MWP

Screening for Appropriate Assessment Report and Natura Impact Statement for 2027 to 2031

Lough Ree Commercial Netting Engine

Inland Fisheries Ireland

September 2026

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Summary of Findings – Appropriate Assessment

Project Title	Lough Ree Commercial Draft-Net Fishing for Trout, Counties Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath, 2027–2031
Project Proponent	Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)
Project Location	The established draw areas are situated within Lough Ree, spanning Counties Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath, approximately 8 km west of Athlone, Co. Westmeath.
Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1)	The Screening for Appropriate Assessment considers the proposed continued licensing and operation of commercial draft-net fishing for trout on Lough Ree during the 2027–2031 period, assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season. The screening considers whether the proposed activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could give rise to likely significant effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives.
Stage 1 Conclusion	The ZOI was determined using a source–pathway–receptor approach, as recommended by CIEEM (2018), having regard to the nature, scale, location and duration of the proposed activity and the potential ecological and hydrological connectivity with European sites. Based on objective scientific information, and without reliance on mitigation measures, it is concluded that the proposed activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have significant effects on the following European sites: ▪ Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) ▪ River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) ▪ Clooneen Bog SAC (002348) ▪ Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818) ▪ Brown Bog SAC (002346) ▪ Corbo Bog SAC (002349) ▪ Mount Jessop Bog SAC (002202) ▪ Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448) ▪ Ballinturly Turlough SAC (000588) ▪ Lisduff Turlough SAC (000609) ▪ Four Roads Turlough SAC (001637) ▪ Lough Funshinagh SAC (000611) ▪ Lough Croan Turlough SAC (000610) ▪ Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC (002339) ▪ Killeglan Grassland SAC (002214) ▪ Castlesampson Esker SAC (001625) ▪ Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776) ▪ Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (000576) ▪ Crosswood Bog SAC (002337) ▪ Carn Park Bog SAC (002336) ▪ Ballymore Fen SAC (002313) ▪ Four Roads Turlough SPA (004140) ▪ River Suck Callows SPA (004097) ▪ Mongan Bog SPA (004017) ▪ Lough Croan Turlough SPA (004139) ▪ Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101) However, on the basis of objective scientific information and applying the precautionary principle, likely significant effects cannot be excluded at the screening stage for the following European sites: ▪ Lough Ree SAC (000440)

	▪ Lough Ree SPA (004064) Potential effects requiring further consideration relate principally to temporary disturbance and/or displacement of relevant QI and SCI species and interaction with wetland and nearshore habitats, including the potential for such interactions to recur during successive annual fishing seasons throughout the 2027–2031 period. Accordingly, these two European sites were brought forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and are assessed within the Natura Impact Statement.
Natura Impact Statement (Stage 2)	The Natura Impact Statement presented in Section 4 provides a scientific assessment of the implications of the proposed commercial netting activity for Lough Ree SAC (000440) and Lough Ree SPA (004064), in view of their site-specific conservation objectives. The assessment considers the maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season during the 2027–2031 period and takes account of the potential for ecological interactions to recur during successive fishing seasons. The assessment considers the relevant QIs and SCIs, the available ecological information, including information provided through consultation with NPWS, the potential effects of the activity alone and in combination with other plans or projects, and the mitigation measures required to address potential disturbance of sensitive breeding SCI species.
Stage 2 Conclusion	The NIS set out in **Section 4** of this report has considered all aspects of the proposed commercial draft-net fishing activity for the 2027–2031 licensing period, assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season, by itself and in combination with other plans or projects. The assessment identified the potential for temporary disturbance of sensitive breeding SCI species, particularly Common Scoter and Common Tern, where commercial netting activity occurs in proximity to breeding locations. While the available ecological evidence indicates that the nature and magnitude of such effects are limited, the potential for adverse effects arising from disturbance cannot be excluded in the absence of mitigation, having regard to the potential for breeding bird distribution to vary between years during the 2027–2031 period. The NIS contains information which the competent authority may consider in making its own complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions, and upon which the competent authority can determine that all reasonable scientific doubt has been removed as to the effects of the project on the integrity of the relevant European sites. Provided that the mitigation measures set out in **Section 4.8** are implemented in full, throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period, and based on the best scientific knowledge available, it is objectively concluded that the proposed commercial draft-net fishing activity will not, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, adversely affect, directly or indirectly, the integrity of the following European sites in view of their conservation objectives: ▪ Lough Ree SAC (000440) ▪ Lough Ree SPA (004064)

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Assessment

This Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared by Malachy Walsh and Partners Engineering and Environmental Consultants (MWP) on behalf of Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) in respect of the proposed licensing of commercial draft netting for trout at established draw areas on Lough Ree for the period 2027 to 2031. The purpose of this report is to provide IFI with the scientific information required to inform the Appropriate Assessment process under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The assessment considers whether the proposed commercial netting activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, could adversely affect the integrity of relevant European sites, having regard to their conservation objectives. The assessment also identifies and evaluates the mitigation measures required for the ongoing commercial netting activity, where necessary, to enable adverse effects on the integrity of relevant European sites to be excluded.

The assessment has been undertaken on the basis of a maximum licensing scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season during the 2027 to 2031 assessment period. This represents the maximum number of licences permitted under the applicable regulatory framework. The proposed activity assessed throughout this report is hereafter referred to as the 'commercial netting activity'.

The commercial trout fishery on Lough Ree is managed under two separate byelaws: The Lough Ree (Netting for Trout) Byelaw No. 484 of 1954[1], which permits the use of draft nets on the lake and sets limits on mesh size, and The Shannon Fisheries Region (Close Season for Draft Netting of Trout on Lough Ree) Byelaw No. 284 of 2006[2]. The latter establishes an annual close season from 1 August to 14 February, prohibits draft netting between 6 a.m. on Saturday and 6 a.m. on the following Monday during the period from 15 February to 11 May, prohibits the taking and retention of trout less than 30 cm in length, and provides that the maximum number of draft-net licences that may be issued shall not exceed twelve.

Section 3 of this report provides a Stage One Screening for Appropriate Assessment, which determines whether the commercial netting activity in Lough Ree (Counties Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath) is likely to have significant effects on European sites within the potential zone of influence of the activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in light of the sites' conservation objectives. The screening is intended to provide IFI with sufficient information to support its own AA screening of the commercial netting activity.

This study is based on a preliminary impact assessment that uses both publicly available data and findings from ecological surveys undertaken at the site. It includes:

- a description of the commercial netting activity and the maximum activity scenario assessed for the 2027 to 2031 period (Section 3.2), particularly aspects that may interact with the receiving environment;
- identification of potential ecological impacts that may arise during commercial netting (Section 3.3);
- consideration of in-combination effects with other plans or projects (Section 3.8), and

[1] Lough Ree (Netting for Trout) Bye-law No. 484, 1954

[2] Shannon Fisheries Region (Close Season for Draft Netting of Trout on Lough Ree) Bye-law No. 284, 2006

- an evaluation of whether predicted impacts are likely to have significant direct and/or indirect effects on the identified European sites (Section 3.6), in view of their conservation objectives.

In line with European Court of Justice case law, the precautionary principle applies: the absence of scientific evidence of adverse effects cannot be used to justify approval. Accordingly, under Article 6(3) procedures, if significant effects are considered likely, possible, or uncertain at the screening stage, a Stage 2 Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be required (see Section 4).

1.2 Statement of Competency

This report has been prepared by Salona Reddy, an Ecologist (MSc, BSc) who has been working full-time with MWP since January 2024. She holds a Master's degree in Environmental Science and brings over ten years of consultancy experience in the preparation and delivery of Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIARs) across a broad range of project types. She is proficient in a wide array of ecological survey methodologies, including habitat mapping and faunal surveys, and has contributed to research teams internationally. Her experience includes ecological assessments for diverse developments, and she has taken lead authorship roles in numerous technical reports, such as Stage 1 Screening Reports for Appropriate Assessment (AA), Stage 2 Natura Impact Statements (NIS), and Ecological Impact Assessments (EcIA). Salona is an experienced field ecologist with a broad and diverse ecological survey portfolio, encompassing habitats and flora, mammals, bats, birds, and terrestrial invertebrates. She holds a National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Derogation Licence for the survey of otters at their resting and breeding places (Licence No. DER-OTTER-2025-10).

The on-site surveys were carried out in 2025 by Salona and Davey Farrar. No new surveys were undertaken.

Davey Farrar brings over 30 years of specialist bird survey experience to the MWP Ecology team. With a background in both Irish and UK ornithological projects, Davey has led and contributed to a wide range of nationally significant studies including Hen Harrier monitoring for UCC and estuary bird surveys for BirdWatch Ireland. Davey is highly skilled in a variety of survey techniques, including vantage point (VP), transect, point count, hinterland, and Red Grouse-specific surveys. His extensive field expertise is matched by a deep knowledge of Irish birdlife demonstrated by his contribution of two first Irish Records to the national bird list. Beyond birds, Davey is also an experienced field naturalist, with proficiency in identifying moths, butterflies, and dragonflies.

This report has been reviewed by Úna Williams (BSc., MSc.), Senior Ecologist and Environmental Scientist, who has worked at MWP for six years. Having worked on research teams both in Ireland and abroad, she is an experienced field ecologist familiar with various ecological survey methodologies including habitat/survey mapping and zoological surveys. She has undertaken assessments for a wide variety of projects including renewable energy developments, and infrastructural and coastal developments. Úna has designed and carried out several Avian Collision Risk Models for proposed wind farms and has authored many ecological reports including Screening for AA reports, Natura Impact Statements (NIS), Ecological Impact Assessments (EcIA), and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). She graduated from Queen's University Belfast in 2018 with an MSc in Animal Behaviour and Welfare, and from Trinity College Dublin in 2008 with an Environmental Science degree.

1.3 Legislative Context for Appropriate Assessment

The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) seeks to conserve natural habitats and wild fauna and flora through the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), while the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) seeks to protect bird species of special importance via the designation of Special Protection Areas (SPAs). It is the responsibility of each European Union member state to designate SPAs and SACs that form part of Natura 2000, a network of

protected sites throughout the European Community. The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2021 transpose the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive into Irish law. The requirement for Appropriate Assessment of the implications of plans and projects on the Natura 2000 network of sites comes from the Habitats Directive (Article 6(3)). Further information is available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/

http://www.npws.ie/planning/appropriateassessment/

The current assessment was conducted within this legislative framework and in accordance with the following:

- The European Commission (EC) guidelines '*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*' (EC, 2021);
- The EC Notice '*Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC*' (EC, 2019);
- The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) guidelines '*Appropriate Assessment of Plans & Projects - Guidance for Planning Authorities'* (DEHLG, 2010); and,
- The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) Practice Note '*Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management*' (OPR, 2021).

As outlined in the above guidance documents, it is the responsibility of the proponent of the project, in this case Inland Fisheries Ireland ('the Applicant'), to provide a comprehensive and objective screening for Appropriate Assessment report (Stage 1) which can then be used by IFI to assist them in completing their screening exercise.

If it is determined that a full Appropriate Assessment is required in respect of the commercial netting operation at Lough Ree, a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) (Stage 2) must be prepared. In the case of Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, mitigation of impacts can be considered.

1.4 Stages of Appropriate Assessment

The Appropriate Assessment process is a four-stage process with issues and tests at each stage. The purpose of the screening assessment is to record in a transparent and reasoned manner the likely effects on European sites of commercial netting. An important aspect of the process is that the outcome at each successive stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required.

The four different stages are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

2. Methodology

2.1 Appropriate Assessment Guidance

As set out in the NPWS guidance (DoEHLG, 2010), the task of establishing whether a plan or project is likely to have an effect on a European site is based on a preliminary impact assessment using available information and data, including that outlined above, and other available environmental information, supplemented as necessary by local site information and ecological surveys. This is followed by a determination of whether there is a risk that the effects identified could be significant. The precautionary principal approach is required. Once the

potential impacts that may arise from the proposal are identified the significance of these is assessed using the following key indicators:

- Water quality and resource;
- Disturbance and/or displacement of species;
- Habitat loss and Alteration; and
- Habitat or Species Fragmentation.

2.2 Consultation

Informal consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) was undertaken on 17th June 2025 in advance of any site visits to identify any areas of potential concern within Lough Ree that should be considered. 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.

A public meeting was convened by IFI on 28 October 2025 with licensed draft-net fishermen operating on Lough Ree. The purpose of this meeting was to present the findings of the draft NIS and to obtain feedback on traditional fishing practices, draw area usage, seasonal patterns of activity, and operational considerations relevant to the assessment. Information provided during this engagement has been used to refine the project description and to inform the assessment of potential ecological interactions associated with the proposed activity.

A formal consultation request was sent to NPWS by MWP on the 4th of November 2025 seeking any observations and/or commentary on the proposal. No direct response to this consultation request was received by MWP.

Separately, NPWS provided correspondence to IFI on 10 November 2025 in relation to the proposed commercial draft-net fishing activity on Lough Ree. This correspondence was subsequently forwarded by IFI to MWP on 13 November 2025. The correspondence provided ecological information and observations relevant to the assessment, including information concerning breeding birds on Lough Ree and the proposed approach to mitigation. The information and recommendations provided by NPWS were considered in the NIS and used to inform the assessment and the mitigation measures developed for the commercial netting activity.

Following the extension of the assessment scope to consider the proposed licensing of commercial draft netting for the period 2027 to 2031, based on a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season, a further formal consultation request was issued to NPWS by MWP on 15 August 2026. This consultation advised NPWS of the revised scope and referred to the previous NPWS correspondence provided to IFI. NPWS was requested to identify any new or updated ecological information relevant to the assessment, including any changes in the distribution, breeding locations or status of relevant Special Conservation Interests or Qualifying Interests associated with Lough Ree, and to advise whether any amendment or supplementation of the mitigation measures established through the previous assessment was considered necessary for the 2027–2031 period.

A further consultation letter relating to the updated Appropriate Assessment Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement for the proposed 2027–2031 licensing period was issued by MWP to NPWS on 1 October

2026. The consultation outlined the revised scope of the assessment and advised that the mitigation measures established through the previous assessment were proposed to continue to apply, subject to review of any updated information provided by NPWS.

In correspondence dated 15 October 2026, NPWS confirmed that the submission previously provided by Dr Andy Bleasdale on 10 November 2025 in relation to the impacts of draft-net fishing on bird species within Lough Ree contained the relevant information and remained valid for the updated 2027–2031 assessment period. NPWS did not identify any additional ecological information requiring incorporation into the assessment and did not recommend any amendment to the mitigation measures developed having regard to the previous NPWS submission. Accordingly, the updated NIS continues to rely on the ecological information, observations and recommendations contained within the 10 November 2025 NPWS correspondence.

2.2.1 Summary of NPWS Data and Observations Relevant to Lough Ree

NPWS provided detailed ecological information to IFI relating to breeding birds and traditional draft-net fishing activity on Lough Ree, drawing on long-term datasets and recent survey work, a summary of which is provided hereunder. Following re-consultation in October 2026, NPWS confirmed that the information and observations contained within the 10 November 2025 submission remained relevant and valid for the updated 2027–2031 assessment period.

NPWS describe draft-net fishing as a low-frequency, shore-based activity carried out at a defined number of traditional draw locations that have been used for generations. These areas are spatially limited and represent a small proportion of the overall lake shoreline.

NPWS reviewed bird survey information from multiple sources, including Breeding Bird Surveys undertaken in 2024 and 2025, data generated through the Breeding Waders European Innovation Partnership (EIP), and national species status assessments published in the Irish Wildlife Manual series. These datasets collectively document the distribution and productivity of breeding waterbirds across Lough Ree and provide a broader temporal context than short-duration surveys undertaken in a single breeding season.

The NPWS data indicate that breeding waterbirds, including ground-nesting waders, gulls, and terns, are widely distributed throughout the lake and regularly occur in proximity to long-established draw areas. Common Tern and Black-headed Gull colonies have been recorded within or adjacent to active draw locations over multiple years, with breeding success remaining stable. NPWS identify fluctuating water levels as the principal environmental factor influencing annual variation in colony location and productivity, rather than human disturbance associated with draft-net fishing.

With regard to Common Scoter, NPWS report that breeding activity on Lough Ree is primarily concentrated around the Black Islands. Long-term monitoring confirms repeated successful breeding at this location, and national assessments identify Lough Ree as the most productive breeding site for the species in Ireland. Draft-net fishing has not been identified in national or site-level assessments as a pressure affecting the species' breeding performance at the site.

NPWS further note that spatial overlap between bird observations and draw locations reflects normal foraging and movement behaviour, particularly for mobile species such as Common Tern, which forage widely across the lake. The continued traditional use of draw areas has not been associated with reduced bird presence or productivity, and NPWS indicate that such use may contribute to maintaining open shoreline conditions that are suitable for ground-nesting birds.

Overall, the NPWS datasets do not demonstrate a negative association between traditional draft-net fishing activity and the distribution or breeding productivity of qualifying bird species on Lough Ree. These data provide

important contextual information on bird use of the lake and inform the understanding of baseline ecological conditions within Lough Ree SAC and SPA.

2.3 Data Requests and Database Searches

The study area lies within OSI National Grid hectads M95, M96, N04 and N05. A data request for records of rare or protected species within these hectads, encompassing the draw areas and a five-kilometre radius around them, was submitted to NPWS on 10th August 2026. The requested species data was subsequently received from NPWS on 25th August 2026.

Additional information on species records for hectads M95, M96, N04 and N05 was retrieved from the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database and reviewed. The NPWS interactive map-viewer, *The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland*, was also consulted for records of Annex-listed habitats and species known to occur in the vicinity of the draw areas[3].

A review of the BirdWatch Ireland I-WeBS[4] online database identified summary data for the closest I-WeBS count sites and sub-sites to Lough Ree. The combined information received from NPWS, together with results of the NBDC and BirdWatch Ireland database searches, was used to inform the baseline surveys and subsequent impact assessment for the netting activity.

2.4 Limitations/Difficulties Encountered

This Stage 1 Screening Report and Stage 2 NIS has been prepared on the basis of the project information made available by IFI and ecological information available and reviewed by MWP up to and including 30 September 2026.

No additional ecological field surveys were undertaken specifically for the updated 2027–2031 assessment. The assessment therefore draws upon the boat-based multidisciplinary ecological surveys undertaken by MWP on 17, 18 and 19 June 2025, supplemented by updated desk-based information and ecological information and observations provided through consultation with the NPWS and IFI. The 2025 MWP surveys provide site-specific information on the habitats and species recorded within the survey area at the time of survey and are considered alongside the wider evidence base rather than in isolation.

The assessment relates to commercial draft-net fishing over a five-year period from 2027 to 2031. The distribution and use of Lough Ree by mobile species, particularly breeding and wintering birds, may vary between years in response to natural environmental conditions and other factors. Consequently, the precise location and level of bird activity during individual fishing seasons cannot be predicted for the full assessment period. This temporal variability has been addressed through consideration of the available longer-term and recent ecological information, including information provided by NPWS, and through the precautionary assessment of potential disturbance pathways.

The mitigation measures set out in Section 4.8 also provide for awareness, liaison and adaptive management in response to changes in breeding bird activity or the location of sensitive areas identified during the 2027–2031 period. In particular, the existing NIS provides for liaison between licence holders, IFI and NPWS personnel active on the lake and allows measures to be reviewed where monitoring identifies an emerging interaction

[3] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a?item=1 Accessed: 26th May 2025

[4] Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) – annual winter counts at wetland sites within the Republic of Ireland. Counts are coordinated by BirdWatch Ireland and are undertaken to monitor population trends for wintering waterbirds across the country.

between draft-net activity and breeding bird conservation objectives. No other limitations or difficulties were encountered that are considered to materially affect the conclusions of the assessment.

2.5 Desktop Study

To complete the screening for Appropriate Assessment report, certain information on the existing environment is required. A desktop study was carried out to collate information available on the natural environment of the draw areas. This comprised a review of the following publications, data and datasets:

- Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) aerial photography, 1:50000 mapping, GeoHive and online satellite imagery sources;
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS);
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) (online map-viewer);
- Central Statistics Office (CSO) – Census of Agriculture (online);
- BirdWatch Ireland and Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (online datasets);
- Teagasc soil area maps (NBDC website);
- Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) area maps;
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) water quality data;
- Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) online fish sampling reports and data;
- Roscommon County Development Plan (2022 – 2028)[5];
- Longford County Development Plan (2022 – 2027)[6];
- Westmeath County Development Plan (2021-2027)[7] and
- Other sources and research listed as footnotes throughout the report.

2.6 Study Area and Zone of Influence (ZOI)

The zone of influence (ZOI) for the netting activity is the geographical area over which the operation of the commercial netting activity has the potential to affect the receiving environment in such a manner as to significantly affect the Qualifying Interests (QI) of a European site. The area over which ecological features may be affected by biophysical changes because of the netting activity and associated activities is not likely to extend beyond the project site where, for example, there are ecological or hydrological links beyond the site boundaries (CIEEM, 2018). Consequently, and to ensure completion of an integrated assessment, the study area for the commercial netting activity has been taken as the entirety of Lough Ree, encompassing the established draw areas assessed for the proposed 2027–2031 licensing period. Refer to **Figure 2-1**, below. The wider ZOI has not been defined solely by a fixed geographical distance but has been determined having regard to the nature, scale and duration of the commercial netting activity and the existence of credible source-pathway-receptor linkages to European sites.

[5] Roscommon County Council Accessed: 25th August 2025

[6] Longford County Council Accessed: 25th August 2025

[7] Westmeath County Council Accessed: 25th August 2025

Potential pathways considered include direct spatial overlap, hydrological connectivity and ecological connectivity associated with mobile QIs and SCIs. Further details are provided in **Section 3.6.1**, below.

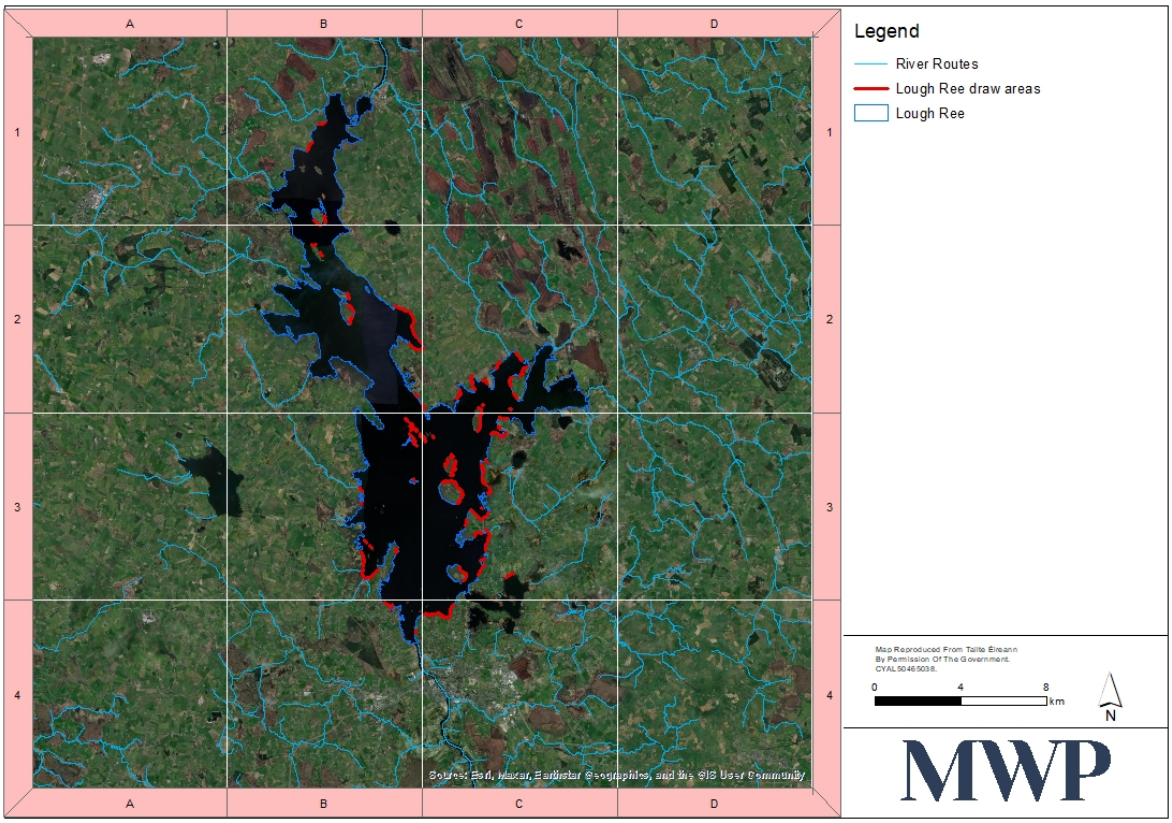


Figure 2-1: Approximate extent of the study area encompassing the draw areas and publicly accessible adjoining areas.

2.7 Field Survey

The updated assessment draws upon the boat-based multidisciplinary ecological surveys undertaken by MWP on 17, 18 and 19 June 2025 in support of the previous assessment of the commercial netting activity. No additional field surveys were undertaken specifically for the updated 2027–2031 assessment. The 2025 survey data have therefore been considered alongside the updated desktop information, consultation responses and ecological information provided by NPWS and IFI for the purposes of the present assessment. The 2025 surveys comprised a boat-based multidisciplinary ecological survey of the draw areas, with particular emphasis on avian presence and movement, and provided site-specific ecological information on the habitats and species present within the areas surveyed at the time of survey. The areas surveyed are shown in see **Figure 2-1** and **Figure 2-2**.

During the boat-based survey of all draw areas, an evaluation of presence and suitability of shoreline habitat for non-volant[8] mammals was undertaken.

During the boat-based survey, all bird species seen or heard on land or water were recorded and any evidence of breeding activity was noted. The survey was undertaken to record the presence and distribution of bird species within the areas surveyed with attention given to the established draw areas and their immediate

[8] Non-volant mammals are land-based mammals incapable of flight i.e. all land-based mammals excluding bats.

surroundings, including birds occurring on the water, shoreline or flying overhead (see **Figure 2-1** and **Figure 2-2**). Habitats within the draw areas were assessed from the boat for their potential suitability for avian species.

Prior to commencement of the 2025 field surveys, a list of target bird species was developed to focus survey effort on species of particular conservation relevance. This included, but was not limited to Red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) 2020-2026[9] assessment, species listed on Annex I of the Birds Directive[10], and Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species of SPAs within the ZOI of the commercial netting activity. Species relevant to this Appropriate Assessment fall into the latter category and are those for which the Lough Ree SPA is designated, namely the following species:

- Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
- Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)
- Teal (*Anas crecca*)
- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
- Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)
- Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)
- Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)
- Coot (*Fulica atra*)
- Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)
- Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)
- Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)
- Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)
- Wetland and Waterbirds
- The results of the June 2025 field surveys are presented in **Section 3.4.3.4.** These results are considered together with the wider ecological evidence base, including the NPWS information summarised in **Section 2.2.1,** when assessing potential effects on the SCI species of Lough Ree SPA. Further information on the relevant SCI species, the SPA and its conservation objectives is presented in **Section 4.2**.

[9] Factor determined by most recent listing of species on the BOCCI list (Gilbert *et al*., 2021). All commonly occurring species are given a status of Red (high concern), Amber (medium concern) or Green (all other species), depending on a combination of threat categories.

[10] Annex I lists 194 species and sub-species of birds that are particularly threatened. EU Member States must designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for them and all migratory bird species.

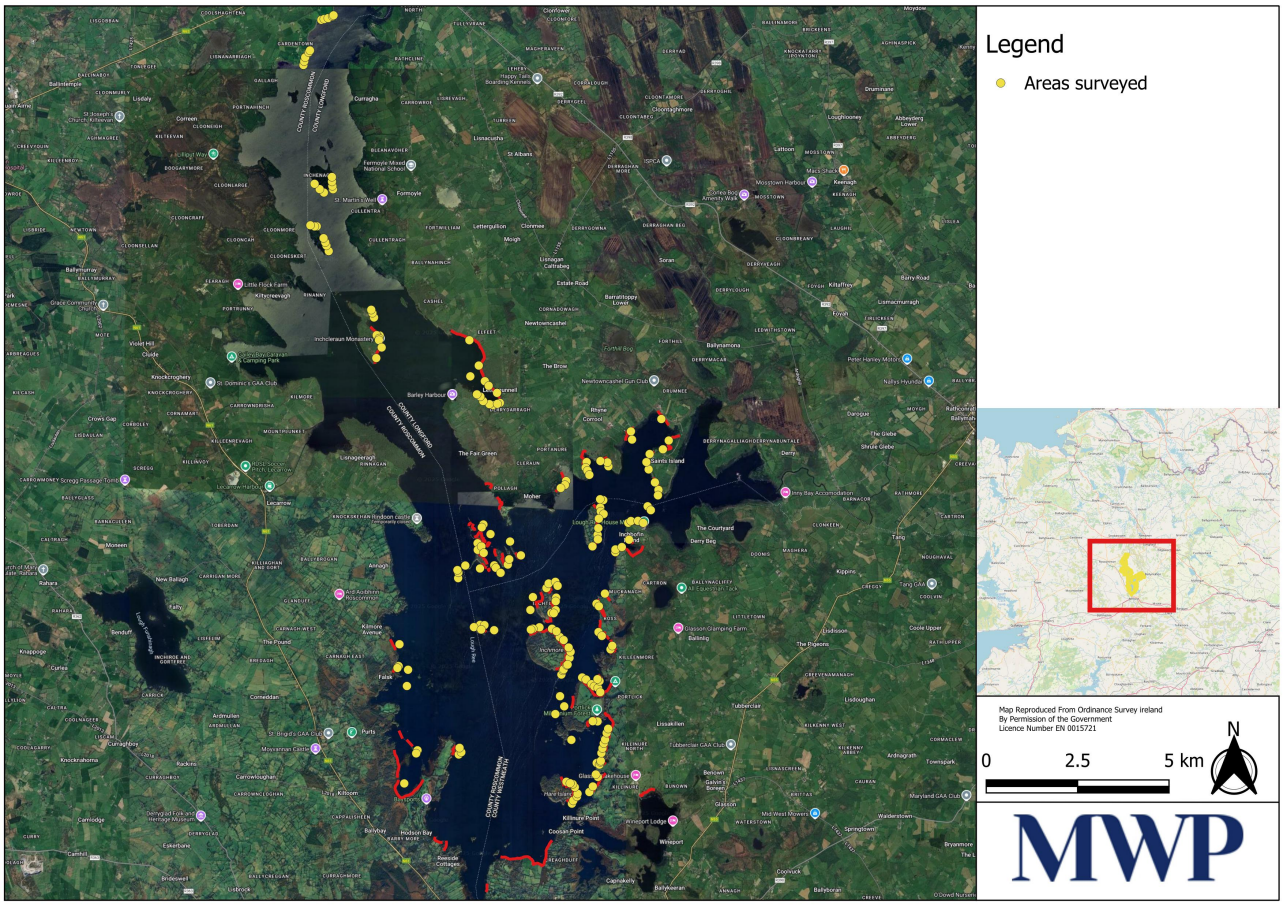


Figure 2-2 Areas surveyed during the boat-based survey.

3. Stage 1: Screening for Appropriate Assessment

The purpose of the screening assessment is to record in a transparent and reasoned manner the direct and indirect likely effects on relevant European sites of the commercial netting at the draw areas, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, and whether these likely effects are significant. Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage 1) determines the need for a full Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2) and consists of several steps, each of which is addressed in the following sections of this report:

3.1 Establishment of whether the project is necessary for the management of a European site(s).

3.2 Description of commercial netting operations at the draw areas.

3.4 Description of the existing site's ecological characteristics and a summary of the field survey results.

3.5 Identification of other plans, projects and activities with which commercial netting could interact to create in-combination effects.

3.6 Identification of any European site(s) potentially affected.

3.7 Identification and description of potential individual and cumulative impacts (in-combination effects) of the project.

3.8 Assessment of the significance of potential impacts on European site(s).

3.9 Conclusion of screening stage.

3.1 Management of European Sites

The proposal is not connected with or necessary to the conservation management of a European site.

3.2 Description of the Commercial Netting Project

3.2.1 Site Location and Context

The draw areas are located within Lough Ree, spanning parts of Counties Roscommon, Longford, and Westmeath, approximately 8 kilometres west of Athlone and 120 kilometres west of Dublin City- see **Figure 3-1** to **Figure 3-7**, below. Access to these draw areas is available through ten common points: Lanesborough (North Quay), Hodson Bay, Coosan Point (Athlone), Killinure Point, Portlick Millennium Forest, Saint's Island, Inchmore Island, Inchcleraun Monastery (Quaker Island), Hare Island, and Inchenagh Island.

Each of the ten access points offer a variety of facilities and opportunities. Lanesborough (North Quay) features a public slipway and jetty suitable for anglers and boat tours, while Hodson Bay, on the northeastern shore near Athlone, provides a public slipway and picnic areas for recreational boating and fishing. Coosan Point (Athlone) offers a public slipway with ample parking, and Killinure Point hosts a private marina with berths, boat hire, and maintenance services. Portlick Millennium Forest provides woodland walks and picnic areas, and several islands, including Saint's Island, Inchmore Island, Inchcleraun Monastery (Quaker Island), Hare Island, and Inchenagh Island, are accessible by boat for historical exploration, wildlife observation, and nature-based recreation. Collectively, these access points support a wide range of activities on Lough Ree, from angling and boating to ecological and cultural studies.

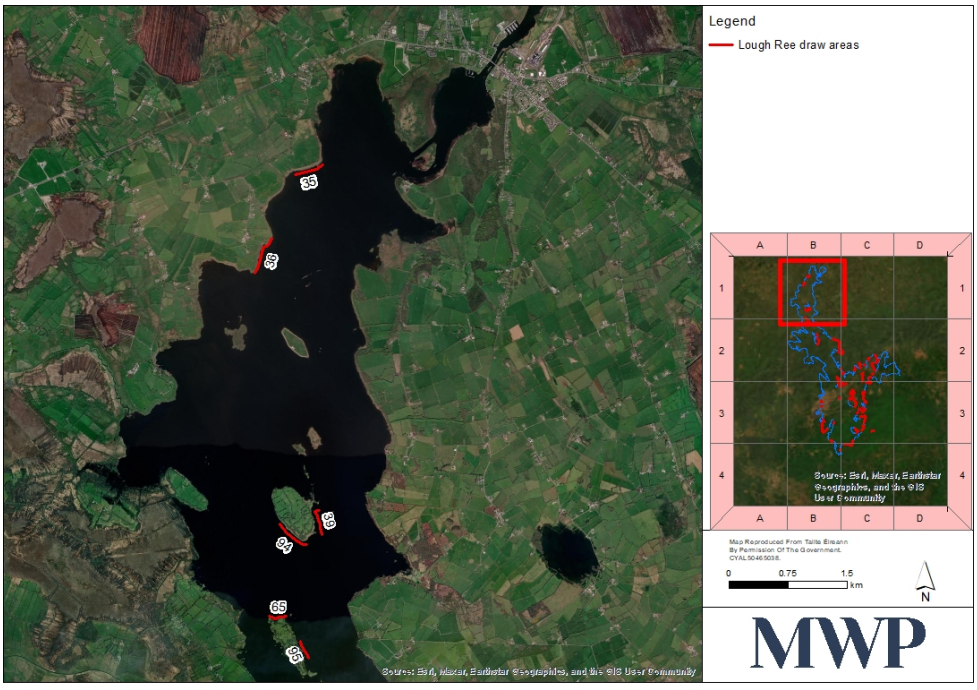


Figure 3-1: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (B1).



Figure 3-2: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (B2).



Figure 3-3: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (B3).

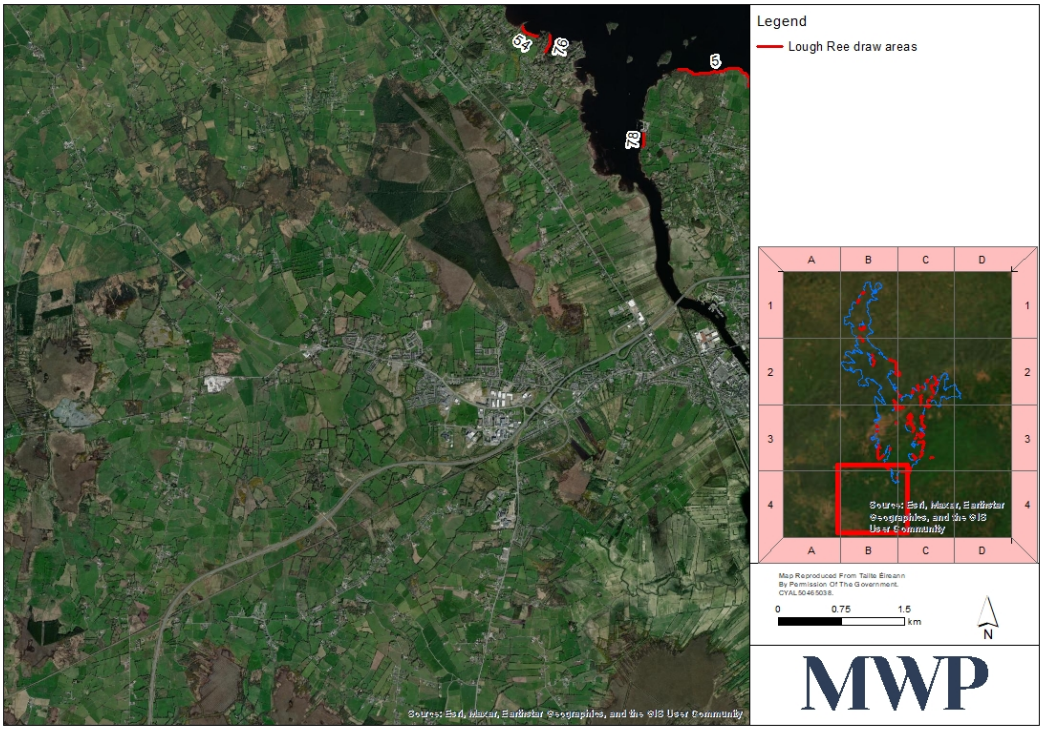


Figure 3-4: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (B4).

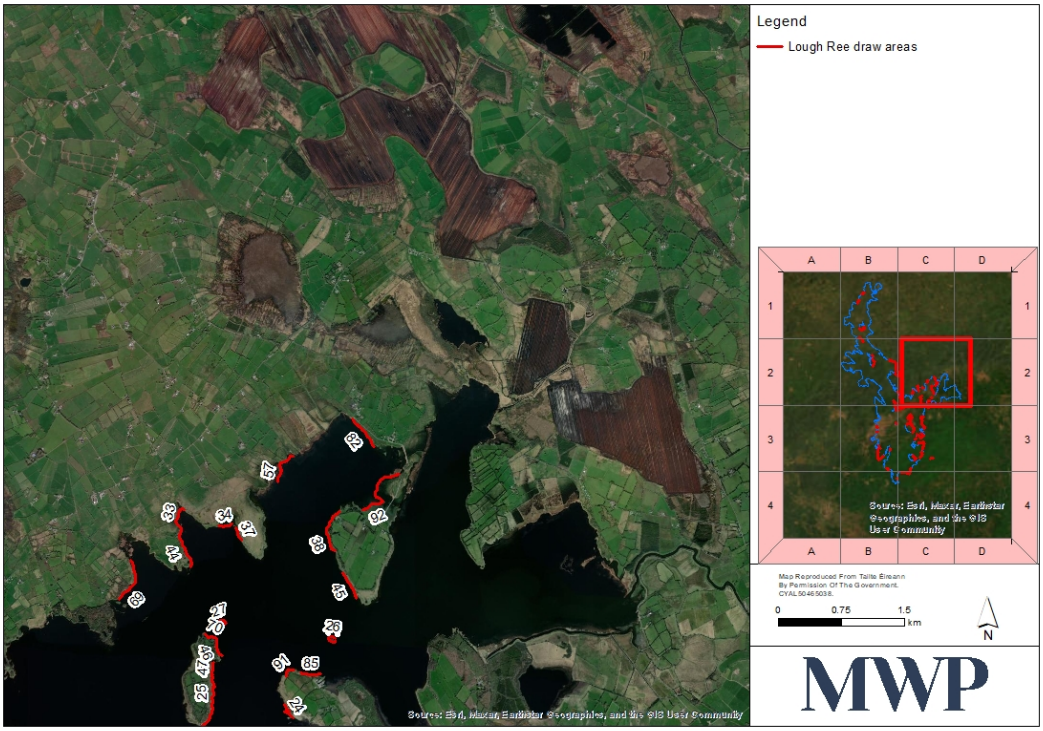


Figure 3-5: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (C2).

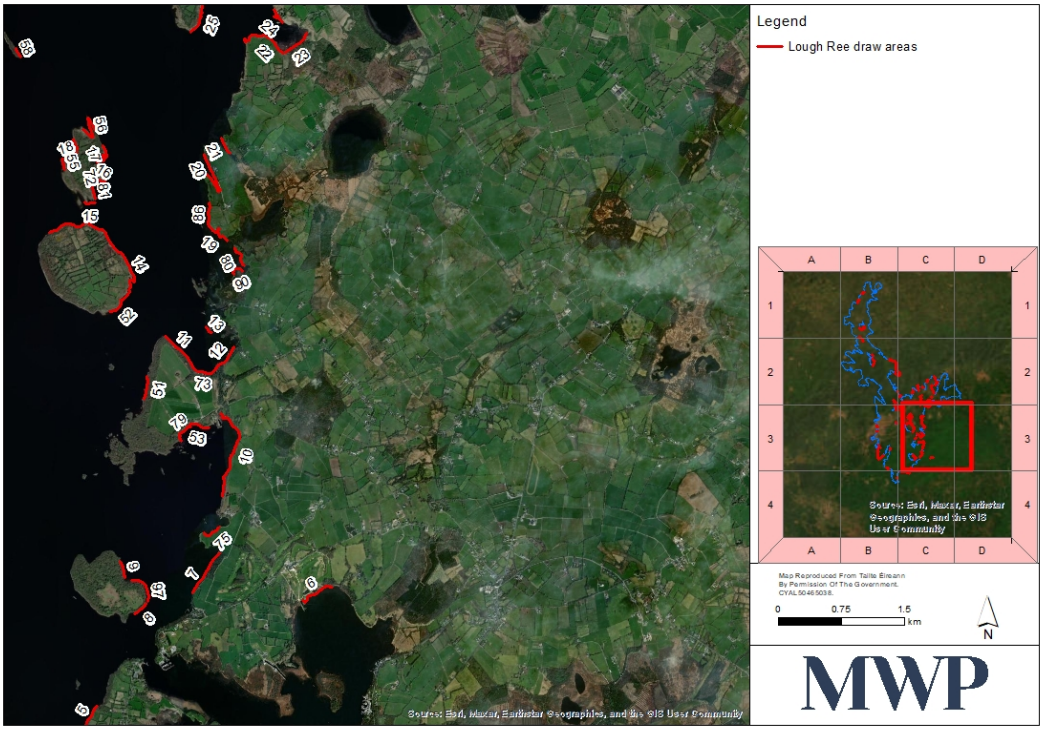


Figure 3-6: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (C3).



Figure 3-7: Location of draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon and Longford (C4).

3.2.2 Brief 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 prior to the designation of the site as sites of European importance. 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 2026, twelve commercial netting 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.

The characteristics of the project and the project design are described in **Section 3.3**, below.

3.3 Characteristics of the Project

The characteristics of the commercial netting activity assessed for the 2027–2031 period are described below and have been confirmed with IFI. For the purposes of this assessment, a maximum licensing scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season has been considered. The characteristics of the activity are summarised in **Table 3-1** and the extent of the draw areas is indicated in **Figure 3-1** to **Figure 3-7** above.

Table 3-1 Characteristics of the commercial netting

Size, scale, area, land-take	Lough Ree covers an area of approximately 105 km², with most of the designated draw areas concentrated along the eastern shoreline and the remainder dispersed throughout the lake. These draw areas lie entirely within both the Lough Ree SPA (004064) and the Lough Ree SAC (000440). As the commercial netting activity takes place predominantly on the water, with only limited interaction at the shoreline when nets are hauled in, no land-take is required. The proposed commercial netting activity has been assessed on the basis of a maximum of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season during the 2027–2031 assessment period.
Details of physical changes that will take place during the various stages of implementing the proposal	The traditional commercial draft netting for trout within Lough Ree will require: • Arrival of boat(s) to the designated shoreline draw areas. • Setting up of nets - one end of the net is securely held onshore while the other end is brought out to the lake by the boat. • Carrying out trout netting – an enclosed area of water is created as

	the net is swept into a semi-circular arc by the boat which then returns to shore. • Manual hauling ashore of nets before trout are captured and placed into containers. • IFI staff carry out inspection and monitoring duties to ensure compliance with legislation and licence conditions. No construction, excavation, dredging or permanent modification of the draw areas forms part of the proposed activity.
Description of resource requirements for the construction/operation and decommissioning of the proposal (water resources, construction material, human presence etc)	<u>Materials</u> • Draft nets (licensed, minimum mesh size in line with legislation); • Small open fishing boats; • Mooring ropes and anchors; • Storage container for trout caught; • Fuels/oils; • Buoys and markers; and • Protective clothing and safety equipment. <u>Typical Equipment</u> • Outboard engines fitted to small boats; • Hand winches and hauling gear (where used); • Trailers for transporting boats and nets; and • Vehicles for access to shoreline draws. <u>Personnel</u> Commercial draft netting is carried out by small family-based crews, typically consisting of 2–4 people per fishing operation working between the shoreline and boat. A maximum of 12 licences has been assessed. The number of licences does not, however, equate directly to the number of crews operating simultaneously or to the frequency of netting activity.
Description of timescale for the various activities that will take place as a result of implementation (including likely start and finish date)	• The proposed commercial netting activity is assessed for the 2027–2031 period, encompassing five annual fishing seasons. • Licensing period: 15 February – 31 July annually; Netting permitted during daylight hours only; Fishing prohibited (Weekend restriction) from 6 a.m. Saturday until 6 a.m. Monday each week between 15 February to 11 May; IFI staff carry out inspection and monitoring duties to ensure compliance with legislation and licence conditions.
Description of wastes arising and other residues (including quantities) and their disposal	<u>Waste Management</u> • Discarded nets and/or damaged netting gear; • General services waste (e.g. packaging, ropes, fuel containers); and • Fuels and oils associated with boat engines.

	All wastes will be disposed of appropriately in accordance with statutory requirements and IFI guidance. Any damaged nets or materials unsuitable for repair or reuse will be collected and removed from the lakeshore by licensed contractors to authorised disposal or recycling facilities. Routine engine maintenance and refuelling will not take place at the water's edge to avoid risk of accidental spillage into the lake. No foul effluent will be discharged to the lake.
Identification of wastes arising and other residues (including quantities) that may be of particular concern in the context of the European sites network	• Discarded/damaged nets and fishing gear; • General services waste (e.g. ropes, packaging, containers); • Fuels and oils from boat engines; and • Protective clothing and consumables.
Description of any additional services required to implement the project or plan, their location and means of construction.	• None

3.4 Description of Existing Site

3.4.1 General Site Description

Lough Ree encompasses parts of the counties of Longford, Roscommon, and Westmeath and several Electoral Divisions (EDs) including Cloontuskert (ED 197040), RATHCLINE (ED 137054), Kilteevan (ED 197079), Cashel West (ED 137015), Lecarrow (ED 197083), Carnagh (ED 197028), Muckanagh (ED 237078), Kiltoom (ED 197080), Killinure (ED 237063), Moydrum (ED 237077) and Athlone West Rural (ED 197008)[11]. As an example of population figures within these EDs, Cloontuskert had a total population of 179 residents in the 2022 Census, primarily residing in the village of Cloontuskert near the R371 road northwest of Lanesborough. Population data for the remaining EDs can be obtained from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) Census 2022 Small Area Population Statistics website[12] which provides detailed demographic profiles at ED level.

The main settlement in the study area is Lanesborough/Ballyleague on the northern shore of Lough Ree, bisected by the River Shannon. Other nearby settlements include Athlone town, approximately 8 km to the south of Lough Ree, and Lecarrow, situated on the western shore. The shoreline of Lough Ree is also dotted with numerous small harbours, piers, and slipways used for recreational boating, angling, and touristic activities.

Lough Ree itself is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), recognised as Ireland's most ecologically significant lake for breeding waterbirds (NPWS, 2024). Conservation management on Clawinch Island includes predator control, particularly targeting mink using trained detection

[11] Electoral Divisions (Accessed on 25th of August 2025)

[12] Census Interactive Maps - CSO - Central Statistics Office

dogs, and habitat management such as scrub clearance to maintain open nesting areas. These measures aim to increase nesting success, support the wider midlands wader population, and safeguard the ecological integrity of Lough Ree for both breeding and wintering bird species (NPWS, 2024).

Clawinch Island, a 50-acre island located near the north shore of Lough Ree, is one of Ireland's most important breeding and wintering sites for wading birds (NPWS, 2024). The island provides critical habitat for species such as Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) and Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), along with a range of ducks (e.g. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Teal *Anas crecca*, Wigeon *Mareca penelope*), gulls (e.g. Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*, Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), and terns (e.g. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*), many of which are endangered or declining. It also serves as a migratory stopover and wintering site for golden plover, whimbrel, dunlin, turnstone, and common sandpiper, with black-tailed and bar-tailed godwit regularly feeding and roosting there (NPWS, 2024)[13].

The CORINE (2018)[14] land cover category for the majority of Lough Ree is 'Water bodies (512)', while the shoreline is classified predominantly as 'Pastures (231)'. Surrounding areas include 'Inland wetlands (412/411)', with smaller patches of 'Forest and semi-natural areas (311)'. The islands present in Lough Ree are classified as 'Heterogeneous agricultural areas (243), [15].

Bedrock mapping indicates that the geology underlying the Lough Ree area is dominated by the Waulsortian Limestone Formation ('unbedded fine-grained limestone'), running across much of the central and southern lake basin. To the north and east, the bedrock comprises areas of 'mudstone, siltstone and shale' of the Longford–Roscommon Group, while isolated outcrops of sandstone and glacial deposits occur locally. In relation to soils, the shoreline is characterised by 'Gleys' (poorly drained mineral soils) and 'Grey Brown Podzolics', while inland areas support 'Brown Earths' (deep, well-drained mineral soils). These soil types underpin a mixed land-use pattern of agriculture, pasture, and semi-natural habitats surrounding the lake.

3.4.2 Hydrology

Lough Ree is situated within the 'Upper Shannon' Water Framework Directive (WFD) catchment (Hydrometric Area 26E), the 'Shannon[Upper]_SC_090' WFD sub-catchment and the 'SHANNON (Upper)_110' river sub-basin[16].

A review of the EPA map-viewer determined that Lough Ree itself forms the principal waterbody within the sub-catchment. Lough Ree is a large natural lake on the River Shannon, located between Counties Longford, Westmeath, and Roscommon. The River Shannon enters Lough Ree from the north via the 'SHANNON (Upper)_100' river waterbody and flows southwards through the lake, exiting near Athlone within the 'SHANNON (Upper)_120' waterbody (see **Figure 3-8**). Several smaller tributary streams and drainage ditches (predominantly 1st and 2nd order) enter Lough Ree, including those at Ballybay, Coosan, and Lecarrow.

[13] State to buy Lough Ree island to protect wading birds

[14] **C**o-**OR**dinated **IN**formation on the **E**nvironment – data series initiated in 1985 by the European Commission to gather environmental data.

[15] EPA Maps (Accessed 20th August 2026)

[16] Water region names as per EPA on-line mapping

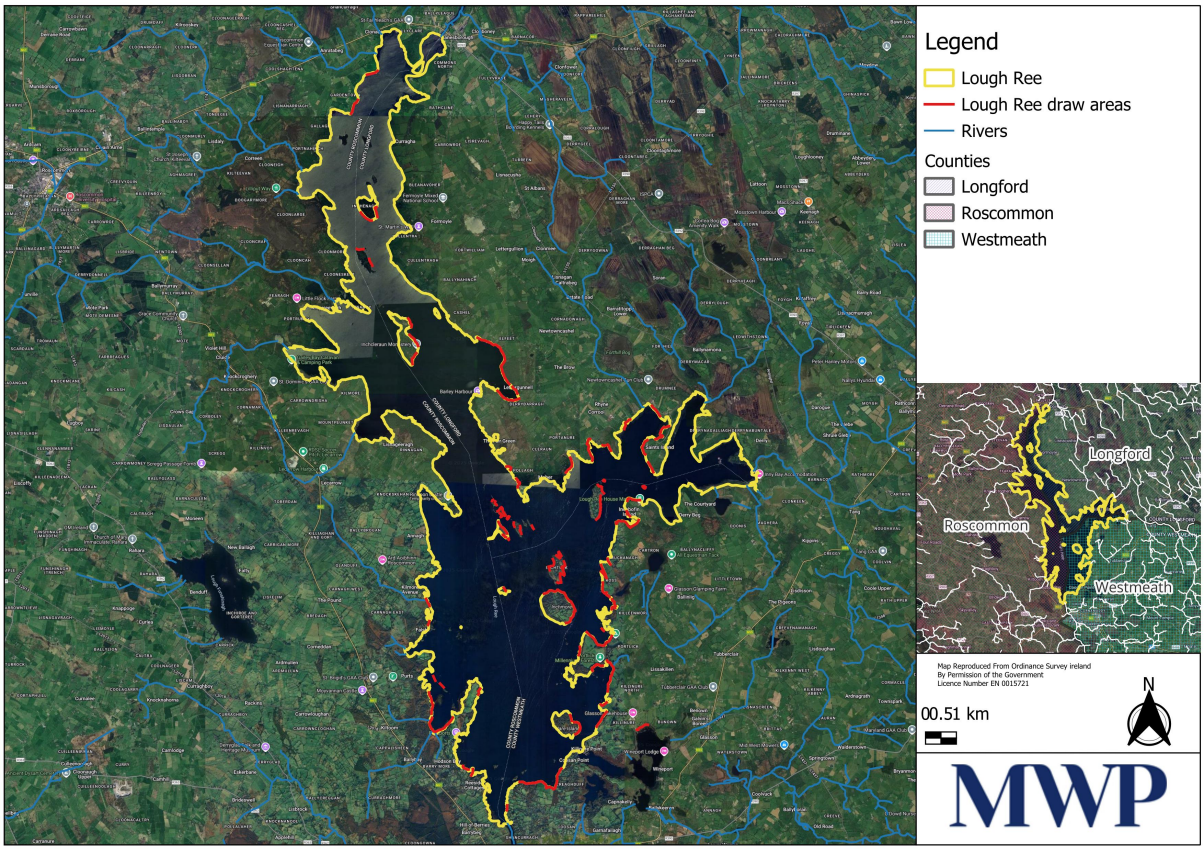


Figure 3-8 Surface hydrological network surrounding the draw areas.

For the most recent WFD reporting period (2016–2021), the Shannon (Upper) River Waterbody is classified as having an overall status of *'Poor'* and a risk status of *'At risk'*[17]. In contrast, the Lough Ree Lake Waterbody[18] is classified as having an overall status of *'Good'* and a risk status of *'Not at risk'*. The underlying Funshinagh Groundwater Body (GWB) [19] is also assessed as having an overall status of *'Good'* with a risk projection of *'Not at risk'*. The site does not overlie a GSI-classified gravel aquifer.

The EPA Maps record a Biological Quality Rating (Q-value) of 'Poor' (Q3) for the 'SHANNON (Upper)_100' at 0.5 km upstream of Lanesboro Bridge (LHS) [20] in 2007. In line with the reporting requirements of the Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC), member states are obliged to provide summary information on the status, risks, and objectives of individual waterbodies. Around Lough Ree, there are 25 monitoring stations (**Table 3-2**) that track water quality parameters. These stations reported trends for Ammonia, Chlorophyll, and Total Phosphorus between 2019 and 2021[21]., with annual data summaries.

- Ammonia: The Indicative Quality was high, with an upward trend, and the distance to the threshold was near.

[17] Available at https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/ Accessed 20/08/2026

[18] IE_SH_26_750a waterbody code

[19] IE_SH_G_091

[20] RS26S021600 station number; IE_SH_26S021600 WFD waterbody code

[21] Trend Charts and Data – Terminology explained

- Chlorophyll: The Indicative Quality was high, with a downward trend, and the distance to the threshold was far.
- Total Phosphorus: The Indicative Quality was moderate, with an upward trend, and the distance to the threshold was far.

Table 3-2 Monitoring Stations on Programme for Lough Ree

Code	Station	Easting	Northing
LS260155a06700010	Site 1	198409.38	267379.27
LS260155a06700020	Site 2	198562.74	265171.32
LS260155a06700030	Site 3	198561.76	262239.86
LS260155a06700040	PRF_010;_Site 4, TO, Secchi	200558.97	259105.11
LS260155a06700050	Site 5	197754.78	258734.6
LS260155a06700060	Site 6	198338.51	256564.98
LS260155a06700070	Site 7	200879.79	256527.48
LS260155a06700080	Site 8	201542.41	254115.67
LS260155a06700090	Site 9	205367	252838.07
LS260155a06700100	PRF_020;_Site 10, TO, Secchi	201610.42	251240.01
LS260155a06700110	Site 11	203115.93	248699.11
LS260155a06700120	Site 12	204322.27	247680.77
LS260155a06700130	PRF_030;_Site 13, TO, Secchi	202850.75	246959.22
LS260155a06700140	Site 14	201246.51	246325.81
LS260155a06700150	Site 15	202498.52	244451.44
LS260155a06700190	M_10	204210.45	245440.54
LS260155a06700200	M_9	205073.91	249987.24
LS260155a06700210	M_8	208123.55	254602.57
LS260155a06700220	M_7	204439.08	254847.4
LS260155a06700230	M_6	196965.91	262671.08
LS260155a06700240	M_5	198749.25	266300.73

LS260155a06700250	M_4	201001.76	259779.21
LS260155a06700260	M_3	197103.97	259075.59
LS260155a06700270	M_2	201007.91	253783.24
LS260155a06700280	M_1, Hymo reporting station	200968.76	246710.37

3.4.3 Field Survey Results

3.4.3.1 Habitats[22]

The draw areas are located predominantly around areas of **Wet grasslands (GS4)** which grades into **Marsh (GM1)**, dominated by rushes (*Juncus* spp.), sedges (*Carex* spp.) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and Reed and large sedge swamps (**FS1**) occur along the shoreline of Lough Ree. The lake itself is classified as a large mesotrophic to moderate-eutrophic system, corresponding to **Mesotrophic Lakes (FL4)** and **Eutrophic Lakes (FL5)** under the Fossitt (2000) habitat classification system. Lough Ree lies in an ice-deepened basin on Carboniferous limestone along the River Shannon, which strongly influences its hydrology, nutrient dynamics, and associated wetland habitats. Species located within these habitats are listed in **Table 3-3**.

Table 3-3 Typical species located within Lough Ree and surrounding

Species	Habitat Type	Fossitt Code	Notes
Utricularia intermedia (Intermediate Bladderwort)	Aquatic vegetation in mesotrophic–eutrophic lakes	FL4 / FL5 (Mesotrophic or Eutrophic lakes)	Rootless submerged species in shallow, sheltered water
Potamogeton spp. (Pondweeds)	Aquatic macrophyte beds	FL4 / FL5 (Mesotrophic or Eutrophic lakes)	Common submerged vegetation in moderate nutrient lakes
Spirodela polyrhiza (Greater Duckweed)	Floating aquatic vegetation	FL5 (Eutrophic lakes)	Found in nutrient-rich, slow-flowing sheltered bays
Chara spp. incl. C. pedunculata (Stoneworts)	Submerged charophyte beds in clear water	FL4 / FL5 (Mesotrophic or Eutrophic lakes)	Indicator of mesotrophic to eutrophic lake margins
Sagittaria sagittifolia (Arrowhead)	Emergent aquatic vegetation at lake margins	FL5 / transitional to GM1 (Marsh)	Occurs in shallow water margins, grading into marsh
Filipendula ulmaria (Meadowsweet)	Marsh/wet grassland margins	GS4 (Wet grassland) / GM1 (Marsh)	Dominant in damp grassland and marsh transition zones
Carex spp. (Sedges, e.g. C. elata, C. lasiocarpa)	Marsh, fen, swamp	GM1 (Marsh)	Widespread emergent or fen-edge vegetation
Juncus spp. (Rushes)	Wet grassland, marsh	GS4 (Wet grassland) / GM1	Typically dominant in seasonally

[22] Habitats as categorised by Fossitt (2000), available at A Guide to Habitats in Ireland - Fossitt.pdf (npws.ie) Accessed: 19th August 2025

		(Marsh)	wet margins
Phragmites australis (Common Reed)	Reedbeds/swamp	FS1 (Reed and large sedge swamps)	Dense stands in sheltered bays
Cladium mariscus (Great Fen-sedge)	Fen/reed-swamp	FS1 (Reed and large sedge swamps)	Locally abundant in alkaline fen patches
Eupatorium cannabinum (Hemp-agrimony)	Wet grassland, marsh	GM1 (Marsh)	Scattered in damp margins
Rumex hydrolapathum (Water Dock)	Swamp/marsh	GM1 (Marsh) / FS1 (Reed and large sedge swamps)	Tall herb at nutrient-rich lake edges
Teucrium scordium (Water Germander)	Rare shoreline plant, marsh	GM1 (Marsh)	Notable rare species between high and low water marks
Catabrosa aquatica (Whorl-grass)	Shallow marsh/fen edge	GM1 (Marsh)	Damp, alkaline soils, shallow flooding zones



Plate 3-1 GM1 (Marsh) and FS1 (Reed and large sedge swamps) vegetation



Plate 3-2 FL4 / FL5 (Mesotrophic or Eutrophic lakes)



Plate 3-3 GS4 (Wet grassland)

3.4.3.2 Rare and Protected Flora

No rare or protected flora species were recorded during any of the ecological surveys.

3.4.3.3 Otter (*Lutra Lutra*)

No evidence of otter was recorded at the areas where the boat-based survey took place. According to the NBDC records Otter are concentrated along the northern and western shoreline with very few records along the southern portion of Lough Ree.

3.4.3.4 Ornithology

This subsection provides a summary of the nine SCI bird species of the Lough Ree SPA recorded during the field surveys carried out at each of the draw areas carried out during the 2025 MWP field survey from the 17th to 19th June 2025 (Table 3-4). A total of 15 bird species were recorded during the survey effort, including two SCI

species of Lough Ree SPA, Little Grebe and Lapwing. The June surveys at Lough Ree SPA recorded a range of waterbird and associated species, with numbers and behaviours varying across locations. A total of 15 bird species were recorded within Lough Ree during this survey effort with 5 target species were recorded within the study area during ornithological surveys. Species of conservation interest recorded during the survey included Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank, Oystercatcher and White-tailed Eagle. Black-headed Gull was the most numerous species, peaking at 50 individuals and recorded consistently throughout the survey. Mute Swan were widespread, with up to 34 birds counted, including notable groups at Ballybay and Horse Island. Moderate counts of Lesser Black-backed Gull, Little Egret (up to 7), Little Grebe (up to 5), and Redshank (up to 10) were also recorded, with additional observations of breeding activity including nesting and chicks for Redshank, and calling behaviour. Cormorant (maximum 11, including a record at Nuns Island) and Great Crested Grebe (recorded at Carney East) were observed regularly in small numbers. Grey Heron, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Lapwing, Moorhen, and Garden Warbler were each present only as single figures. A single White-tailed Eagle was also noted, underlining the site's importance for raptors. Overall, the surveys highlight Lough Ree's role in supporting both larger flocks of common species and smaller numbers of conservation-relevant breeding waders.

Table 3-4 Observed species during the survey on Lough Ree

Species	Latin Name	Peak Count	Mean Count	Notes
Black-headed Gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	50	16.0	Numerous observations, widely present
Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	11	4.7	Small flocks, variable presence
Curlew	*Numenius arquata*	1	1.0	Only two individuals recorded
Garden Warbler	*Sylvia borin*	2	1.5	Very scarce, terrestrial species
Great Crested Grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*	2	1.4	Regular but low numbers
Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	1	1.0	Single birds only
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*	1	1.0	Very scarce
Lesser Black-backed Gull	*Larus fuscus*	12	5.7	Small to medium flocks
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	7	3.0	Frequent small groups
Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	5	2.6	Present in most counts, low numbers
Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	1	1.0	Single record
Mute Swan	*Cygnus olor*	34	5.1	Frequent, sometimes large aggregations
Oystercatcher	*Haematopus ostralegus*	2	1.2	Scarce, single figures only
Redshank (incl. "Red Shank")	*Tringa totanus*	10	2.6	Widespread but mostly in low numbers
White-tailed Eagle	*Haliaeetus albicilla*	1	1.0	One individual recorded

Although most of the birds recorded during the June 2025 survey, with the exception of Little Grebe and Lapwing, are not designated as SCI species for the Lough Ree SPA, several of these species occupy habitats that are also used by SCI birds. This includes shallow water areas, mudflats, open lakes, and islands or sheltered bays. Recognising these habitat overlaps is important for management and conservation planning, as non-SCI species can indicate the ecological quality of the site and may be affected by measures such as netting restrictions, predator control, or habitat maintenance. **Table 3-5** summarises the habitat associations of both SCI and non-SCI species recorded during the survey, highlighting areas of shared use and potential conservation interest.

Table 3-5 Habitat similarities between SCI species and the non-SCI species

Habitat Type (on site)	SCI Species (designation list)	Non-SCI Species Recorded
Shallow water / sheltered bays (FL4 / FL5, GM1 edges)	Little Grebe, Lapwing, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Wigeon	Black-headed Gull, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Oystercatcher, Redshank (breeding),
Open water / deeper lake (FL4 / FL5)	Tufted Duck, Common Scoter, Goldeneye, Whooper Swan, Coot, Mallard, Little Grebe	Mute Swan, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant
Wet grasslands / floodplain margins (GS4, GM1, PF1)	Lapwing, Golden Plover, Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler	Curlew, Moorhen
Islands / lake margins (stonewort, reedbeds, marsh transition zones)	Common Tern (nesting), Whooper Swan	Black-headed Gull, Mute Swan, White-tailed Eagle
Scrub / woodland edge (adjacent to wetlands)	–	Garden Warbler, White-tailed Eagle

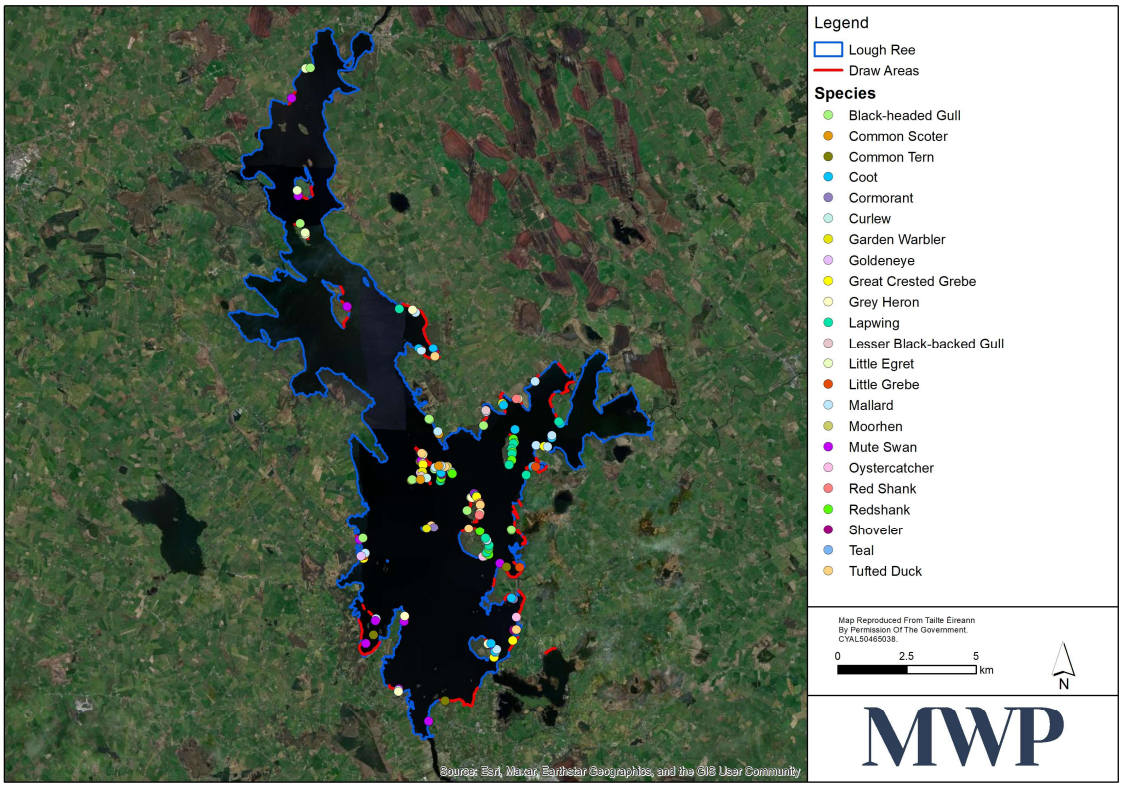


Figure 3-9 Bird observations along draw areas

3.4.4 Invasive Alien Species

Records from the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) show the presence of several Invasive Alien Species (IAS) across different taxonomic groups, including birds, bony fish, crustaceans, flowering plants, fungi, molluscs, and terrestrial mammals. Molluscs (notable records):

- Common Garden Snail (*Cornu aspersum*)
- Asian Clam (*Corbicula fluminea*)
- Jenkins' Spire Snail (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*)
- Quagga Mussel (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*)
- Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*)
- Wrinkled Snail (*Xeroplexa intersecta*)
- Budapest Keeled Slug (*Tandonia budapestensis*)
- Roach (*Rutilus rutilus*)
- American mink (*Neogale vision*)
- Canadian Waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*)

These invasive molluscs, particularly Zebra Mussel and Quagga Mussel, have significant ecological implications, as they can alter nutrient dynamics, outcompete native species, and change lakebed habitats.

A review of invasive alien flowering plants recorded for Lough Ree indicates that only a subset have the potential to establish along the shoreline. Submerged species such as Canadian Waterweed (*Elodea canadensis*) and Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*) are highly likely to occur in shallow bays and littoral zones, where they can form dense stands that displace native aquatic vegetation. Riparian invaders including Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) and Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) also pose a significant risk, as both species readily colonise wet soils and disturbed ground along lake margins, potentially altering marsh (GM1) and wet grassland (GS4) habitats. By contrast, other recorded species such as Butterfly-bush (*Buddleja davidii*), Cherry Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), Himalayan Honeysuckle (*Leycesteria formosa*), and Pampas-grass (*Cortaderia selloana*) are more typically associated with terrestrial or woodland habitats and are unlikely to become established directly on the shoreline. Similarly, Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor*), Traveller's-joy (*Clematis vitalba*), and Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) occur mainly in dry grassland or hedgerow contexts. Overall, shoreline invasion risk at Lough Ree is greatest from the aquatic waterweeds and riparian species, which can directly impact aquatic plant communities and wetland habitats of ecological importance.

3.5 Identification of Other Projects or Plans or Activities

As well as singular effects, the potential for in-combination effects also need to be considered. A cumulative impact arises from incremental changes caused by other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future actions in conjunction with the netting activity. The netting activity which is the subject of this Stage 1 screening for AA was considered in combination with other relevant plans, projects and activities in the area.

3.5.1 Plans

With regards to the potential for in-combination effects, Roscommon County Development Plan (2022 – 2028)[23], Longford County Development Plan (2022 – 2027)[24] and Westmeath County Development Plan (2021-2027)[25] and accompanying mapping were considered.

3.5.2 Other Permitted and Proposed Developments in the Locality

A search of the Roscommon, Longford, and Westmeath County Council online planning enquiry systems was undertaken on the 19th of August 2026 to identify granted or ongoing planning applications in the vicinity of the draw areas. The results of this search are presented in **Table 3-6.** Only activities considered relevant to the commercial netting project either through potential increases in human activity or direct alterations to Lough Ree have been included. Domestic planning applications have been excluded, as they are not considered material to the nature or scale of the commercial netting.

[23] Roscommon County Council Accessed: 19th August 2026

[24] Longford County Council Accessed: 19th August 2026

[25] Westmeath County Council Accessed: 19th August 2026

Table 3-6 List of granted and/or on-going planning applications for the commercial netting of Lough Ree and similar within close proximity of the draw areas.

Application No.	Applicant	Location	Proposed Development	Decision
22179	Lough Ree Access For All CLG,	Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Co Roscommon	Permission for the proposed replacement and enhancement of a wheelchair accessible embarkation / disembarkation ramp to service Lough Ree Access For All Passenger Boat, all of which will be positioned on existing slipway & within the existing footprint of slipway and all ancillary works.	Granted: 2/6/2022
19311	Lough Ree Lanesborough Angling Hub	Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Co Roscommon	for development consisting of change of use planning application to convert existing Waterways Ireland storage shed to an outdoor recreational centre/lake access centre facility to Lough Ree. The facility will include an information area and seating area for walkers/tourists/anglers. The change of use of the premises will require alterations to the existing elevations including: replacement of existing roller shutter door with glazing (southern elevation), partial removal of existing external wall and replacement with glazing (eastern elevation), provision of wheelchair access ramp/door (eastern elevation), blocking up of existing door (eastern elevation), installation of 3 new windows (northern elevation) and installation of access door (western elevation). The works also involve removal of existing green area and provision of small car park/turning area to the north of the site, provision of outdoor seating area to the south of the site and all associated site works and service	Granted: 26/03/2021
2460534	Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Co. Roscommon.	Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Co. Roscommon	Permission for the proposed construction of a floating jetty together with associated jetty ramp & footpath and all ancillary works.	Granted: 5/06/2025
19311	Lough Ree Lanesborough Angling Hub	Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Co. Roscommon	For development consisting of change of use planning application to convert existing Waterways Ireland storage shed to an outdoor recreational centre/lake access centre facility to Lough Ree. The facility will include an information area and seating area for walkers/tourists/anglers. The change of use of the premises will require alterations to the existing elevations including: replacement of existing roller shutter door with glazing (southern elevation), partial removal of existing external wall and replacement with glazing (eastern elevation), provision of wheelchair access ramp/door (eastern elevation), blocking up of existing door (eastern elevation), installation of 3 new windows (northern elevation) and installation of access door (western elevation). The works also involve removal of existing green area and provision of small car park/turning area to the north of the site, provision of outdoor seating area to the south of the site and all associated site works and service.	Granted: 1/8/2019

2560020	New Island Resorts Limited,	Yew Point Hodson Bay , Barrymore Kiltoom , Athlone Co. Roscommon.	Permission for minor amendments to the sustainable eco-tourism project previously approved under Planning Ref. No. PD/23/60204. The development, situated on a 59.71-hectare (147.55-acre) site, is a low-density visitor destination designed with minimal environmental impact, utilizing renewable energy, sustainable materials, and reversible construction methods. The proposed amendments are: a. minor relocation southward by c.7 metres of the permitted Environmental Induction Building with bicycle parking (8 spaces) relocated adjacent to the building, b. A small increase in the building's floor area (from the permitted area of c.111 sq.m. to c.142 sq.m.), to include a café/restaurant (c.107 sq.m.) area, kitchen (c.28 sq.m.) and storage (c.6 sq.m.) to serve guests and staff only, enhancing the environmental education experience, with associated amendments to the building's elevations. c. The addition of an external covered walkway (c.86 sq.m.) connecting the Environmental Induction Buildi	Granted: 13/03/2025
2262	Athlone Baysports Ltd.,	Barrymore Townland, Hodson Bay, Kiltoom, Athlone	Permission for development consisting of the following recreational facilities: Part A. Landside installations details of which are outlined below: 1. 2 No. marquees for use as a reception and wet suit distribution, measuring 9m X 9m X 6.6m high and 21m X 15m X 7.8M high; 2. 1 No. 9m X 9m X 3.8m high disabled changing marquee; 3. 1 No. 9m X 9m X 4.7m high safety briefing marquee; 4. 9 No. 12m X 6m X 3.3m high changing marquees; 5. 3 No. 12m X 15M X 5m high marquees for use as a customer observation area, a dining area and a gift shop; 6. 1 No. 4m X 8m X 3.7m high café marquee; 7. 2 No. 3m X 6m X 3m high prefabricated office buildings; 8. Outdoor showers 5m X 6m; 9. Realignment of existing fencing. All the marquees will be coloured white. The proposed development includes all ancillary and enabling site works. The changing rooms and coffee shop will be connected by gravity to existing public sewerage. Part B. Waterside Installations, details of	Granted: 11/4/2024
2460559	EirGrid Plc	County Roscommon	Permission for works to uprate approximately 35.7km of the overall 35.82km of the existing Athlone to Lanesboro 110 kV overhead line (OHL) circuit located within the administrative boundary within County Roscommon. The proposed development will consist of: • Replacement ("restringing") and uprating of the conductor along the existing Athlone-Lanesboro 110 kV OHL circuit; • Provision of fibre communication connection on the uprated circuit; • Replacement of 155No. Intermediate Wooden Polesets (IMPs), with similar structures, including poleset stays at 32No. IMPs. The change in structures will result in standardised heights from 16m to 23m along the circuit, the majority of height increases will be between 0.1m and 2.0m (at 125 No. IMPs), with the remainder between 2.1m and 3.7m, and a 4.0m height increase at only one IMP. 3no. IMP replacements will not result in a height change; • Replacement of 25No. Intermediate Wooden Poleset crossarms; • Replacement of 1No. steel angle mast, the replacement structure will result in a height increase of 0.5m; • Foundation strengthening of 9No. steel angle masts, and 1No. end mast; • Bar member replacements to 12No. steel angle masts	Granted: 25/06/2025

	and 1No. end mast; and, •All associated development including insulator/hardware replacement (suspension clamps and vibration dampers), replacement of signage, painting of angle masts, replacement/installation of anticlimbing guards, access tracks, vegetation clearance, temporary construction compounds and all other works necessary to facilitate the development. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared to accompany this planning application.	

3.5.3 EPA Licenced/Registered Facilities

A review of the EPA's mapping tool confirmed that there are no Integrated Pollution Provention and Control (IPPC), Integrated Pollution Control (IPC), or Industrial Emissions Licensing facilities (IEL) licensed facilities located within the immediate vicinity of the draw areas. The closest licensed facility is the 'Electricity Supply Board's Lough Ree Power Station (Licence No. P0610-03)', situated approximately 2.9km north of the most north draw area. A cluster of additional IEL-licensed facilities is located around 2.07 kilometres to the south-west, including 'Arran Chemical Company Limited (Licence No. P0100-02)', 'Novo Nordisk Production Ireland Limited (Licence No. P0110-03)', 'Alexion Pharma International Operations Unlimited Company (Licence No. P1094-01)', 'Bord Gáis Energy Power Plant (Licence No. P1197-01)', and 'Jazz Pharmaceuticals Ireland Limited (Licence No. P0987-01)'.

All of these facilities are not located within any designated SAC or SPA. While they are unlikely to have a direct influence on the draw areas, they may contribute cumulatively to water quality pressures in the surrounding environment. Further IEL and IPC licensed facilities occurring within 15 km of the site are listed in Table 3-7.

Table 3-7: IEL/IPC Licensed Facilities Proximal to Lough Ree

IEL/IPC Name	License Number	License Status Type	Distance from Lough Ree
DDS BRADY FARMS LIMITED	P0408-02	Licensed	14.55 km east of Lough Ree
Electricity Supply Board	P0610-01	Licensed	6.33 km east of Lough Ree
JMW Farms (IRL) Limited	P1082-01	Licensed	4.70 km east of Lough Ree
Kepak Athleague	P0168-02	Other	13.00 km east of Lough Ree
Hodson Bay and Environs	D0377-01	Other	Within Lough Ree
Lecarrow and Environs	A0277-01	Other	Within Lough Ree
Ballyleague and Environs	D0229-01	Other	Within the Shannon Upper River

3.5.4 Existing Land-use and On-going Activities

The Upper Shannon (26E) catchment is dominated by agriculture and localised commercial conifer plantations. Historically, peat extraction has occurred, particularly to the north of the lake, while small-scale residential and other extractive developments are also present. Recreational and touristic activities, including boating, angling, and water sports, are common along the lake's shoreline and contribute to both the local economy and environmental pressures. Urban settlements such as Athlone and smaller villages including Ballyleague and Lanesborough are situated near the lake, with associated infrastructure influencing land use patterns and environmental conditions.

The surrounding landscape comprises a mix of wetlands, peatlands, undulating farmland, islands, and scattered developments. Certain areas, including Killinure Lough, Lough Ree, and the inner lake zones, are particularly sensitive to water quality impacts due to slower water turnover. In recognition of species conservation needs,

Tern floating nesting rafts have been installed near Black Islands, Inchmore, and Inchturk Islands (Ref: NPWS[26] and Waterways Ireland) to alleviate known and predicted vulnerabilities of this species. Lough Ree's ecological, cultural, and recreational significance has also led to initiatives such as the proposed UNESCO Biosphere Nature Reserve, recognising the importance of balancing biodiversity conservation with sustainable human activities (Westmeath County Development Plan, 2021–2027)[27].

The commercial netting activity is considered in combination with other relevant plans, projects and activities in the area in Section 3.8.5 below.

3.6 Identification of European Sites

Table 3-8, lists the European sites within a potential ZOI of the draw areas, including their proximities to the draw areas. The draw areas overlap with the Lough Ree SPA (Figure 3-10) and Lough Ree SAC (Figure 3-11) and are within close proximity to the River Shannon Callows SAC and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (see Table 3-8).

Table 3-8 European Sites within the potential ZOI of the proposal site

Designated Site	Site Code	Proximity of Lough Ree to Nearest Point of Designated Site
Lough Ree SAC	000440	SAC overlaps with the draw areas.
Clooneen Bog SAC	002348	15.22 km north east of Lough Ree.
Lough Forbes Complex SAC	001818	9.34 km north east of Lough Ree.
Brown Bog SAC	002346	11.2 km north east of Lough Ree.
Corbo Bog SAC	002349	3.14 km west of Lough Ree.
Mount Jessop Bog SAC	002202	12.17 km east of Lough Ree.
Fortwilliam Turlough SAC	000448	1.6 km west of Lough Ree
Ballinturly Turlough SAC	000588	7.08 east of Lough Ree.
Lisduff Turlough SAC	000609	11.1 km west of Lough Ree
Four Roads Turlough SAC	001637	13.3 km west of Lough Ree
Lough Funshinagh SAC	000611	5.9 km west of Lough Ree
Lough Croan Turlough SAC	000610	10.8 km west of Lough Ree

[26] Screening for Appropriate Assessment Adoption of necessary conservation measures (Tern rafts) within Lough Ree

[27] Westmeath County Development Plan, 2021–2027

Designated Site	Site Code	Proximity of Lough Ree to Nearest Point of Designated Site
Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC	002339	6.04 km south west of Lough Ree
Killeglan Grassland SAC	002214	13.05 km west of Lough Ree
Castlesampson Esker SAC	001625	9.2 km west of Lough Ree
Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC	001776	11.01 km south of Lough Ree
Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC	000576	12.6 km south of Lough Ree
River Shannon Callows SAC	000216	1.7 km south of Lough Ree
Crosswood Bog SAC	002337	5.13 km south east of Lough Ree
Carn Park Bog SAC	002336	4.2 km south east of Lough Ree
Ballymore Fen SAC	002313	15.4 km east of Lough Ree
Lough Ree SPA	004064	SPA overlaps with the draw areas.
Four Roads Turlough SPA	004140	13.3 km west of Lough Ree
River Suck Callows SPA	004097	15.2 km west of Lough Ree
Middle Shannon Callows SPA	004096	1.7 km south of Lough Ree
Mongan Bog SPA	004017	12.6 km south of Lough Ree
Lough Croan Turlough SPA	004139	11.4 km west of Lough Ree
Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA	004101	9.3 km north of Lough Ree

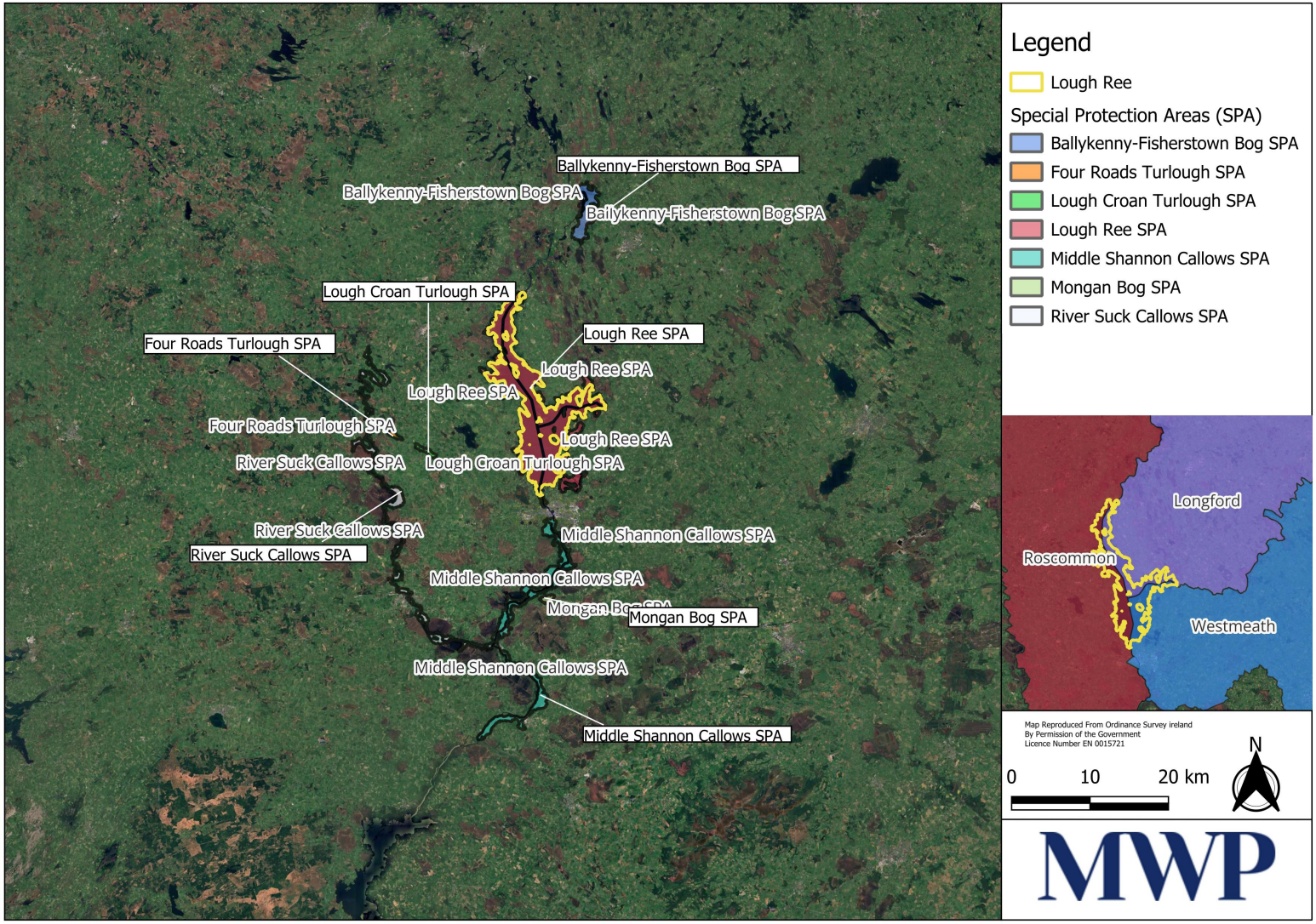


Figure 3-10. SPAs within the ZOI of the draw areas at Lough Ree.

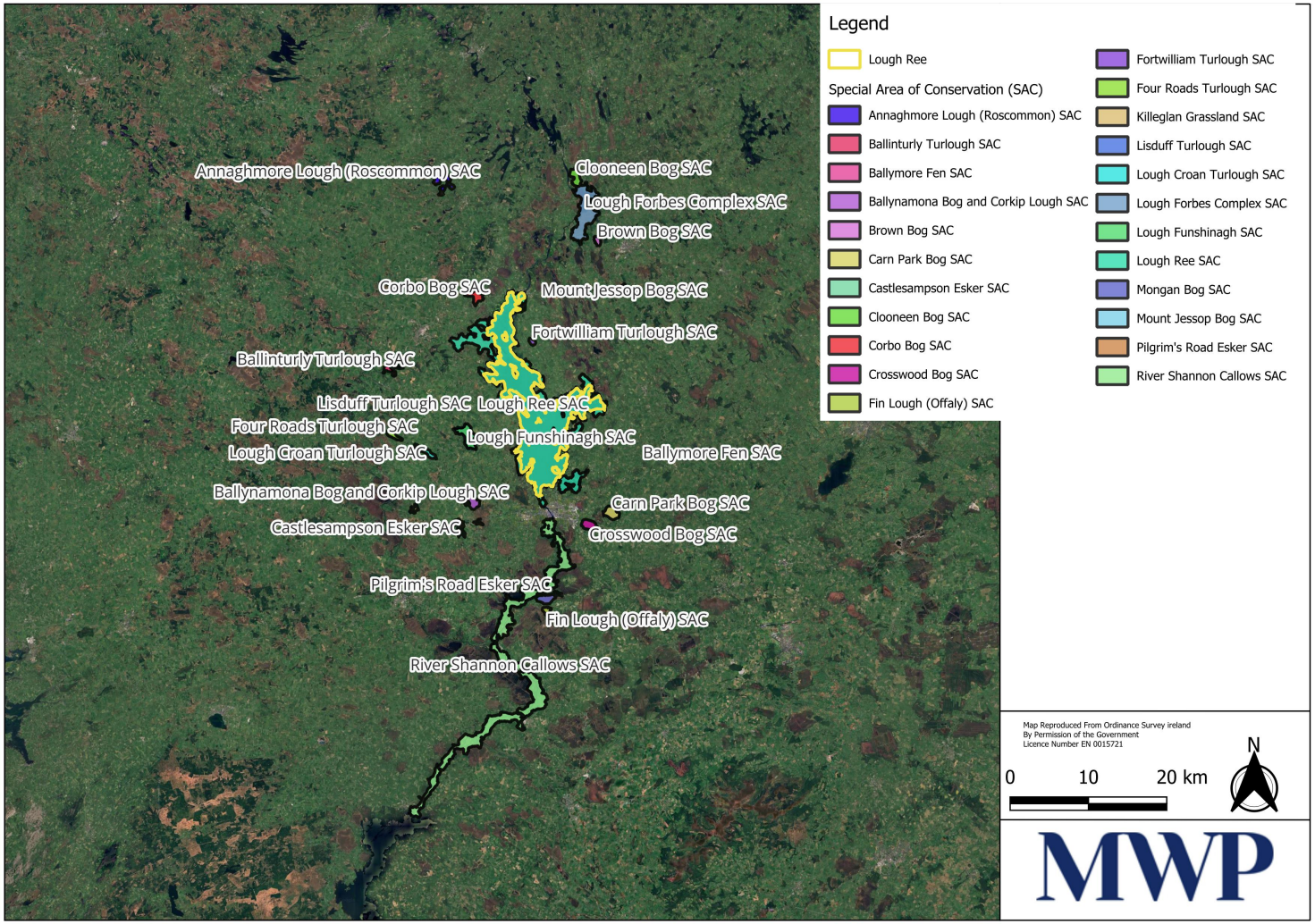


Figure 3-11 SACs within with ZOI of draw areas at Lough Ree.

3.6.1 Zone of Impact Influence

The screening stage of AA involves compiling a 'list' of European sites within a potential zone of influence (ZOI) for later analysis which may or may not be significantly impacted upon by the proposal. The ZOI of the draw areas is the geographical area over which it could affect the receiving environment in a way that could have significant effects on the conservation interests of a European site. The ZOI is established using the Source-Pathway-Receptor (SPR) model. When assessing impact, European sites are only considered relevant where a credible or tangible source-pathway-receptor link exists between the draw areas of commercial netting and a protected species or habitat type. In order for an impact to occur there must be a risk initiated by having a 'source' (e.g.,netting), a 'receptor' (e.g., a protected species associated with aquatic or riparian habitats), and an impact pathway between the source and the receptor (e.g., a waterbody which connects the source to the protected species or habitats).

All European sites within a potential ZOI of the draw areas will be characterised in the context of the rationale for designation and qualifying features, in accordance with NPWS guidance. An evaluation based on these factors to determine which European sites are the plausible ecological receptors for potential impacts of commercial netting will be conducted. The evaluation takes cognisance of the scope, scale, and nature of the commercial trout netting, its location relative to European sites, and the degree of connectedness that exists between the draw sites and each European site's potential ecological receptors. Following this, the potential impacts and effects associated with the commercial trout netting will be identified before an assessment is made of the likely significance of these effects.

As described above, the test for Screening for Appropriate Assessment is to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the proposal, individually or in combination with other plans/projects is likely to have a significant effect on a European site, in view of those sites conservation objectives. If there are any significant, potentially significant, or uncertain effects, it will be necessary to proceed to Appropriate Assessment and submit a Natura Impact Statement (NIS).

3.6.2 Characteristics of European Sites

Table 3-9, lists the qualifying features of Conservation Interest for the European sites that lie within the potential ZOI of the draw areas. Information pertaining to the European sites is from site synopses, conservation objectives and other information available on www.npws.ie.

Table 3-9 European sites within the potential ZOI with qualifying features, distance to Lough Ree, ecological/hydrological connection and rationale for exclusion or inclusion of conservation interest.

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
Lough Ree SAC (000440)[29]	• Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] • Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210] • Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Alkaline fens [7230] • Limestone pavements [8240] • Bog woodland [91D0] • Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae) [91E0] • *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355]	SAC overlaps with Lough Ree.	Yes, potential for direct ecological disturbance.	The proposed activity occurs within and overlaps spatially with Lough Ree SAC. The qualifying interests include aquatic habitats and Otter (*Lutra lutra*), which may interact with nearshore and open-water areas used for draft-netting. As a direct ecological pathway exists and potential disturbance effects cannot be excluded at this stage, the site is carried forward for further assessment.

[28] Asterisk (*) denotes a priority habitat considered to be in danger of disappearance.

[29] Lough Ree SAC (000440)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
River Shannon Callows SAC (000216)[30]	• *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*) [6410] • Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*) [6510] • Alkaline fens [7230] • Limestone pavements [8240] • Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*) [91E0] • *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355]	1.7 km south of Lough Ree	Yes (tenuous), direct hydrological connection.	The River Shannon Callows SAC is located downstream of Lough Ree and is designated for floodplain and terrestrial habitats associated with seasonal inundation of the Shannon callows. The proposed commercial draft-net fishery is a non-invasive, short-term activity that does not involve discharges, habitat modification, or alteration of hydrological regimes. The qualifying habitats are spatially and functionally distinct from Lough Ree, and the qualifying interest species Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is highly mobile and not dependent on the specific draw areas for critical life-cycle functions. SAC located downstream of the draw areas so there is a potential for an indirect impact pathway linking the two, hence the site is carried forward for further assessment.
Clooneen Bog SAC (002348)[31]	• Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150] • Bog woodland [91D0]	15.22 km north east of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological or ecological connection.	Clooneen Bog SAC is located over 15 km from the subject site, has no hydrological or ecological connection to Lough Ree, and is designated for exclusively terrestrial bog habitats. There is no plausible pathway by which the proposed activity could affect the site's qualifying interests, and it is therefore excluded from further assessment.

[30] River Shannon Callows SAC (000216)

[31] Clooneen Bog SAC (002348)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818)[32]	• Natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrocharition - type vegetation [3150] • Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150] • Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*) [91E0]	9.34 km north east of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological connection.	Lough Forbes Complex SAC is geographically distant and upstream/upgradient of Lough Ree, and has no hydrological or ecological connectivity with the proposed activity. The qualifying habitats are terrestrial or lake systems unrelated to Lough Ree. No plausible impact pathway exists and the site is excluded from further assessment.
Brown Bog SAC (002346)[33]	• Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]	11.2 km north east of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC comprises raised bog habitats only and has no hydrological, ecological, or spatial connection with Lough Ree. Given its distance and upstream location, no plausible impact pathway exists and the site is excluded from further assessment.
Corbo Bog SAC (002349)[34]	• Active raised bogs [7110]	3.14 km west of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological connection.	Corbo Bog SAC is designated for terrestrial bog habitats and is not hydrologically connected to Lough Ree. Despite its

[32] Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818)

[33] Brown Bog SAC (002346)

[34] Corbo Bog SAC (002349)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
	• Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150]			relative proximity, there is no ecological linkage or impact pathway between the proposed activity and the qualifying interests of the SAC. The site is therefore excluded from further assessment.
Mount Jessop Bog SAC (002202)[35]	• Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Bog woodland [91D0]	12.17 km east of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological connection.	Mount Jessop Bog SAC is designated for terrestrial bog woodland habitats and is hydrologically disconnected from Lough Ree. The absence of any ecological or functional linkage means no plausible impact pathway exists and the site is excluded from further assessment.
Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448)[36]	• Turloughs [3180]	1.6 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Ballinturly Turlough SAC (000588) [37]	• Turloughs [3180]	7.08 east of Lough Ree.	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no

[35] Mount Jessop Bog SAC (002202)

[36] Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448)

[37] Ballinturly Turlough SAC (000588)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
				spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Lisduff Turlough SAC (000609)[38]	• Turloughs [3180]	11.1 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Four Roads Turlough SAC (001637)[39]	• Turloughs [3180]	13.3 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Lough Funshinagh SAC (000611)[40]	• Turloughs [3180] • Rivers with muddy banks with *Chenopodion rubri* p.p. and *Bidention* p.p. vegetation [3270]	5.9 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough and river habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which

[38] Lisduff Turlough SAC (000609)

[39] Four Roads Turlough SAC (001637)

[40] Lough Funshinagh SAC (000611)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
				the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Lough Croan Turlough SAC (000610)[41]	• Turloughs [3180]	10.8 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater-dependent turlough habitats that are hydrologically and functionally distinct from Lough Ree. There is no surface water connection, no spatial overlap, and no mechanism by which the proposed activity could affect their qualifying interests. Accordingly, these sites are excluded from further assessment.
Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC (002339)[42]	• Turloughs [3180] • Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120] • Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion* [7150] • Bog woodland [91D0]	6.04 km south west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater dependant and terrestrial habitats with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Killeglan Grassland SAC (002214)[43]	• Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-*	13.05 km west of Lough	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for one terrestrial habitat with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given

[41] Lough Croan Turlough SAC (000610)

[42] Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC (002339)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
	Brometalia) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	Ree		their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Castlesampson Esker SAC (001625)[44]	• Turloughs [3180] • Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	9.2 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for groundwater dependant and terrestrial habitats with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776)[45]	• Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (* important orchid sites) [6210]	11.01 km south of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for one terrestrial habitat with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (000576)[46]	• Alkaline fens [7230] • *Vertigo geyeri* (Geyer's Whorl Snail) [1013]	12.6 km south of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for one groundwater dependant habitat and one species with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact

[43] Killeglan Grassland SAC (002214)

[44] Castlesampson Esker SAC (001625)

[45] Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776)

[46] Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (000576)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
				pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Crosswood Bog SAC (002337)[47]	• Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]	5.13 km south east of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for terrestrial habitats with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Carn Park Bog SAC (002336)[48]	• Active raised bogs [7110] • Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration [7120]	4.2 km south east of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for terrestrial habitat with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Ballymore Fen SAC (002313)[49]	• Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]	15.4 km east of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SAC is designated for one terrestrial habitat with no ecological or hydrological connection to Lough Ree. Given their distance, upstream position, and lack of functional linkage, no plausible impact pathway exists. These sites are excluded from further assessment.
Lough Ree SPA	• Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]	SPA overlaps	Yes, potential for	The proposed activity occurs within Lough Ree SPA,

[47] Crosswood Bog SAC (002337)

[48] Carn Park Bog SAC (002336)

[49] Ballymore Fen SAC (002313)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
(004064)[50]	• Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038] • Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052] • Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [A053] • Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061] • Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065] • Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) [A067] • Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125] • Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] • Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142] • Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193] • Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855] • Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) [A857] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	with the draw areas.	direct ecological disturbance.	designated for a wide variety of wader and waterbird species and the habitat and species complex 'wetland and waterbirds'. The proposed activity overlaps spatially with habitats used by qualifying interest bird species for foraging, roosting and, in some cases, breeding. As disturbance effects associated with boat use and shoreline activity cannot be excluded at this stage, the SPA is included for Further Assessment.
Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096)[51]	• Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038] • Corncrake (*Crex crex*) [A122]	1.7 km south of Lough Ree	Yes (tenuous), direct hydrological connection	The qualifying interest species of the Middle Shannon Callows SPA are associated with floodplain habitats downstream of Lough Ree. As disturbance effects

[50] Lough Ree SPA (004064)

[51] Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
	• Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] • Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142] • Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) [A156] • Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) [A179] • Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]			associated with boat use and shoreline activity cannot be excluded at this stage, the SPA is included for Further Assessment.
Four Roads Turlough SPA (004140)[52]	• Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] • Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	13.3 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SPA is designated for wintering waterbird species whose core feeding and roosting habitats are located well beyond the influence of Lough Ree during the netting season. Given the distance involved, lack of ecological connectivity, and the seasonal nature of the qualifying interests, no plausible impact pathway exists and the sites are excluded from further assessment.
River Suck Callows SPA (004097)[53]	• Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038] • Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] • Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]	15.2 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SPA is designated for wintering waterbird species whose core feeding and roosting habitats are located well beyond the influence of Lough Ree during the netting season. Given the distance involved, lack of ecological connectivity, and the seasonal nature of the qualifying

[52] Four Roads Turlough SPA (004140)

[53] River Suck Callows SPA (004097)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
	• Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395] • Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999			interests, no plausible impact pathway exists and the sites are excluded from further assessment.
Mongan Bog SPA (004017)[54]	• Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]	12.6 km south of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SPA is designated for one wintering waterbird species whose core feeding and roosting habitats are located well beyond the influence of Lough Ree during the netting season. Given the distance involved, lack of ecological connectivity, and the seasonal nature of the qualifying interests, no plausible impact pathway exists and the sites are excluded from further assessment.
Lough Croan Turlough SPA (004139)[55]	• Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140] • Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*) [A395] • Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) [A857] • Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]	11.4 km west of Lough Ree	No Hydrological connection.	This SPA is designated for wintering waterbird species whose core feeding and roosting habitats are located well beyond the influence of Lough Ree during the netting season. Given the distance involved, lack of ecological connectivity, and the seasonal nature of the qualifying interests, no plausible impact pathway exists and the sites are excluded from further assessment.
Ballykenny-	• Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser*	9.3 km north	No Hydrological	This SPA is designated for one wintering waterbird species

[54] Mongan Bog SPA (004017)

[55] Lough Croan Turlough SPA (004139)

Designated Site and Site Code	Qualifying features of conservation interest[28]	Approximate Distance of Designated Site from Subject Site	Ecological/hydrological Connection	Rationale for Exclusion/Inclusion for Assessment
Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101)[56]	*albifrons flavirostris*) [A395]	of Lough Ree	connection.	whose core feeding and roosting habitats are located well beyond the influence of Lough Ree during the netting season. Given the distance involved, lack of ecological connectivity, and the seasonal nature of the qualifying interests, no plausible impact pathway exists and the sites are excluded from further assessment.

[56] Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101)

3.6.3 Conservation Objectives

According to the Habitats Directive, the *conservation status of a natural habitat* will be taken as 'favourable' within its biogeographic range when:

- its natural range and the areas covered 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 as defined below.

According to the Habitats Directive, the *conservation status of a species* means the sum of the influences acting on the species concerned that may affect the long-term distribution and abundance of its populations. The conservation status will be taken as 'favourable' within its biogeographical range 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.

The conservation objectives for each European site listed in **Table 3-9**, above, together with other information on the sites, are available on http://www.npws.ie/protectedsites/. Their published dates and versions are listed below. These have been accessed on the 27th of August 2026.

- Lough Ree SAC (000440) - 27 Mar 2026. Version 2
- River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) - 18 Jan 2022. Version 1
- Clooneen Bog SAC (002348) - 29 Oct 2024. Version 2
- Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818) - 04 May 2016. Version 1
- Brown Bog SAC (002346) - 18 Feb 2016. Version 1
- Corbo Bog SAC (002349) - 25 Nov 2015. Version 1
- Mount Jessop Bog SAC (002202) - 13 Jun 2023. Version 1
- Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448) - 08 Feb 2018. Version 1
- Ballinturly Turlough SAC (000588) - 29 Jan 2018. Version 1
- Lisduff Turlough SAC (000609) - 15 Jan 2018. Version 1
- Four Roads Turlough SAC (001637) - 09 Feb 2018. Version 1
- Lough Funshinagh SAC (000611) - 19 Feb 2018. Version 1
- Lough Croan Turlough SAC (000610) - 12 Jan 2018. Version 1
- Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC (002339) - 23 Sep 2016. Version 1
- Killeglan Grassland SAC (002214) - 19 Jun 2018. Version 1

- Castlesampson Esker SAC (001625) - 21 Oct 2021. Version 1
- Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776) - 02 Jul 2018. Version 1
- Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (000576) - 06 Feb 2019. Version 1
- Crosswood Bog SAC (002337) - 10 Feb 2016. Version 1
- Carn Park Bog SAC (002336) - 23 Nov 2015. Version 1
- Ballymore Fen SAC (002313) - 05 Oct 2018. Version 1
- Lough Ree SPA (004064) - 04 Apr 2025. Version 1
- Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) - 15 Nov 2022. Version 1
- Four Roads Turlough SPA (004140) - 24 Jan 2025. Version 1
- River Suck Callows SPA (004097) - 15 Nov 2022. Version 1
- Mongan Bog SPA (004017) - 18 Apr 2025. Version 1
- Lough Croan Turlough SPA (004139) - 24 Jan 2025. Version 1
- Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101) - 18 Apr 2025. Version 1

3.6.4 European Sites Outside the Zone of Potential Impact after Application of SPR Model

With regards to the draw areas, it is considered that the activity does not include any element that has the potential to significantly affect the conservation objectives for which certain European sites are designated outside the ZOI. Although located within 15 kilometres of the draw areas site and/or are hydrologically connected, these European sites are deemed to be outside the zone of potential impact influence of commercial netting due to the absence of plausible impact pathways when the SPR model was applied (see Section 3.6.1 for summary of the model). Therefore, it is objectively concluded that significant effects on the conservation objectives of these sites are not reasonably foreseeable because of the characteristics of the commercial netting activity at Section 3.3. These sites are listed in Table 3-9, along with their approximate distances from the subject site and the rationale for their exclusion, and therefore will not be considered further in this report.

3.6.5 European Sites requiring further consideration following application of the SPR model

With regards to the draw areas, it is considered that the works include elements that have the potential to significantly alter the conservation objectives for which certain European sites are designated, or there is uncertainty at this stage and significant effects cannot be ruled out.

Due to the presence of a plausible impact pathway, it is considered that these European sites, listed in Table 3-9, are within the likely ZOI of the proposal. These sites are outlined in Table 3-9, along with their distances from the proposal area and the rationale for inclusion for further evaluation include:

a) Lough Ree SAC (000440);

b) Lough Ree SPA (004064);

c) River Shannon Callows SAC (000216); and

d) Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096).

The likelihood of significant effects from the commercial netting on these European sites outlined above was determined based on several indicators including:

- Water quality;
- Disturbance and/or displacement of species;
- Habitat Loss and alteration; and
- Habitat or Species Fragmentation.

The likelihood of significant in-combination effects is assessed in Section 3.8.5, below.

3.7 Identification of Potential Impacts

Potential direct, indirect and secondary ecological impacts arising from the proposed commercial netting activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, are identified in this section (Table 3-10). The assessment considers a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season during the 2027–2031 assessment period. In identifying potential impact pathways, consideration has therefore been given both to the effects associated with individual netting operations and to the potential for effects to recur across successive annual fishing seasons during the five-year assessment period.

Table 3-10. Identification of the impacts of commercial trout netting within the draw areas of Lough Ree.

Description of elements of the project likely to give rise to potential ecological impacts sites.	The commercial draft-net trout fishery involves the use of small boats to deploy and retrieve nets in nearshore areas and a limited, temporary increase in human activity at established shoreline draw locations. Boat movements are short in duration and confined to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, while shoreline activity occurs only for the period required to handle and retrieve the net. These elements of the project have the potential to give rise to short-term, localised disturbance to waterbirds using nearshore, shoreline, or adjacent open-water habitats within the designated sites.
Describe any likely direct, indirect or secondary ecological impacts of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) by virtue of: ▪ *Size and scale* ▪ *Land-take* ▪ *Distance from European Site or key features of the site* ▪ *Resource requirements* ▪ *Emissions* ▪ *Excavation requirements* ▪ *Transportation requirements* ▪ *Duration of construction, operation etc.* ▪ *Other.*	▪ There is spatial overlap of draw areas with the Lough Ree SPA and SAC. ▪ The draw areas are directly hydrologically connected to two European sites – Lough Ree SPA [004064] and Lough Ree SAC [000440] and directly hydrologically connected via the River Shannon to River Shannon Callows SAC [000216] and Middle Shannon Callows SPA [004096] located approximately 2.96 river kilometres downstream from the nearest netting areas in Lough Ree. ▪ Potential for water quality impacts through the ingress of fuels/oils or other substances via small boats. ▪ Potential for temporary direct alteration of habitats by means of the netting activity and the haul on to the shore. ▪ Potential for species both birds and Otter disturbance/displacement impact due to operational

	activities including fugitive noise emissions from boats and human activity.

3.8 Assessment of Significance of Potential Effects

3.8.1 Water Quality

Lough Ree is a multi-use lake supporting a wide range of recreational activities. During the temporary draw season, the potential for water-quality impairment arises primarily from the routine operation of boats, which is already a characteristic feature of the lake environment. Water quality is a critical factor underpinning the conservation condition of the Lough Ree SPA and SAC.

However, commercial netting does not introduce new nutrient, sediment, or notable hydrocarbon inputs, and its operations are not of a type or scale that could measurably alter water quality. The small-scale nature of commercial netting limited in duration, spatial extent, and vessel type does not represent a significant additional pressure when compared with the established baseline of recreational boating and marina activity. The EPA Catchment Assessment (2018) identifies agriculture and wastewater discharges as the dominant water-quality pressures in the Shannon system, with no evidence to indicate that small-scale netting contributes to such impacts.

Although a hydrological connection exists between the draw-netting areas and the Lough Ree SPA/SAC, and further downstream to the River Shannon Callows SAC and Middle Shannon Callows SPA (c.1.96 km away via Athlone), any minor and temporary and extremely localised water-quality effect associated with netting will dissipate rapidly and be subject to dilution. The intervening urbanised stretch through Athlone further reduces any ecological continuity of potential effects. Previous Appropriate Assessment screenings for draft netting (DAFM/IFI, 2021) concluded that manual draft netting is unlikely to result in significant water-quality impacts downstream.

The assessment has also considered the potential for the commercial netting activity to recur annually throughout the 2027–2031 licensing period, based on a maximum scenario of 12 licences in any fishing season. While this increases the overall duration over which the activity may occur, it does not alter the nature or magnitude of the potential water-quality pathway associated with individual netting operations. The activity does not involve discharges, dredging, excavation or works capable of generating sediment, and there is no mechanism for pollutants or other inputs associated with normal operation to accumulate between successive fishing seasons. Accordingly, repeated seasonal operation during the 2027–2031 period is not considered capable of giving rise to a significant deterioration in water quality within Lough Ree or downstream European sites.

On this basis, it is objectively concluded that significant effects on water quality within the Lough Ree SPA, Lough Ree SAC, River Shannon Callows SAC, or Middle Shannon Callows SPA, particularly in relation to their qualifying habitats and species, are not likely to occur. Consequently, this potential impact pathway is screened out and does not require further consideration at NIS stage.

3.8.2 Disturbance and/or Displacement of Species

The proposed commercial draft-netting activity has the potential to give rise to temporary disturbance to fauna through short-duration boat movements and limited shoreline activity within defined draw areas on Lough Ree.

These disturbance mechanisms are spatially and temporally restricted, do not involve habitat removal or modification, and are confined to the immediate vicinity of active netting operations.

Within Lough Ree itself the QI species associated with the European sites listed in Table 3-9, above, are either fully dependent or semi-dependent on the aquatic environment of the lake for different stages of their life cycles such as for, nesting/breeding, and migrating or different behavioural activities, such as for foraging, commuting or roosting/loafing. As the proposed activity overlaps spatially with habitats used by these species, and as disturbance associated with boat use and shoreline net handling cannot be excluded at this stage, the potential for disturbance or displacement within the Lough Ree SAC (000440) and Lough Ree SPA (004064) is carried forward for further assessment.

The potential for disturbance has also been considered in the context of repeated seasonal activity throughout the five-year 2027–2031 assessment period. Although individual netting events are temporary and localised, commercial netting may recur annually during successive fishing seasons. Consequently, the potential for repeated disturbance cannot be excluded solely on the basis that individual netting events are short in duration. In particular, the annual fishing season overlaps, at least in part, with periods during which breeding bird species associated with Lough Ree SPA may be present and using shoreline, island and open-water habitats.

The available ecological information, including the 2025 MWP field survey and the wider information provided by NPWS, indicates that bird distribution and use of Lough Ree may vary spatially and between years. Given the five-year duration of the proposed licensing period and the possibility that sensitive species may occur in proximity to active draw areas during individual seasons, likely significant effects arising from repeated disturbance or displacement cannot be excluded at Stage 1 for Lough Ree SPA. Similarly, given the spatial overlap between the activity and Lough Ree SAC and the potential use of shoreline and aquatic habitats by Otter, disturbance effects cannot be excluded at screening stage. These potential effects are therefore carried forward for detailed assessment within the NIS.

In contrast, the River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) are designated primarily for floodplain, wet grassland and associated terrestrial habitats located downstream of Lough Ree. While a hydrological connection exists within the wider Shannon system, the proposed activity comprises short-duration draft-netting operations undertaken from small boats with associated net handling at discrete shoreline draw points on Lough Ree only. The activity does not extend into downstream callows habitats and does not involve physical works, habitat modification or sustained disturbance within floodplain grasslands or wetland habitats associated with these European sites. Any disturbance arising from boat movements or shoreline activity is temporary, localised to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and confined to the lake environment.

When considered in the context of the minor scale of the activity, its temporary and intermittent nature, and the absence of any habitat loss or sustained increase in disturbance, the proposed commercial draft-netting does not have the potential to result in significant disturbance or displacement of qualifying interest species associated with the River Shannon Callows SAC or the Middle Shannon Callows SPA. This conclusion applies equally to mobile species such as Otter (*Lutra lutra*) and to breeding bird species associated with callows habitats, given the availability of extensive suitable habitat throughout the wider Shannon catchment and the lack of any functional reliance on the draw areas of Lough Ree for critical life-cycle requirements. The repetition of the activity over successive fishing seasons from 2027 to 2031 does not alter this conclusion, as there is no spatial or functional disturbance pathway by which activity confined to Lough Ree could result in disturbance or displacement within the downstream callows habitats.

Accordingly, no plausible impact pathway exists linking the identified disturbance mechanisms associated with the proposed activity to significant effects on the conservation objectives of the River Shannon Callows SAC or

the Middle Shannon Callows SPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. These sites are therefore screened out from further assessment in the NIS.

3.8.3 Habitat Loss and Alteration

The Lough Ree SPA is designated for the protection of the habitat and species complex Wetlands [A999], which requires the conservation of wetland habitats as essential resources for regularly occurring migratory waterbirds. As outlined in Section 3.8.2, commercial netting activity has some, albeit limited, potential to alter the Wetlands [A999] habitat through habitat disturbance during the netting season. While such effects are expected to be temporary and small in scale, the possibility of significant loss or alteration of habitats within the Lough Ree SPA cannot be excluded at this stage.

Accordingly, it is objectively concluded that potential effects on Wetlands [A999] may arise, and this impact pathway must therefore be carried forward for further assessment in the NIS.

The Lough Ree SAC (000440) is designated for a range of aquatic, wetland and terrestrial habitats, including Natural eutrophic lakes [3150], Alkaline fens [7230], Alluvial forests [91E0] and Bog woodland [91D0]. The proposed activity takes place within the open-water and nearshore environment of Lough Ree but does not involve habitat removal, dredging, shoreline modification or changes to hydrological conditions. While temporary disturbance to aquatic habitats may occur in the immediate vicinity of draw areas during active netting, such effects are localised, short-term and reversible in nature, and do not result in habitat loss or alteration of the qualifying habitats of the SAC.

The potential for effects arising from repeated annual use of the established draw areas during the 2027–2031 period has also been considered. The activity does not involve permanent structures, vegetation clearance, dredging, excavation, land-take or permanent modification of the lake shoreline or bed. Individual netting events are temporary and the activity does not result in a progressive physical footprint between fishing seasons. Accordingly, repeated annual operation is not expected to result in permanent or cumulative habitat loss.

Nevertheless, given the direct spatial overlap of the commercial netting activity with Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC, and the repeated seasonal nature of the activity over the five-year assessment period, the potential for temporary disturbance to wetland and nearshore habitats cannot be excluded at the screening stage. This pathway is therefore retained for further consideration within the NIS.

In contrast, the River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) and the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096) are designated primarily for floodplain grasslands, wet meadows and associated terrestrial habitats located downstream of Lough Ree. While these sites form part of the wider Shannon system, the proposed activity is confined to Lough Ree and comprises short-duration draft-netting undertaken from small boats with associated net handling at discrete shoreline draw points. The activity does not involve habitat removal, physical works or alteration of habitats within downstream callows areas, nor does it give rise to habitat loss or alteration within floodplain grasslands or wetland habitats associated with these European sites.

Accordingly, no plausible impact pathway exists by which the proposed activity could result in habitat loss or alteration affecting the conservation objectives of the River Shannon Callows SAC or the Middle Shannon Callows SPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. These sites are therefore screened out from further assessment in the NIS with respect to habitat loss and alteration.

3.8.4 Habitat or Species Fragmentation

Habitat fragmentation is defined as the "reduction and isolation of patches of natural environment" (Franklin et al., 2002; Morrison et al., 2012), resulting in the spatial separation of habitat areas that were previously continuous. Such fragmentation can significantly affect species by increasing population isolation, reducing connectivity, and diminishing long-term resilience.

In relation to the Lough Ree SPA and SAC, there is no credible pathway by which commercial netting could result in habitat or species fragmentation. The activity is temporary, seasonal, and small-scale, and does not involve any physical alteration of habitats, introduction of barriers, or division of ecological units. Netting operations are mobile and confined to open water, lake and shore, with no potential to alter the extent, structure, or connectivity of lake and shore habitats that underpin the qualifying interests of these sites. Although the activity may recur annually during the 2027–2031 licensing period, repeated seasonal use of the draw areas does not introduce permanent physical barriers, result in the severance of habitats or progressively reduce ecological connectivity. The five-year duration of the proposed licensing period therefore does not alter the absence of a credible habitat or species fragmentation pathway.

Similarly, no habitat or species fragmentation pathway arises in respect of the River Shannon Callows SAC (000216) or the Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096). These sites are designated for floodplain grasslands, wet meadows and associated terrestrial habitats located downstream of Lough Ree. The proposed activity does not extend into these downstream callows habitats and does not involve works within river channels, floodplains or wet grassland systems. The temporary and localised nature of boat movements and shoreline activity on Lough Ree cannot result in the physical separation, isolation or loss of connectivity of habitats within the River Shannon Callows SAC or the Middle Shannon Callows SPA.

EPA catchment assessments identify nutrient enrichment and wastewater discharges as the dominant pressures on the Shannon system, with no evidence that small-scale netting activities contribute to habitat modification. Furthermore, previous Appropriate Assessment screenings of draft netting (DAFM/IFI, 2021) have not identified fragmentation as a relevant impact pathway.

On this basis, it is objectively concluded that the proposed commercial draft-netting activity will not result in habitat or species fragmentation affecting the conservation objectives of the Lough Ree SPA, Lough Ree SAC, River Shannon Callows SAC or Middle Shannon Callows SPA, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This potential impact pathway is therefore screened out and does not require further consideration at NIS stage.

3.8.5 Cumulative/In-combination Effects

As set out in the preceding sections, there is potential for the commercial netting to cause temporary habitat alteration, disturbance/displacement of species, for which two European sites are designated, namely the Lough Ree SPA and the Lough Ree SAC. The potential for the proposed commercial netting activity to result in significant effects in combination with other plans or projects has been considered having regard to the plans, projects and ongoing activities identified in Section 3.5. The assessment considers the proposed activity over the full 2027–2031 licensing period and therefore takes account of the potential for commercial netting to operate concurrently or sequentially with other relevant plans, projects and activities affecting Lough Ree during that period. The pathways considered include potential cumulative disturbance to SCI species, pressures on wetland and aquatic habitats and effects on water quality.

However as identified in Section 3.8 above, no plausible pathway exists to connect either the Middle Shannon Callows SPA nor the River Shannon Callows SAC with the European sites located outside the zone of impact (listed in Table 3-9, above) and, therefore, the potential for cumulative impacts with other European sites is

negligible. Given the repeated seasonal nature of the proposed activity over the 2027–2031 period and the presence of other recreational, tourism and development-related activities within and around Lough Ree SPA and the Lough Ree SAC, the potential for the disturbance associated with the commercial netting activity to act in combination with other sources of human activity cannot be ruled out at this stage on a precautionary basis. Further assessment is required to determine whether significant cumulative/in-combination impacts will ensue from the commercial netting.

3.9 Conclusion of Screening Stage

A Screening for Appropriate Assessment was undertaken for the proposed continued licensing and operation of commercial draft-net fishing for trout on Lough Ree during the 2027–2031 licensing period. The assessment was undertaken on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season and considered whether the proposed activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have significant effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives. A total of 28 European sites were identified within the potential ZoI of the proposed activity and were considered as part of the screening assessment.

Based on objective scientific information, and without reliance on mitigation measures, it is concluded that the proposed commercial netting activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is not likely to have significant effects on the following European sites:

- River Shannon Callows SAC (000216)
- Clooneen Bog SAC (002348)
- Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818)
- Brown Bog SAC (002346)
- Corbo Bog SAC (002349)
- Mount Jessop Bog SAC (002202)
- Fortwilliam Turlough SAC (000448)
- Ballinturly Turlough SAC (000588)
- Lisduff Turlough SAC (000609)
- Four Roads Turlough SAC (001637)
- Lough Funshinagh SAC (000611)
- Lough Croan Turlough SAC (000610)
- Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC (002339)
- Killeglan Grassland SAC (002214)
- Castlesampson Esker SAC (001625)
- Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC (001776)
- Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC (000576)
- Crosswood Bog SAC (002337)
- Carn Park Bog SAC (002336)

- Ballymore Fen SAC (002313)
- Middle Shannon Callows SPA (004096).
- Four Roads Turlough SPA (004140)
- River Suck Callows SPA (004097)
- Mongan Bog SPA (004017)
- Lough Croan Turlough SPA (004139)
- Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA (004101)

However, on the basis of objective scientific information and applying the precautionary principle, likely significant effects cannot be excluded at the screening stage for the following European sites:

- Lough Ree SAC (000440)
- Lough Ree SPA (004064)

Accordingly, these sites are brought forward for Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

4. Stage 2 - Natura Impact Statement

4.1 Introduction

The Stage 1: screening for Appropriate Assessment carried out in Section 3, above, determined that a full Appropriate Assessment of the netting is required, as it could not be excluded based on objective information that the netting, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant impact on European sites, in view of the sites' conservation objectives. The conservation objectives of European sites are site specific and based on the ecological requirements of the species and habitats present. They define the desired conservation condition of certain species and habitat types for the site. Conservation objectives are defined using attributes and targets that are based on parameters as set out in the Habitats Directive for defining favourable status, namely area, range, structure and function. The conservation objectives may be either to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of a habitat/species. For the purposes of this NIS, the project comprises the proposed licensing of commercial draft-net fishing for trout on Lough Ree for the period 2027 to 2031 and has been assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season during that period. The assessment considers the nature, scale and seasonal timing of the activity, together with the potential for relevant ecological effects to recur across successive annual fishing seasons during the five-year assessment period.

Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC stipulates that certain projects and plans must be subjected to an "appropriate assessment" of their effects on the integrity of European site(s). Article 6(3) provides in full:

"*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*."

It has been concluded in Section 3.9, in Stage 1 of the Screening for Appropriate Assessment report, that commercial netting at the draw areas within Lough Ree in Counties Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath is likely to have a significant effect, or the potential for significant effects cannot be ruled out (at the screening stage), in the absence of mitigation on the following two European sites:

- Lough Ree SAC (000440); and
- Lough Ree SPA (004064).

An Appropriate Assessment is required; hence, this Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared to detail the scientific examination of evidence and data and to identify and classify any implications for European sites likely to have a significant effect in view of the conservation objectives of those sites. The aim of the assessment is to provide a sufficient level of information to the IFI on which to base their appropriate assessment of the project. Additionally, mitigation measures to avoid or reduce ecological effects were considered. The project is fully described in Section 3.2, above, and includes details on all elements of the commercial trout netting, particularly in relation to the aspects that could interact with the surrounding environment.

4.2 Description of the European Sites

4.2.1 Lough Ree SAC (000440) and Lough Ree SPA (004064)

Lough Ree SAC extends across parts of Counties Longford, Roscommon, and Westmeath. The SAC encompasses a large freshwater lake on the River Shannon and a network of islands, bays, and shoreline habitats. It supports a wide variety of Annex I habitats, including natural eutrophic lakes, orchid-rich calcareous grassland, active raised bog, degraded raised bog, alkaline fens, limestone pavement, bog woodland and alluvial forests. The site is of particular importance for Annex II species such as the otter. The designation ensures protection of these habitats and species under the EU Habitats Directive, contributing to the ecological integrity of the wider Shannon catchment.

Lough Ree SPA is a large wetland site that covers the open waters, islands, and shorelines of Lough Ree. It is recognised as one of the most important midland sites in the country for waterbirds, and supports internationally significant populations of species such as great crested grebe, tufted duck, and common scoter, as well as nationally important numbers of goldeneye, little grebe, mallard, shoveler, teal, lapwing, and common tern. The site also provides important staging areas for migratory birds along the Shannon system. Designated under the EU Birds Directive, the SPA plays a key role in maintaining bird populations of conservation concern and safeguarding one of Ireland's most valuable wetland ecosystems.

4.3 Selection of Qualifying Features for Impact Assessment

The Stage 1 Screening for Appropriate Assessment identified Lough Ree SAC (000440) and Lough Ree SPA (004064) for further assessment at Stage 2. The QIs of Lough Ree SAC and SCIs of Lough Ree SPA have therefore been reviewed to identify those features for which a credible source-pathway-receptor relationship exists with the proposed commercial netting activity. The selection has been undertaken having regard to the current QIs and SCIs of the European sites, their current site-specific Conservation Objectives, the ecological information provided through consultation with NPWS, the results of the 2025 MWP field surveys and the updated desktop evidence base. The evaluation also takes account of the revised project scope comprising commercial draft-net fishing during the 2027–2031 licensing period, assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 licences in any annual fishing season.

For each QI and SCI, consideration has been given to its ecological requirements and distribution, the spatial and temporal relationship between the feature and the proposed activity, the potential impact pathways identified in Section 3.7 and the potential for relevant interactions to recur during successive fishing seasons throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period. The results of this evaluation are presented in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1 Selection of qualifying interests of the Lough Ree SAC (000440) and Lough Ree SPA (004064) for Stage 2 impact assessment

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
[3150] Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition* - type vegetation	Inadequate	No	This habitat is associated with base-rich lakes, with circumneutral or higher pH, in low-lying, large, naturally more productive catchments. It is characterised by a high abundance and diversity of pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.) and mesotrophic values for total phosphorus and chlorophyll. Within the Lough Ree SAC, this habitat is considered to occur in the main body of Lough Ree, as well as in the closely-connected Killinure and Coosan Loughs and Ballaghkeeran Bay, along with other Shannon lakes. The proposed commercial draft netting activity is temporary, highly localised and short in duration, and is undertaken from established shoreline draw points. The activity does not involve the removal of aquatic vegetation. Given the spatial separation between draw areas and the mapped extent of this habitat, there is no direct or indirect impact pathway by which the activity could affect the structure, function or conservation condition of Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation. Accordingly, the project will not have the potential to result in significant effects on this qualifying habitat and will not affect the conservation objectives for habitat type [3150]. Further assessment in the NIS is not required.
[6210] Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-*	Bad	No	This habitat occurs in close association with other Annex I habitats, including grassland habitats, outcropping rock, fen, swamp, heath, and scrub. It is of high conservation value due to its plant diversity, particularly at sites that support important orchid populations.

[57] The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland 2025

[58] Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2020-2026

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
Brometalia) (*important orchid sites)			Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (6210). Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[7110] Active raised bogs	Bad	No	Active raised bogs are peat-forming habitats that develop in areas of high rainfall and low nutrient input, where waterlogged conditions prevent the complete decomposition of plant material. They are characterised by a surface layer of living sphagnum mosses, with typical vegetation including *Sphagnum cuspidatum*, S. *magellanicum*, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, and *Andromeda polifolia*. These habitats are highly sensitive to drainage, peat extraction, afforestation, and nutrient enrichment. Within the region, active raised bogs are primarily found in areas of deep peat in lowland and intermediate landscapes. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Active raised bogs. Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[7120] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	Bad	No	This habitat includes raised bogs that have been subject to human disturbance such as peat cutting, drainage, or grazing, but where sufficient peat and hydrological integrity remain to allow natural regeneration. Vegetation is often patchy, with surviving Sphagnum species, *Eriophorum* spp., and other typical bog plants. These habitats are sensitive to further drainage, peat extraction, afforestation, and nutrient enrichment. They are of high conservation value because of their potential to recover into active raised bogs under appropriate management. Degraded raised bogs occurs throughout the main lobes of the bogs. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration (7120). Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[7230] Alkaline fens	Bad	No	Alkaline fens are nutrient-rich, groundwater-fed wetlands occurring on calcareous substrates. They are characterised by a high diversity of sedges, rushes, and fen mosses, often including species such as *Cladium mariscus*, *Carex elata*, and *Caricion davallianae* communities. These habitats are sensitive to changes in hydrology, nutrient enrichment, and peat extraction. They are of high conservation value due to their botanical diversity and the specialised species they support. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Alkaline fens. Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[8240] Limestone pavements	Inadequate	No	Limestone pavements often occur in close association with other habitats including grasslands and heath. Limestone pavements are rocky habitats characterised by exposed, flat or gently sloping limestone surfaces with distinctive clints (blocks) and grikes (fissures). They support specialised plant communities adapted to shallow soils, including ferns, mosses, and rare vascular plants such as *Asplenium septentrionale* and *Cymbalaria muralis*. These habitats are sensitive to quarrying, overgrazing, and invasive species. They are of high conservation value due to their rarity and the unique assemblages of flora they support. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Limestone pavements. Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
[91D0] Bog woodland	Bad	No	Bog woodland is typically species-poor but with a characteristic and distinctive flora. Bog woodlands are wetland habitats occurring on peatlands, often dominated by *Betula pubescens* (downy birch) and *Alnus glutinosa* (alder), with an understorey of mosses, sedges, and other bog-adapted plants. These woodlands develop on waterlogged, nutrient-poor soils and are sensitive to drainage, peat extraction, and changes in hydrology. They are of high conservation value because they provide unique habitat for specialised flora and fauna and contribute to the ecological integrity of peatland landscapes. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Bog woodland. Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[91E0] Alluvial forests with Alnus glutinosa and Fraxinus excelsior (*Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion albae*)	Bad	No	Alluvial forests are riparian woodlands occurring on nutrient-rich, periodically flooded soils along rivers and streams. They are typically dominated by *Alnus glutinosa* (alder) and *Fraxinus excelsior* (ash), with a diverse understorey of wetland herbs, shrubs, and mosses. These habitats are sensitive to hydrological alterations, river engineering, and land-use change. They are of high conservation value due to their rarity, their role in stabilising riverbanks, and the specialised flora and fauna they support. Given that the netting predominantly takes place on the lake shore there is no possible connection with this habitat, and the absence of any direct impact pathway, it is considered that the project does not have potential for significant effects on Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior*. Accordingly, the project will not affect the conservation objectives for this habitat, and it is not considered further in the NIS.
[1355] Otter (*Lutra lutra*)	Favourable	**Yes**	Otter has a widespread distribution throughout Ireland and can be found in a wide variety of aquatic habitats such as lakes, rivers, streams, estuaries, marshland, canals and along the coast. They are mainly solitary animals and are highly territorial, preying on a wide variety of vertebrate and invertebrate species, although their diet

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			primarily comprises fish. The amount of time spent within different parts of an individual's home range is related to prey abundance. No evidence of otter was recorded during the ecological field surveys, however, there are documented records of otter according to the NBDC are concentrated along the northern and western shoreline with very few records along the southern portion of Lough Ree. The commercial netting activity creates the potential, albeit extremely limited, for otter to be indirectly affected through a reduction in prey resource and/or direct disturbance. It is considered on Precautionary Principle that there is potential for effects to the conservation objectives for otter so the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A004] Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)	Amber	**Yes**	Little Grebe is a diving waterbird, diving to depths of approximately 1m, occasionally 2m (Llimona *et al*., 2020), and feed predominantly on animal material, including a range of invertebrates, particularly insect larvae and molluscs, and small fish (Crowe *et al*., 2009). Key foraging habitat reflects that of prey species and includes sheltered waters such as ponds, edges of lakes and slow flowing rivers and canals, particularly where the water is richly vegetated with dense plant material, as well as estuaries, lagoons and sheltered coasts. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Little Grebe population. Since Little Grebe was recorded on five occasions within and around Lough Ree, there is also potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, Little Grebe is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal, and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A038] Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)	Amber	**Yes**	Whooper swan is a winter migrant to Ireland, with an internationally important population supported at Lough Ree. Roosting occurs on large, undisturbed open waterbodies, while foraging typically takes place on

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			surrounding wetlands and farmland. This species feeds on a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial vegetation. Key forage materials include grasses (significant component), seeds (including spilled grain), roots, tubers (such as potatoes), and shoots (including those from winter wheat and other cereals). Foraging habitats include grasslands (wet, semi-improved and improved), arable stubble, winter cereals, as well as rivers, lakes, turloughs and other wetlands. In general, wintering whooper swans forage within 5 km of roost sites, although this distance may vary depending on site conditions and landscape context (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2016). The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Whooper Swan population. It should be noted that Lough Ree and its associated wetlands and grasslands provide extensive, high-quality habitat for this species during the winter months. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are ecologically linked to the SPA. Based on Precautionary Principle there is also potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during the commercial netting. Based on this, Whooper Swan is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A052] Teal (*Anas crecca*)	Amber	**Yes**	Teal utilise a wide range of foraging habitats and have a broad diet. Key food sources are: small seeds of sedges, grasses and aquatic vegetation; aquatic invertebrates, including larvae, such as molluscs and crustaceans; as well as algae (particularly *Enteromorpha* spp.) (Johnson *et al*., 2020). Key habitats include shallow water, between depths of 4cm (dabbling) - 24cm (upending), and can be widespread on wetlands with good cover, such as reedbeds. The species uses a wide variety of shallow areas within wetland habitats, both coastal and inland, including estuaries, lagoons, mudflats, marshes, floodplains, lakes, ponds, turloughs and agricultural areas. They feed by day where they are safe from disturbance.

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Teal population. Since Teal was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, Teal is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A053] Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)		**Yes**	Mallard is a widespread and common dabbling duck species in Ireland, breeding and wintering on a wide variety of aquatic habitats, including lakes, rivers, marshes, ponds, and coastal wetlands. Foraging habitats include wetlands such as marshes, flooded areas, lakes, estuaries and lagoons, as well as grasslands. In winter, mallard are primarily herbivorous, dabbling for roots, leaves, stems, and seeds of aquatic plants. They will also consume aquatic invertebrates including insects, crustaceans, and molluscs, and, where adjacent to wetlands, they occasionally graze on grasslands or utilise cereal grain. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Mallard population. Since Mallard was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, mallard is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A061] Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)	Red	**Yes**	Tufted duck were regularly seen during the MWP shore count survey on Lough Ree. Tufted duck is a widespread diving duck species that occurs on freshwater lakes, rivers, and reservoirs, typically favouring open water with good food availability such as aquatic invertebrates and plants. They are largely migratory in Ireland,

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			with populations peaking in winter. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's tufted duck population. Since tufted duck was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, tufted duck is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal, and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A065] Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)	Red	**Yes**	Common Scoter nest on land among low-lying vegetation such as heather, shrubs or tall herbaceous plants. In Lough Ree, evidence to date suggests that the species nests on wooded islands within the lake that have areas of suitable nesting cover (Hunt *et al*., 2013; Heffernan & Hunt, 2022). Results from a 2020 survey suggest that the distribution of Common Scoter on Lough Ree may have contracted relative to previous surveys, with the population largely centred around the Black Islands in 2020 (Heffernan & Hunt, 2022). Common Scoter is a breeding SCI of Lough Ree SPA and the commercial netting season overlaps with its breeding period. NPWS information indicates that breeding activity is primarily concentrated around the Black Islands, while the distribution and use of Lough Ree by breeding birds may vary between years. Given the spatial overlap of the activity with the SPA, its recurrence during successive fishing seasons from 2027 to 2031 and the maximum 12-licence scenario, potential disturbance or displacement effects cannot be excluded. Common Scoter will be considered further in the NIS.
[A067] Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)	Red	**Yes**	The wintering population of goldeneye within the SPA is considered of national importance. The species generally spends little time on land and prefers open water where visibility is good and there is no emergent, floating or dense submerged vegetation (Eadie *et al*., 2020). This was evident during the MWP survey, where

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			goldeneye was recorded only in June 2025 with a peak count of two, where the open waters of the lake were more visible to the surveyor. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Goldeneye population. Since Goldeneye was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, the species is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence and will be considered further in the NIS.
[A125] Coot (*Fulica atra*)		**Yes**	This species is omnivorous; plants dominate the diet but it will also take invertebrate and vertebrate prey. It forages primarily in waterbodies, rarely foraging far from them. The species feeds at the surface and sub-surface of waterbodies by upending and diving. It prefers shallow, open, slow moving waterbodies with marginal, floating, emergent or bottom vegetation. Foraging habitats utilised by Coot include rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, lagoons, estuaries, drainage channels and flooded lands. In winter, individual Coot can forage alone or as part of large aggregations. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Coot population. Since Coot was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. On this basis, Coot is considered to fall within the zone of potential influence of the project and will therefore be assessed further in the NIS.

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
[A140] Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)	Red	**Yes**	This species forages exclusively at ground level and relies primarily on surface and sub-surface dwelling invertebrate prey, consuming a wide variety of prey items, including pupae and larvae. The species is reliant on open habitats, including a wide range of wetland habitats such as the edges of lakes, turloughs, river floodplains, lagoons, estuaries, intertidal flats and other coastal wetlands, as well as grasslands (wet grassland, semi-improved and improved grasslands), stubble fields and ploughed farmlands. While Golden Plover primarily forage diurnally, the species is also known to feed nocturnally on clear, moonlit nights. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Golden Plover population. Since Golden Plover was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, golden plover is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A142] Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)	Red	**Yes**	This species forages exclusively at ground level and relies primarily on surface and sub-surface dwelling invertebrate prey, consuming a wide variety of prey items, including pupae and larva. The species locates prey both visually and aurally. The species is reliant on open habitats, including a wide range of wetland habitats such as the edges of lakes, turloughs, river floodplains, lagoons, estuaries, intertidal flats and other coastal wetlands, as well as grasslands (wet grassland, semi-improved and improved grasslands) and ploughed farmlands. While Lapwing feed primarily diurnally, the species is also known to feed nocturnally on clear and moonlit nights. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Lapwing population.

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			Since Lapwing was recorded within and around Lough Ree, there is a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. On this basis, lapwing is considered to fall within the zone of potential influence of the project and will therefore be assessed further in the NIS.
[A193] Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)	Amber	**Yes**	Common tern breeding colonies typically occur in open areas of islands or beaches less than five metres above the high-water mark but more than 100 metres from the water's edge on loose substrate with intermittent vegetation present to provide some cover for the ground-nesting birds and their chicks (Arnold *et al*., 2020). The SPA is designated for a nationally important breeding tern colony that has almost exclusively been located on Black Island (NPWS, 2025), in the Co. Longford section. Common Tern is a breeding SCI of Lough Ree SPA and the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding period. NPWS information indicates that breeding colonies occur within Lough Ree and may occur within or adjacent to areas associated with established draw locations. Given the potential for colony distribution to vary between years and the recurrence of commercial netting during the 2027–2031 period, potential disturbance effects cannot be excluded. Common Tern will be considered further in the NIS.
[A855] Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)	Red	**Yes**	This dabbling duck feeds primarily on aquatic vegetation, at surface level in waterbodies or at ground level in wetland habitats. Key forage materials include leaves, stems, stolons, roots, rhizomes, and seeds (including cereals). Key wintering habitats are marshes, lagoons, estuaries, coastal bays, lakes, rivers and river floodplains, turloughs and other wetland habitats, as well as pastures. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Wigeon population. Since Wiegon was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for

Qualifying features	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species-Overall Status[57] / Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status[58]	Potential for significant impacts	Rationale
			disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. Based on this, Wigeon is deemed to be within the zone of potential influence of the proposal and the species will be considered further in the NIS.
[A857] Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)	Red	**Yes**	Foraging habitats include a range of wetlands, such as marshes, rivers, flood-waters, lakes, reservoirs, lagoons and estuaries, as well as grasslands. Shoveler are omnivorous and primarily forage at the surface (dabbling or upending) but also dive. The species demonstrates a highly specialised filter-feeding behaviour which allows it to consume a wide variety of planktonic prey items, including crustaceans, molluscs, insects, larvae and various plant materials. The draw areas are located within the SPA and are, therefore, ecologically linked to the SPA. The proposed netting activities, therefore, have the potential to affect the SPA's wetlands habitat and lake shore which, subsequently, may affect the habitat, distribution and feeding opportunities of the SPA's Shoveler population. Since Shoveler was not recorded within and around Lough Ree, there still remains a potential for disturbance/displacement impacts to the species due to fugitive noise emissions from boats and/or increased human activity during commercial netting. On this basis, shoveler is considered to fall within the zone of potential influence of the project and will therefore be assessed further in the NIS.
[A999] Wetland		**Yes**	Lough Ree and its associated 'Wetland' habitats are located entirely within the SPA. The proposed commercial netting activity does overlap with these habitats. Consequently, 'Wetlands' is considered to fall within the zone of potential influence of the project and will therefore be assessed further in the NIS.

It has been determined (see Table 4-1, above) that commercial netting within the draw areas has the potential to result in significant effects to the conservation objectives of the following QIs of Lough Ree SAC and SCIs of Lough Ree SPA:

- Otter (*Lutra lutra*) [1355].
- Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]
- Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038]
- Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]
- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [A053]
- Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061]
- Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) [A065]
- Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) [A067]
- Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125]
- Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]
- Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]
- Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]
- Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) [A855]
- Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) [A857]
- Wetland [A999]

The assessment in the following sections considers these features against their current site-specific conservation objectives and evaluates the implications of the proposed commercial netting activity throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period, including the maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season.

4.4 Assessment of Significance of Potential Impacts

There follows an evaluation of potentially significant effects which may arise because of commercial netting on the qualifying features that have been selected for impact assessment in Sections 4.3, above, together with the potential effects identified in Section 3.7, above. Following this, a determination is made as to whether the proposal is likely to have adverse effects on the integrity of the European sites selected for assessment. The assessment has been undertaken on the basis of the proposed 2027–2031 licensing period and a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any fishing season. In addition to considering the nature, intensity, spatial extent and duration of individual netting events, the assessment considers the potential for effects to recur during successive annual fishing seasons throughout the five-year assessment period. Consideration is therefore given to the frequency and seasonal recurrence of the activity, together with potential interannual variation in the distribution and use of Lough Ree by relevant QI and SCI species.

The likelihood of adverse effects to a European site from the draw areas has been determined based on the following indicators:

- Disturbance/displacement of species
- Habitat Loss and Alteration

The likelihood of significant cumulative/in-combination effects is assessed in Section 4.7, below.

4.4.1 Disturbance/Displacement of Species

4.4.1.1 Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC

The Lough Ree SPA is designated for the protection of multiple bird species, while the Lough Ree SAC is designated for the semi-aquatic species, otter. **Table 4-1** identifies the QI/SCI species selected for impact assessment.

Although individual netting operations are short in duration and spatially restricted to established draw areas, the proposed activity may recur during each annual fishing season between 2027 and 2031. The potential for disturbance has therefore been assessed not only in relation to individual netting events but also in relation to repeated seasonal exposure over the five-year period.

For wintering SCI species, the principal period of commercial netting has limited temporal overlap with peak winter occurrence, although some seasonal overlap may occur. For breeding species, particularly Common Scoter and Common Tern, the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding period and the locations used for nesting, brood-rearing and associated foraging may vary between years. The assessment therefore considers the potential for disturbance to occur at different locations during successive seasons rather than assuming that areas identified as sensitive in one year will remain unchanged throughout the 2027–2031 period.

Disturbance to these species may arise from the presence of boats and human activity associated with commercial netting, which could temporarily deter species from normal feeding, roosting, commuting, or breeding behaviours. The netting season is temporary, restricted to specific draw areas, and conducted under licence between 15 February and 31 July, with further restrictions on early-season weekends. Nets are actively managed from the shore during daylight hours and are never left unattended or set overnight, minimising spatial and temporal disturbance.

For most wintering SCI bird species as classified in the Lough Ree SPA Conservation Objectives, including Little Grebe, Whooper Swan, Teal, Mallard, Goldeneye, Coot, Golden Plover, Wigeon, and Shoveler, commercial netting does not overlap with peak periods of presence. These species occur within a lake environment that is also subject to established recreational boating, angling and other human activity. The potential contribution of commercial netting to disturbance is considered having regard to its spatial extent, frequency, timing and duration.

Breeding populations of Common Scoter and Common Tern, as identified in the Lough Ree SPA Conservation Objectives, Tufted Duck as listed on the Lough Ree SPA Natura 2000 Standard Data Form[59], may be more sensitive to disturbance in specific draw areas where suitable nesting or brood-rearing habitat occurs. Other bird species of conservation interest, including Black-headed Gull, were also recorded during surveys, while Little Grebe were observed in the vicinity of some draw locations.

Based on the distribution and sensitivity of SCI/QI species, these species have been assigned sensitivity classifications, as discussed in **Table 4-2**. On the basis of the available ecological information, the nature of individual commercial netting operations limits the spatial extent and duration of potential disturbance. For the majority of wintering SCI species, the degree of temporal overlap with the commercial netting season is also limited. However, the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding period of disturbance-sensitive species, particularly Common Scoter and Common Tern, and the location of breeding activity may vary between successive years.

[59] Lough Ree SPA (IE0004064 - SPA) Accessed: 30th August 2026

Accordingly, when the proposed activity is considered without mitigation and across the full 2027–2031 period, the potential for repeated seasonal disturbance to breeding SCI species cannot be excluded with sufficient certainty. In particular, adverse effects associated with disturbance of Common Scoter and Common Tern, including potential effects on breeding activity and productivity where netting occurs in proximity to sensitive breeding locations, cannot be excluded in the absence of mitigation. Mitigation is therefore required to ensure that disturbance associated with the commercial netting activity does not adversely affect the achievement of the conservation objectives for these species. The mitigation measures relied upon are set out in Section 4.8. Following application of those measures, the residual effects of the proposed activity are assessed in Section 5.

Table 4-2. QI species for Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC selected for impact assessment.

Species	Sensitivity	Justification
Otter (*Lutra lutra*)	Low-Medium	Semi-aquatic; uses shoreline and riparian zones. Disturbance possible near haul-in points, but activity is temporary and localized.
Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)	Low	Wintering/foraging SCI. Commercial netting overlaps only partly with the principal wintering period and individual netting operations are temporary and spatially restricted.
Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*)	Low	Wintering species; netting occurs outside peak presence.
Teal (*Anas crecca*)	Low	Wintering species; temporal overlap minimal.
Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)	Low	Wintering species; tolerant of moderate human disturbance.
Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)	Low-Medium	Wintering species (Conservation objectives); Breeding according to the Standardized form, preference for large open lakes in lowland areas; however netting occurs outside peak presence of the wintering population.
Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra*)	Low-Medium	Breeding populations may overlap with draw areas; sensitive to disturbance during nesting. Breeding SCI with temporal overlap between the commercial netting season and the breeding period. Breeding activity is spatially concentrated but may vary between years. Potential disturbance associated with boat movements and shoreline activity in proximity to breeding locations cannot be excluded over the 2027–2031 period in the absence of mitigation.
Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)	Low	Wintering species; low likelihood of disturbance during netting.
Coot (*Fulica atra*)	Low	Mostly wintering/foraging; activity largely outside sensitive periods.
Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)	Low	Wintering species; commercial netting occurs outside peak winter period. Low likelihood of disturbance affecting conservation objectives.
Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)	Low	Wintering SCI. The commercial netting season has limited overlap with the principal wintering period and disturbance associated with individual netting operations is temporary and localised.
Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)	Low-Medium	Breeding colonies are co-located in specific draws. Breeding SCI with temporal overlap between the commercial netting season and the breeding period. Colony locations and use of connected foraging areas may vary between years. Potential disturbance at or in proximity to breeding locations cannot be

Species	Sensitivity	Justification
		excluded in the absence of mitigation.
Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*)	Low	Wintering species; activity outside peak period.
Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)	Low	Wintering species; low sensitivity to short-term disturbance.

4.4.2 Habitat Loss and Alteration

The Lough Ree SPA is designated for the protection of the Wetlands [A999] habitat complex, which provides essential resources for regularly occurring migratory waterbirds. The Lough Ree SAC includes Natural eutrophic lakes with *Magnopotamion* or *Hydrocharition*-type vegetation and other aquatic habitats (Table 4-3). These habitats are critical for supporting the range of QI/SCI species associated with the sites.

Commercial netting activity has the potential to result in temporary and localised interaction with nearshore and shoreline habitats through boat presence and net deployment, particularly in littoral zones. However, netting is restricted to specific draw areas, is conducted only during daylight hours, and nets are actively managed from the shoreline. No physical alteration of habitats (e.g., dredging, vegetation removal) occurs, and the activity is of short duration. The potential for these interactions to recur during successive annual fishing seasons from 2027 to 2031 has also been considered. Although individual draw areas may be used repeatedly during the five-year assessment period, the nature of the activity does not result in a permanent physical footprint between fishing events or seasons. There is therefore no mechanism by which successive annual operation would progressively reduce the area or permanently alter the extent of Wetlands [A999] habitat or qualifying habitats of Lough Ree SAC.

Similarly, commercial netting does not create a physical barrier, sever habitat connectivity or result in the permanent isolation of areas of wetland or aquatic habitat. Any interaction with littoral or shoreline habitat associated with deployment and retrieval of the nets is temporary and localised to the draw area in use.

On this basis, and without reliance on mitigation measures, the proposed commercial netting activity will not result in permanent habitat loss, a reduction in habitat extent, fragmentation, or deterioration in the quality or functioning of Wetlands [A999] or the qualifying habitats of Lough Ree SAC, including through repeated seasonal operation during the 2027–2031 period. Temporary displacement of birds from otherwise suitable wetland habitat as a consequence of human or boat activity is considered as a disturbance pathway rather than physical habitat loss or alteration and is assessed separately in Section 4.4.1.

Table 4-3. QI habitats for Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC selected for impact assessment.

Species	Sensitivity	Justification
Wetlands	Medium	Wetland fringes provide foraging/roosting habitat for birds. Temporary disturbance from boat presence or shoreline activity may cause short-term displacement of birds using these habitats, but no permanent habitat loss is expected. Spatial restriction to draw areas limits the overall impact.

4.5 Assessment of Effects on the Conservation Objectives of Lough Ree SPA [004064]

An evaluation was undertaken to identify which of the SCI of the Lough Ree SPA (see Section 4.2.1 above) potentially lie within the zone of influence of the draw areas and require further assessment in the NIS. This was done through a scientific examination of ecological evidence and data listed in Section 3.7, above, or referenced, as well as the results of the ecological field survey (Section 3.4.3 above). In this case, all thirteen SCIs were selected for further assessment (listed in Table 4-1, above).

Following this, the potentially significant effects that may arise because of the commercial netting were assessed in Section 4.4, above, and a determination was made as to whether the integrity of the SPA is likely to be adversely affected by the proposal. The SCI species of the SPA have been assessed against the measures designed to achieve the conservation objectives of the site and the outcome of this assessment is presented in the following sections.

4.5.1 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) [A004]

Little Grebe is a small resident diver in Ireland, breeding on lakes, slow-flowing rivers, and sheltered wetlands with dense aquatic vegetation. It feeds mainly on small fish, aquatic invertebrates, and insects, foraging in shallow vegetated margins. Within Lough Ree SPA the species occurs as a breeding bird, nesting in reedbeds and sheltered areas of the lake. The species is amber-listed in Ireland due to its localised breeding distribution and vulnerability to habitat change and disturbance.

The conservation objective for Little Grebe is to maintain the favourable conservation condition of the species within Lough Ree SPA. The specific species attributes and targets for Little Grebe in the conservation objectives focus on population size and trend, the continued availability of suitable breeding and foraging habitats, and the avoidance of significant anthropogenic disturbance during the breeding season (Table 4-4). An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-4. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Little Grebe [A004]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend / % change in individuals	Long-term winter population trend is stable or increasing.	Both nationally and at the SPA, Little Grebe population trends show an increase. Habitats at the draw areas have the potential to be considered optimal for Little Grebe nesting. NPWS surveys conducted during baseline assessments to inform the SPA's designation, estimated 52 Little Grebe using the SPA (3-year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98–1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). Recent I-WeBS surveys have recorded a 71% increase in the population, with a 4-year mean of peak counts from 2018/19–2022/23 estimating 89 individuals using the SPA. Little Grebe population in Lough Ree SPA has increased (2018–2023: ~89 individuals; NPWS/I-WeBS). Commercial netting is temporary, localized, and unlikely to affect wintering populations. Precautionary measures regarding disturbance will be applied, but no significant effect is anticipated.	No
Winter spatial distribution / hectares, time & intensity of use	Sufficient number locations, area and availability (timing & intensity) of habitat to support population target.	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas are likely to vary throughout the season. Little Grebe habitat is widely distributed throughout Lough Ree SPA. Commercial netting occurs in limited draw areas during the season, unlikely to affect overall habitat availability.	No

Disturbance at wintering site. Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the wintering population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends (see, for example, Madsen and Fox, 1995). During the MWP survey Little Grebe was one of two SCI species to be observed for the Lough Ree SPA. Boat and human activity during netting is temporary and restricted to draw areas. The netting season does not overlap with peak wintering counts, and Little Grebe present during the summer are not expected to be significantly disturbed given the temporary, localized nature of activity. Precautionary measures regarding localized disturbance will be applied.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use. Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Barriers limiting the population's access to this SPA or ecologically important sites outside the SPA will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Waterbirds can often use many different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening) and, while it is unlikely the commercial netting will present a significant barrier to connectivity given its temporary seasonal nature, it is unlikely to restrict movement of Little Grebe within the SPA.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance. Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Little Grebe are a diving waterbird, diving to depths of approximately 1m, occasionally 2m (Llimona *et al*., 2020), and feed predominantly on animal material, including a range of invertebrates, particularly insect larvae and molluscs, and small fish (Crowe *et al*., 2009). Key foraging habitat reflects that of prey species and includes sheltered waters such as ponds, edges of lakes and slow flowing rivers and canals, particularly where the water is richly vegetated with dense plant material, as well as estuaries, lagoons and sheltered coasts. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Little Grebe forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of foraging habitat for Little Grebe within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, Little Grebe was seen foraging in a peak count of five. Little Grebe forage in sheltered waters; temporary localized disturbance near draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect foraging availability.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent. Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable	When roosting overnight, the species uses a range of waterbodies, as noted for foraging habitat. Roosting is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling	No

	roosting habitat to support the population target	to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use; this would ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution The species often utilise extensive areas of freshwater for roosting. Little Grebe was recorded on five occasions during the MWP ornithological surveys and the species is considered to use the lake waters around the draw areas as roosting grounds. Roosting sites are extensive. Netting activity is temporary and localized, and unlikely to prevent use of roosting sites. Precautionary measures to minimise disturbance will be applied.	

4.5.2 Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) [A038]

Whooper Swan is a winter visitor to Ireland, occurring between October and April in both freshwater and coastal habitats, particularly lowland lakes, rivers, and estuaries. This large swan does not breed in Ireland and is amber-listed due to threats from habitat disturbance, water pollution, and collision with power lines. The wintering population of the species is the qualifying interest for this SPA (NPWS, 2025).

The conservation objective for Whooper Swan is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the SPA. The specific species Attributes and Targets for Whooper Swan defined in relation to the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA are presented in **Table 4-5**, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-5. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Whooper Swan [A038]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	A population of 126 Whooper Swan was estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22 and the 2019/20 count was derived from the 2020 International Swan Census). This represents an estimated population decline of 9% since the baseline period, in contrast to the national trend. During MWP ornithological surveys, whooper swan was not recorded. The project is not expected to cause a significant decline in the wintering population. Temporary localized disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to affect overall population trends.	No
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by Whooper Swan within the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to Whooper Swan. However,	No

intensity of use	use) of suitable habitat to support the population target	the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of Whooper Swan. During the MWP ornithological surveys, Whooper Swan were not recorded. Whooper Swan distribution is widespread across the SPA. Commercial netting occurs in limited draw areas, unlikely to significantly affect winter spatial distribution.	
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking can potentially disturb Whooper Swan and affect the species' population trend and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak in summer months and are, therefore, unlikely to significantly disturb Whooper Swan at their wintering sites. During MWP survey, Whooper Swan was not recorded. Boat and human activity during netting is temporary and localized. Wintering Whooper Swan were not recorded in the draw areas, and disturbance is therefore negligible.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of Whooper Swan from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA footprint will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect the potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Waterbirds may use different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Commercial netting is limited in scale and duration. No significant barriers to connectivity are expected.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	This species feeds on a wide range of aquatic and terrestrial vegetation. Key forage materials include: leaves, with significant consumption of grasses; seeds, including spilled grain; roots; tubers, including potatoes; shoots, including those from winter wheat and other cereals. The species favours open water with good visibility and without emergent or dense submerged vegetation (NPWS, 2025). Whooper Swan forage in open water areas. Temporary netting activity in draw areas is unlikely to affect forage availability.	No
Roost spatial distribution and	Sufficient number of locations, area and	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of Whooper Swan. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitat can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via	No

extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Whooper Swan roost locations, it will be temporary due to the nature of works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for Whooper Swan within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, Whooper Swan were not recorded. Roosting occurs over extensive waterbodies. Temporary disturbance from boats/human activity in draw areas is unlikely to affect roosting habitat or site use.	
Supporting habitat: area and quality. Hectares and quality	Sufficient area of utilisable habitat available in ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Wintering Whooper Swan can use habitats outside the SPA. Temporary commercial netting activity is unlikely to restrict access.	No

4.5.3 Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) [A855]

Wigeon is a common winter visitor to Ireland, present mainly from September to April, with large flocks occurring on lowland lakes, turloughs, estuaries, and coastal wetlands. This medium-sized dabbling duck does not breed in Ireland. The species is amber-listed due to pressures such as wetland drainage, loss of feeding habitat, water pollution, and disturbance. Wigeon feed largely on grasses, sedges, and aquatic vegetation, and are especially associated with extensive wet grasslands and shallow coastal areas. For this SPA, it is the wintering population of Wigeon that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Wigeon is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Wigeon, set in relation to achieving the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are presented in Table 4-6, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-6. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Wigeon [A855]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Wigeon in Ireland has declined by 18% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 2,070 Wigeon were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 560 Wigeon were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from IWeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter	No

		2021/22). This represents an estimated population decline of 73% since the baseline period which is significantly greater than the national trend. The project is not expected to cause a significant further decline in the wintering population. Temporary, localized disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to affect overall population trends.	
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and intensity of use	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support the population target	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by Wigeon within the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to Wigeon. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of Wigeon. During the MWP ornithological surveys, Wigeon was not recorded. Wigeon use a range of suitable habitats across the SPA. Temporary netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect winter spatial distribution, given the limited scale and seasonal timing.	No
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking can potentially disturb Wigeon and affect the species' population trend and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak in summer months and are, therefore, unlikely to significantly disturb Wigeon at their wintering sites. Temporary anthropogenic activity associated with commercial netting (boats, human presence) is confined to specific draw areas and seasonal windows. Wintering Wigeon were not recorded in these areas during surveys, so disturbance impacts are considered negligible.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of Wigeon from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA footprint will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect the potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Waterbirds may use different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Commercial netting is limited in scale and duration and does not create barriers to Wigeon accessing the SPA or surrounding habitats.	No

Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	This dabbling duck feeds primarily on aquatic vegetation, at surface level in waterbodies or at ground level in wetland habitats. Key forage materials include leaves, stems, stolons, roots, rhizomes, and seeds (including cereals). Key wintering habitats are marshes, lagoons, estuaries, coastal bays, lakes, rivers and river floodplains, turloughs and other wetland habitats, as well as pastures. Wigeon forage primarily on aquatic vegetation in lakes, marshes, and wetlands. Temporary activity at draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect the availability or accessibility of forage for the wintering population.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of Wigeon. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitat can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Wigeon roost locations, it will be temporary due to the nature of works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for Wigeon within the SPA. Roosting occurs across extensive areas of Lough Ree and fringing wetlands. Temporary commercial netting in specific draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect roosting habitat or site use.	No
Supporting habitat: area and quality/ Hectares and quality	Sufficient area of utilisable habitat available in ecologically important sites outside the SPA	The wintering population can make extensive use of suitable habitats in important areas outside the SPA for foraging and roosting. The extent, availability and quality of these supporting habitats may be of importance for the resilience of the SPA population. Suitable supporting habitats include those highlighted in the attributes for foraging and roosting habitat. Wigeon can access supporting habitats outside the SPA. Temporary, localized netting activity is unlikely to restrict access.	No

4.5.4 Teal (*Anas crecca*) [A052]

Teal is a widespread winter visitor to Ireland, present mainly between September and March, using a range of freshwater and coastal wetlands including lakes, turloughs, estuaries, lagoons, and floodplains. This small dabbling duck does not breed in Ireland and is amber-listed due to pressures such as wetland drainage, water pollution, and disturbance. The species is highly dependent on shallow wetlands with good vegetative cover, where it forages on seeds, aquatic plants and invertebrates. It is the wintering population of Teal that is the qualifying interest for this SPA (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Teal is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Teal, set in relation to the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are presented in **Table 4-7** below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.,

Table 4-7. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Teal [A052]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Teal in Ireland has increased by 19% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (IWeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 1,474 Teal were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 319 Teal were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). During the MWP ornithological surveys, teal was not seen. The project is not expected to cause a significant further decline in the wintering population. Temporary, localized disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to affect overall population trends.	No
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and intensity of use	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support population target	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by teal in the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to teal. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of teal. During the MWP ornithological surveys, teal were not seen. Teal use a range of suitable habitats across the SPA. Temporary netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect winter spatial distribution given the limited scale, location, and seasonal timing.	No
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially disturb teal and affect population trends and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly disturb teal at their wintering sites. During MWP ornithological surveys, teal were not seen. Temporary anthropogenic activity associated with commercial netting (boats, human presence) is confined to specific draw areas and seasonal windows.	No

		Wintering Teal were not recorded in these areas during surveys, so disturbance impacts are considered negligible.	
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact wintering population's access to SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of teal from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the footprint of the SPA will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Waterbirds may use different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Commercial netting is limited in scale and duration and does not create barriers to Teal accessing the SPA or surrounding habitats.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Teal feed across a variety of wetland habitats, taking both plant and animal matter. Their diet mainly includes small seeds from grasses and sedges, aquatic plants, invertebrates such as insect larvae, molluscs and crustaceans, and also algae. They favour shallow waters, typically 4–24 cm deep, where they can dabble or upend, and are commonly found in sheltered wetlands with good cover like reedbeds. The species occurs in both coastal and inland sites, including estuaries, lagoons, mudflats, marshes, floodplains, lakes, ponds, turloughs and even farmland. Where disturbance is low, they often feed during daylight hours. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to teal forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the activity and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of foraging habitat for teal within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, teal were not seen foraging. Teal feed in shallow, sheltered wetlands across the SPA. Temporary commercial netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect foraging habitat availability or quality.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of teal. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to teal forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the activity and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for teal within the SPA.	No

	During MWP ornithological surveys, teal were not seen. Teal use multiple roosting locations within the SPA. Temporary commercial netting in specific draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect roosting habitat availability or quality.

4.5.5 Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) [A053]

Mallard are a resident and winter visitor species in Ireland occurring in lowland freshwater lakes, town lakes, canals and slow-moving rivers. This species tends to breed in large open lakes in lowland areas, where nests are built in waterside vegetation. T Mallard is a dabbling duck with a broad omnivorous diet. In winter, plant material, including seeds and aquatic vegetation, forms an important component of the diet, supplemented by aquatic invertebrates. The species is amber-listed in Ireland because of declining numbers, and Lough Ree SPA is an important wintering site for Mallard . It is the wintering population of the species that is the qualifying interest for this SPA (NPWS, 2025).

The conservation objective for Mallard is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific species Attributes and Targets for Mallard defined in relation to the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA are presented in Table 4-8, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-8. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Mallard [A053]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Mallard in Ireland has declined by 19% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 1,087 Mallard were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 537 Mallard were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from IWeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). During the MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard was not seen. During MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard was not recorded. Temporary, localized disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to cause a significant decline in the wintering population.	No
Winter spatial	Sufficient number of	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering	No

distribution/ Hectares, time and intensity of use	locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support population target	population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by Mallard in the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to Mallard. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of Mallard. During the MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard were not seen. Distribution encompasses the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population. Temporary commercial netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect spatial distribution given the limited scale, location, and seasonal timing.	
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially disturb Mallard and affect population trends and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly disturb Mallard at their wintering sites. During MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard were not seen. Temporary human activity associated with commercial netting (boats, presence in draw areas) is confined to specific areas and seasonal windows. Mallard were not recorded in draw areas during surveys, so disturbance impacts are considered negligible.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact wintering population's access to SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of Mallard from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the footprint of the SPA will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Waterbirds may use different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Commercial netting is limited in scale and duration and does not create barriers to Mallard accessing the SPA or surrounding habitats.	No

Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Foraging habitats include a range of wetlands, such as marshes, flooded areas, lakes, estuaries and lagoons, as well as grasslands. In winter, Mallard are primarily herbivorous, dabbling for roots, leaves, stems and seeds of plants in surface waters. Mallard will also consume aquatic insects, crustaceans, and molluscs, and, where adjacent to wetlands, they occasionally graze on grasslands or consume cereal grain. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Mallard forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the activity and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of foraging habitat for Mallard within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard were not seen foraging. Mallard forage across a range of wetlands (marshes, lakes, flooded areas, estuaries) and adjacent grasslands. Temporary commercial netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect availability or quality of foraging habitat.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of Mallard. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Mallard forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the activity and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for Mallard within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, Mallard were not seen. Mallard use multiple roosting locations within the SPA. Temporary commercial netting is unlikely to significantly affect availability or quality of roosting habitat.	No

4.5.6 Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) [A857]

Shoveler is a winter visitor to Ireland, occurring mainly between September and March, with smaller numbers remaining to breed in summer. This medium-sized dabbling duck favours shallow wetlands, such as lakes, lagoons, turloughs, and marshes with rich aquatic vegetation and invertebrate communities. In Ireland, Shoveler is amber-listed due to its relatively small and localised population, which is vulnerable to wetland drainage, water pollution, and habitat disturbance. For this SPA, it is the wintering population of Shoveler that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Shoveler is to maintain the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Shoveler, developed to achieve the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are outlined in Table 4-9, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-9. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Shoveler [A857]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Shoveler in Ireland has declined by 11% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 54 Shoveler were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 73 Shoveler were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from IWeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). This represents an estimated population increase of 35% since the baseline period, in contrast to the national trend. During MWP ornithological surveys, Shoveler was not recorded. Temporary, localized disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to cause a significant decline in the wintering population.	No
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and intensity of use	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support the population target	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by Shoveler within the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to Shoveler. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of Shoveler. During the MWP ornithological surveys, Shoveler was not recorded. Distribution encompasses the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population. Temporary commercial netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect spatial distribution given the limited scale, location, and seasonal timing.	No

Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking can potentially disturb Shoveler and affect the species' population trend and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak in summer months and are, therefore, unlikely to significantly disturb Shoveler at their wintering sites. Temporary human activity associated with commercial netting (boats, presence in draw areas) is confined to specific areas and seasonal windows. Shoveler were not recorded in draw areas during surveys, so disturbance impacts are considered negligible.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of Shoveler from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA footprint will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect the potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Seabirds can often use many different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Commercial netting is limited in scale and duration and does not create barriers to Shoveler accessing the SPA or surrounding habitats.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Foraging habitats include a range of wetlands, such as marshes, rivers, flood-waters, lakes, reservoirs, lagoons and estuaries, as well as grasslands. Shoveler are omnivorous and primarily forage at the surface (dabbling or upending) but also dive. The species demonstrates a highly specialised filter feeding behaviour which allows it to consume a wide variety of planktonic prey items, including crustaceans, molluscs, insects, larvae and various plant materials. Shoveler forage in a variety of wetlands (marshes, lakes, rivers, floodwaters, estuaries) using surface dabbling, upending, and occasional diving. Temporary commercial netting in draw areas is unlikely to significantly affect availability or quality of foraging habitat.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of Shoveler. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitat can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Shoveler roost locations, it	No

	population target	will be temporary due to the nature of the commercial netting activity and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for Shoveler within the SPA. Roosting habitat is critical for Shoveler. Temporary disturbance from commercial netting is restricted to draw areas and unlikely to affect roosting habitat availability or quality.

4.5.7 Wetlands [A999]

A wetland is an area of land that is saturated with water either permanently or seasonally, and where the water table is near or at the surface. "Wetlands" may vary considerably in visual appearance, owing in part to the setting in which they occur and the vegetation type(s) present (Table 4-10). There are special suites of plants adapted to cope with wet conditions and, as these wet conditions vary spatially, a mosaic of habitats comprising different plant communities may occur within a single wetland (Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee, 2018)[60].

Table 4-10. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Wetlands [A999]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Wetland habitat Area/ Hectares	No significant loss to wetland habitat within the SPA, other than that occurring from natural patterns of variation	Any significant loss to the wetland habitat within the SPA would likely negatively impact the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise this wetland habitat. Such loss of wetland habitat would likely reduce the diversity and abundance of waterbird species that the wetland can support. This, in turn, could negatively impact the Conservation Objectives for waterbird species listed as Special Conservation Interests in the SPA or other regularly-occurring migratory waterbird species. Significant loss or permanent alteration of wetland habitat could negatively affect regularly-occurring migratory waterbirds by reducing the diversity and abundance of species supported. Lough Ree's wetland habitats are located entirely within the SPA. There will be no loss of wetland habitat as a result of the proposed activity. Commercial netting does not involve land-take, dredging, excavation, vegetation clearance or permanent shoreline modification. Repeated seasonal operation during the 2027–2031 period does not create a progressive physical footprint. Accordingly,	No

[60] Irish Ramsar Wetlands Committee, 2018

		no adverse effect on the wetland habitat area attribute is predicted and mitigation is not required in respect of habitat loss.	
Wetland habitat quality and functioning/ Quality and function of the wetland habitat	No significant impact on the quality or functioning of the wetland habitat within the SPA, other than that occurring from natural patterns of variation	Any significant impact on the quality, functioning and accessibility of the wetland habitat within the SPA would likely negatively impact the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise this wetland habitat. Impacts on wetland quality, functioning and accessibility would likely reduce the diversity and abundance of waterbird species that the wetland can support. This, in turn, could negatively impact the Conservation Objectives for waterbird species listed as Special Conservation Interests in the SPA or other regularly-occurring migratory waterbird species. Impacts on wetland quality, functioning, or accessibility could reduce the diversity and abundance of waterbird species supported. Commercial netting may cause localized, temporary disturbance or minor habitat alteration, but no significant effects on overall wetland quality or functioning are anticipated. The activity does not involve a mechanism capable of permanently altering the structure, quality or functioning of wetland habitat. Interaction with shoreline and nearshore areas during individual netting operations is temporary and localised and does not persist between fishing events or successive seasons. Accordingly, no adverse effect on wetland habitat quality or functioning is predicted. Disturbance of birds using wetland habitat is assessed separately as a species-disturbance pathway.	No

4.5.8 Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) [A061]

Tufted Duck is a common winter visitor to Ireland, occurring mainly between October and March, with large concentrations on lowland lakes, reservoirs, and sheltered coastal waters. This medium-sized diving duck also breeds in small numbers in Ireland, favouring eutrophic lakes with good aquatic vegetation and nearby cover. The species is amber-listed due to concerns over habitat degradation, and disturbance, which can affect both breeding and wintering populations. For the purposes of this SPA, it is the wintering population of Tufted Duck that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Tufted Duck is to maintain the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Tufted Duck, set in relation to the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are outlined in Table 4-11, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-11.Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Tufted Duck [A061]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required

Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Tufted Duck in Ireland has declined by 18% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 1,012 Tufted Duck were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 989 Tufted Duck were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). Although the local Tufted Duck population is stable (~989 individuals, 2018–2023), temporary disturbance from commercial netting could slightly increase energetic expenditure for any individuals present in draw areas. Given timing outside peak wintering, this effect is negligible.	No
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and intensity of use	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support population target	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by tufted duck in the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to tufted duck. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of tufted duck. Minor, temporary displacement from netting draw areas could reduce available habitat for foraging or roosting for a small number of individuals present. The effect is expected to be highly localized and short-term.	No
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking etc. can potentially disturb tufted duck and affect population trends and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly disturb tufted duck at their wintering sites. During MWP surveys, Tufted Duck were not recorded. Small numbers of Tufted Duck present near draw areas could experience short-term disturbance from boat noise or human presence. Timing outside peak wintering limits overall impact, and any energetic cost is minor and temporary.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and	Barriers do not significantly impact wintering population's	Barriers that limit the wintering population of tufted duck from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the footprint of the SPA will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential	No

hectares	access to SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	barriers can affect potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. There is no credible barrier to movement, but temporary presence of boats in draw areas may require brief avoidance by any individuals present. This is a negligible, short-term effect.	
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	This species is omnivorous and forages primarily in open freshwater or brackish waterbodies. Molluscs are the main food source for the species, but fish, insects, amphibians and various plant materials are also consumed. Tufted duck feed primarily by diving, but to a lesser extent will also feed at the surface of waterbodies, wade in shallows, and forage onshore. Fugitive noise or boat presence may temporarily displace individuals from specific foraging patches within draw areas. Effect is temporary, localized, and unlikely to reduce overall foraging opportunities or energy intake.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of tufted duck. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to tufted duck roost locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for tufted duck within the SPA. During MWP ornithological surveys, tufted duck was not seen roosting. Any Tufted Duck present near draw areas during the netting season could experience minor, short-term disturbance while roosting. Overall roosting availability remains extensive and unaffected.	No

4.5.9 Common Scoter (*Melanitta nigra)* [A065]

Common Scoter is a scarce and highly localised breeding species in Ireland, occurring at a small number of inland freshwater sites, of which Lough Ree SPA is one of the most important. The species nests terrestrially on vegetated islands within lakes and forages primarily in freshwater during the breeding season. The Irish breeding population has undergone a substantial decline in recent decades and is amber-listed due to its small population size, restricted distribution and vulnerability to threats such as disturbance at breeding sites, reduced productivity, and changes in habitat quality. It is the breeding population of Common Scoter that forms the

qualifying interest for Lough Ree SPA (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Common Scoter is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Common Scoter, identified to support the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are presented in **Table 4-12,** below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-12. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Common Scoter [A065]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Breeding population trend Percentage change in number of potential breeding pairs	Long term trend is stable or increasing	The national breeding population of Common Scoter in Ireland declined from 101 - 111 potential breeding pairs in 1995 (Gittings, 1995) to 50 potential breeding pairs in 2020 (Heffernan and Hunt, 2022), a decline of 50-55%. Baseline surveys in 1995 to inform SPA designation recorded an estimated 39 potential breeding pairs in Lough Ree SPA (Gittings, 1995; NPWS, 2013). Repeat surveys in 2020 estimated a total of seven potential breeding pairs in the SPA (Heffernan and Hunt, 2022). This represents a population decline of 82% between 1995 and 2020, in line with the general trend recorded by surveys in the intervening years (1996, 1999 and 2012; see Heffernan and Hunt, 2022). The available NPWS information does not identify commercial draft-net fishing as a demonstrated pressure on Common Scoter breeding performance. Nevertheless, the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding period and activity may recur annually throughout 2027–2031. Given the conservation status of the breeding population and the potential for breeding distribution to vary between years, disturbance associated with netting in proximity to breeding birds could affect breeding behaviour or reproductive success. In the absence of mitigation, an adverse effect on achievement of the population trend target cannot therefore be excluded with sufficient certainty.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Productivity rate/ Number of young fledged per potential breeding pair	Sufficient productivity to maintain the population trend as stable or increasing	Commercial netting does not result in a reduction in nesting habitat or the availability of aquatic foraging habitat. However, where netting activity occurs in proximity to breeding adults, broods or areas used during the breeding period, disturbance could interfere with breeding behaviour or foraging activity. As such interactions may recur during successive fishing seasons and breeding distribution may vary between years, an adverse effect on productivity cannot be excluded in the absence of mitigation.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Distribution of nesting habitat Spatial distribution	No significant loss of distribution in the long term, other than that occurring due to natural patterns of variation	Common Scoter nest on land among low-lying vegetation such as heather, shrubs or tall herbaceous plants. In Lough Ree, evidence to date suggests that the species nested on wooded islands within the lake that held areas of suitable nesting cover (Hunt et al., 2013; Heffernan and Hunt, 2022). Results from a 2020 survey suggest that the distribution of Common Scoter on Lough Ree may have contracted relative to previous surveys, with the population largely centred around the Black Islands in 2020 (see Heffernan and Hunt, 2022).	No

		Common Scoter nest on vegetated islands (low shrubs, heather, tall herbs). Surveys indicate contraction to Black Islands. Netting does not remove habitat and is unlikely to alter nesting distribution.	
Extent and condition of nesting habitat. Hectares of high quality nesting habitat	Sufficient area of high quality habitat to support the population target	Common Scoter nest on land among low-lying vegetation such as heather, shrubs or tall herbaceous plants. In Lough Ree, evidence to date suggests that the species nested on wooded islands within the lake that held areas of suitable nesting cover (Hunt et al., 2013; Heffernan and Hunt, 2022). Results from a 2020 survey suggest that the distribution of Common Scoter on Lough Ree may have contracted relative to previous surveys, with the population largely centred around the Black Islands in 2020 (see Heffernan and Hunt, 2022). Nesting habitat is primarily vegetated islands. No habitat loss/alteration, which could affect the extent and condition of nesting habitat, is expected from netting.	No
Disturbance at the breeding site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution of nesting and foraging habitat. Factors such as intensity, frequency, timing and duration of a (direct or indirect) disturbance source must be taken into account to determine the potential impact upon the targets for population trend and spatial distribution. Disturbance increases energetic expenditure and can reduce adult breeding fitness or chick survival. Commercial netting is temporary and spatially restricted; however, the annual fishing season overlaps with the Common Scoter breeding period. The location of breeding activity may vary between years and therefore spatial separation between active draw areas and breeding birds cannot be assumed for every season between 2027 and 2031. In the absence of mitigation, repeated disturbance where netting occurs in proximity to breeding birds could affect the achievement of the disturbance target.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Barriers to connectivity/ Number; location; shape; area (hectares)	Barriers do not significantly impact the breeding population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Commercial netting does not introduce a physical barrier to movement between nesting and foraging areas and does not reduce the availability of Common Tern prey resources. Temporary disturbance within ecologically connected areas is assessed under the disturbance attribute above. No adverse effect on connectivity is predicted.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance. Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat, and available forage biomass	During the breeding season Common Scoter forage primarily in freshwater bodies, such as lakes. During the breeding season, the species feeds primarily on molluscs by diving (typically to 1-3.7m depth), but also preys upon aquatic insects (especially chironomid larvae), worms, crustaceans, small fish, fish eggs and some plant materials (e.g. seeds, roots and tubers). Surface-dwelling, nutrient-rich prey items such as insects and plant	No

	to support the population target	seeds are likely to be an essential food source for ducklings in the early growth periods during which they cannot forage by diving (Carboneras and Kirwan, 2020). Common Scoter feed primarily on benthic invertebrates (molluscs, insects) and small fish. There will be no reduction in the number of forage locations, area of suitable habitat, and available forage biomass as a result of the commercial netting.

4.5.10 Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) [A067]

Goldeneye is a winter visitor to Ireland, occurring between November and April in both freshwater and saltwater, particularly lowland freshwater lakes and sea loughs. This medium-sized diving duck does not breed in Ireland and is red-listed due to its vulnerability to poor water quality and because of competition for food with introduced fish species. It is the wintering population of the species that is the qualifying interest for this SPA (NPWS, 2025).

The conservation objective for goldeneye is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific species Attributes and Targets for goldeneye defined in relation to the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the SPA are presented in **Table 4-13**, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-13. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Goldeneye [A067]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend/ Percentage change in number of individuals	Long term winter population trend is stable or increasing	The national population of wintering Goldeneye in Ireland has declined by 67% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy *et al*., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 205 Goldeneye were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 47 Goldeneye were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (3 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22 and counts from 2019/20 were excluded due to low quality). The proposed activity is small-scale, temporary, and localized; no significant effect on population trend is expected. Minor temporary disturbance to any individuals present may occur.	No
Winter spatial distribution/ Hectares, time and	Sufficient number of locations, area, and availability (in terms of	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. Land management and other human activities can affect the spatio-temporal patterns of habitat use by goldeneye within the area. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling,	No

intensity of use	timing and intensity of use) of suitable habitat to support the population target	kayaking etc. can potentially reduce the quantity/quality of locations and habitat available to goldeneye. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak during summer months and are, therefore, not likely to significantly affect the winter spatial distribution of goldeneye. Goldeneye use open-water areas for foraging and roosting. Recreational activity (boating, angling, kayaking) peaks in summer and is unlikely to affect winter spatial distribution. Commercial netting is localized to specific draw areas and small-scale. Any temporary displacement of individuals from draw areas is minor and localized.	
Disturbance at wintering site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure by SCI species which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and can negatively impact population trends. Anthropogenic recreational activities on the lake such as boating, angling, kayaking can potentially disturb goldeneye and affect the species' population trend and spatial distribution. However, the frequency of these activities within Lough Ree will peak in summer months and are, therefore, unlikely to significantly disturb goldeneye at their wintering sites. Disturbance can increase energetic expenditure, potentially affecting survival. Goldeneye were not recorded in MWP surveys. Netting occurs outside peak winter activity in wintering areas. Temporary disturbance from boats or human presence in draw areas is highly localized and unlikely to affect overall population trend or spatial distribution.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use/ Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside SPA	Barriers that limit the wintering population of goldeneye from accessing the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA footprint will ultimately affect the species' ability to achieve population trend and/or spatial distribution targets. Factors such as the number, location, shape and area of potential barriers can affect the potential impact to a population and are considered during assessment. Goldeneye move freely across the SPA and connected sites. Commercial netting does not introduce physical barriers, and temporary presence of boats is unlikely to restrict movement or access to maintenance behaviors (bathing, preening). Minor short-term avoidance may occur in draw areas.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance/ Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Goldeneye are a diving omnivorous duck that feed primarily on crustaceans, molluscs and insects and prefer to forage over waters that contain a mix of substrate-size. The species favours open water with good visibility and without emergent or dense submerged vegetation (NPWS, 2025). During MWP ornithological surveys, goldeneye was not recorded. Goldeneye feed primarily on crustaceans, molluscs, and insects in open water. Temporary boat presence or noise in draw areas may cause minor short-term displacement from localized foraging patches, but overall forage availability and feeding success are unlikely to be affected.	No
Roost spatial	Sufficient number of	Sufficient, good quality roosting habitat is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population of goldeneye. A	No

distribution and extent/ Location and hectares of roosting habitat	locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitat can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to goldeneye roost locations, it will be temporary due to the nature of works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of roosting habitat for goldeneye within the SPA. Roosting habitat is critical for winter survival. Goldeneye were not recorded roosting in MWP surveys. Temporary disturbance from nearby draw areas may cause minor localized displacement, but effects are short-term and do not reduce overall roosting availability or quality.

4.5.11 Coot (*Fulica atra*) [A125]

Coot is a widespread resident and winter visitor to Ireland, occurring throughout the year on lowland lakes, reservoirs, slow-flowing rivers, and sheltered coastal lagoons. This medium-sized waterbird breeds in Ireland, with numbers supplemented in winter by migrants from continental Europe. The species is amber-listed due to declines linked to water pollution, wetland drainage, and loss of aquatic vegetation, which is a key food and nesting resource. For the purposes of this SPA, it is the wintering population of Coot that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Coot is to maintain the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Coot, established to support the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are outlined in (Table 4-14). An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-14. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Coot [A125]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend / % change in individuals	Long-term winter population trend is stable or increasing.	The national population of wintering Coot in Ireland has declined by 23% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (IWeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 338 Coot were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 619 Coot were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). The commercial netting activity is not expected to cause a significant decline in the wintering population of	No

		Coot. Commercial netting is temporary and localized; it is unlikely to cause a significant decline. Minor disturbance effects may occur.	
Winter spatial distribution / hectares, time & intensity of use	Sufficient number locations, area and availability (timing & intensity) of habitat to support population target.	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas are likely to vary throughout the season, Potential degradation of water quality and disturbance impacts to Coot could potentially affect food availability and food procurement by Coot leading to an impact on productivity rate of breeding Coot at Lough Ree. Distribution of suitable habitat varies seasonally. Temporary disturbance could reduce short-term foraging availability in draw areas, but overall habitat availability across the SPA remains sufficient.	No
Disturbance at wintering site. Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the wintering population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends (see, for example, Madsen and Fox, 1995). Habitats in some draw areas are not considered optimal for Coot. Temporary disturbance from human activity or machinery could increase energetic expenditure, but given the localized and short-term nature of netting, no significant effect is expected.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use. Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Barriers limiting the population's access to this SPA or ecologically important sites outside the SPA will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Temporary netting activity is unlikely to restrict movement or create physical barriers. Minor, localized reduction in water quality could reduce prey availability and affect maintenance behaviors, but overall connectivity remains intact.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance. Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Coot are omnivorous; plants dominate the diet but it will also take invertebrate and vertebrate prey. It forages primarily in waterbodies, rarely foraging far from them. The species feeds at the surface and sub-surface of waterbodies by upending and diving. It prefers shallow, open, slow moving waterbodies with marginal, floating, emergent or bottom vegetation. Foraging habitats utilised by Coot include rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, lagoons, estuaries, drainage channels and flooded lands. In winter, individual Coot can forage alone or as part of large aggregations. Coot feed on plants and invertebrates in shallow water. Temporary disturbance in draw areas may cause	No

		minor, localized displacement from foraging patches. Overall forage availability remains sufficient.	
Roost spatial distribution and extent. Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	When roosting overnight, the species uses a range of waterbodies, as noted for foraging habitat. Roosting is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use; this would ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution Applies to breeding colonies of Coot - the species often utilise extensive areas of freshwater for foraging. Coot was not recorded during the MWP ornithological surveys. Roosting occurs across multiple freshwater areas. Temporary disturbance in draw areas is unlikely to prevent use of roosting habitat.	No

4.5.12 Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) [A140]

Golden Plover is a widespread winter visitor to Ireland, present mainly between September and March, with large flocks using coastal estuaries, inland wetlands, grasslands, and agricultural land. Small numbers also breed in upland bogs and heaths, though the breeding population is now very localised and declining. The species is red-listed in Ireland due to long-term population declines and pressures from habitat loss, agricultural intensification, and disturbance. For this SPA, it is the wintering population of Golden Plover that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Golden Plover is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Golden Plover, developed to achieve the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are outlined in (Table 4-15). An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-15. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Golden Plover [A140]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend / % change in individuals	Long-term winter population trend is	The national population of wintering Golden Plover in Ireland has declined by 54% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 3,058 Golden Plover were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak	No

	stable or increasing.	counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 927 Golden Plover were estimated to be using Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). Commercial netting is temporary and localized; no significant population decline is expected, though minor disturbance effects are possible.	
Winter spatial distribution / hectares, time & intensity of use	Sufficient number locations, area and availability (timing & intensity) of habitat to support population target.	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas are likely to vary throughout the season, Potential degradation of water quality and disturbance impacts to Golden Plover could potentially affect food availability and food procurement by Golden Plover leading to an impact on productivity rate of breeding Golden Plover at Lough Ree. Distribution of suitable habitat varies seasonally. Temporary disturbance changes could reduce short-term foraging availability in draw areas, but overall habitat availability across the SPA remains sufficient.	No
Disturbance at wintering site. Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the wintering population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends (see, for example, Madsen and Fox, 1995). Some draw areas are not optimal for breeding Golden Plover. Temporary disturbance from human activity or machinery could increase energetic expenditure, but given the localized and short-term nature of netting, no significant effect is expected.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use. Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Barriers limiting the population's access to this SPA or ecologically important sites outside the SPA will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Seabirds can often use many different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Temporary netting activity is unlikely to restrict movement or create physical barriers. Minor, localized reduction in water quality could reduce prey availability and affect maintenance behaviours, but overall connectivity remains intact.	No

Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance. Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Golden Plover forage at ground level within open wetland, grassland and agricultural habitats, taking predominantly terrestrial and surface/sub-surface invertebrate prey. Commercial netting does not reduce the extent or quality of these foraging habitats. Temporary human activity at draw areas may result in localised avoidance where birds are present, but given the seasonal timing and spatially restricted nature of the activity, no adverse effect on the forage distribution or abundance target is predicted.	No
Roost spatial distribution and extent. Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	When roosting overnight, the species uses a range of waterbodies, as noted for foraging habitat. Roosting is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use; this would ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution Roosting occurs across multiple freshwater areas. Temporary disturbance in draw areas is unlikely to prevent use of roosting habitat. Roosting habitat across the SPA remains sufficient.	No

4.5.13 Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) [A142]

Lapwing is a widespread winter visitor to Ireland, occurring between September and March, and is found in a variety of habitats including estuaries, floodplains, grasslands, wetlands, and farmland. Although the species breeds in Ireland, the national breeding population has undergone serious declines, and Lapwing is now red-listed due to habitat loss, agricultural intensification, drainage of wetlands, and disturbance. Large flocks are characteristic in winter, particularly in lowland areas. For the purposes of this SPA, it is the wintering population of Lapwing that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Lapwing is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Lapwing, set to achieve the Conservation Objectives for the SPA, are presented in (Table 4-16). An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-16. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Lapwing [A142]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Winter population trend / % change in individuals	Long-term winter population trend is stable or increasing.	Lapwing national population of wintering Lapwing in Ireland has declined by 64% from 1994/95 - 2019/20, as monitored via the Irish Wetland Bird Survey (I-WeBS) (Kennedy et al., 2022). During the baseline assessments to inform SPA designation, 5,793 Lapwing were estimated to be using this SPA (3 year mean of peak counts for the period 1997/98 - 1999/2000; see NPWS, 2013). A population of 1,337 Lapwing were estimated to be using	No

		Lough Ree SPA in recent years (4 year mean of peak values from I-WeBS monitoring for the period 2018/19 - 2022/23; note there was no data for winter 2021/22). The commercial netting activity is not expected to cause a significant decline in the wintering population of Lapwing. Temporary, localized commercial netting is unlikely to significantly affect the population, though minor disturbance impacts are possible.	
Winter spatial distribution / hectares, time & intensity of use	Sufficient number locations, area and availability (timing & intensity) of habitat to support population target.	Distribution encapsulates the number of locations and area of potentially suitable habitat for the wintering population and its availability for use. The suitability and availability of habitat areas are likely to vary throughout the season, Potential degradation of water quality and disturbance impacts to Lapwing could potentially affect food availability and food procurement by Lapwing leading to an impact on productivity rate of breeding Lapwing at Lough Ree. Distribution of suitable habitat varies seasonally. Temporary disturbance changes could reduce short-term foraging availability in draw areas, but overall habitat availability across the SPA remains sufficient.	No
Disturbance at wintering site. Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact the achievement of targets for population trend and spatial distribution	The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the wintering population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of winter mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends (see, for example, Madsen and Fox, 1995). This species has been identified as a wintering population and given the timing and temporary disturbance from human activity or boats and the localized, short-term nature of netting, no significant effect is expected.	No
Barriers to connectivity and site use. Number, location, shape and hectares	Barriers do not significantly impact the wintering population's access to the SPA or other ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Barriers limiting the population's access to this SPA or ecologically important sites outside the SPA will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Seabirds can often use many different areas of the SPA to engage in various maintenance behaviours (e.g bathing, preening). Temporary netting activity is unlikely to restrict movement or create physical barriers. Minor, localized reduction in water quality could reduce prey availability and affect maintenance behaviours, but overall connectivity remains intact.	No
Forage spatial distribution, extent and abundance. Location, hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the	This species forages exclusively at ground level and relies primarily on surface and sub-surface dwelling invertebrate prey, consuming a wide variety of prey items, including pupae and larva. The species locates prey both visually and aurally. The species is reliant on open habitats, including a wide range of wetland habitats such as the edges of lakes, turloughs, river floodplains, lagoons, estuaries, intertidal flats and other coastal wetlands, as well as grasslands (wet grassland, semi-improved and improved grasslands) and ploughed	No

	population target	farmlands. While Lapwing feed primarily diurnally, the species is also known to feed nocturnally on clear and moonlit nights. Fugitive noise from boats and/or human activity during the commercial netting season will largely be restricted to the immediate vicinity of the draw areas, and while there is some potential for disturbance to Lapwing forage locations, they will be temporary due to the nature of the works and unlikely to significantly affect the availability and quality of foraging habitat for Lapwing within the SPA. In the MWP ornithological surveys, Lapwing (one of the two SCI species) was observed once, with a peak count of one. Lapwing forage on invertebrates and small prey items in shallow waters and grassland edges. Temporary disturbance effects may reduce prey availability locally, but overall foraging habitat across the SPA remains sufficient.	
Roost spatial distribution and extent. Location and hectares of roosting habitat	Sufficient number of locations, area and availability of suitable roosting habitat to support the population target	Lapwing roost exclusively at ground level. Roosting is a critical ecological requirement for the wintering population. When roosting overnight, this species typically utilises a similar range of habitats as noted for foraging. Daytime roosting is also a common behaviour, where birds minimise activity levels to conserve energy, while benefitting from the vigilance of other flock members. A lack of sufficient and suitable roosting habitats can result in increased mortality risk, whether indirectly (e.g. via increased energy expenditure travelling to/from roost sites) or directly (e.g. via increased predation risk), or reduction in site use; this would ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population trend and/or spatial distribution. Lapwing roost at ground level in similar habitats to foraging areas. Temporary disturbance from commercial netting is unlikely to significantly reduce roosting habitat availability.	No
Supporting habitat: area and quality Hectares and quality	Sufficient area of utilisable habitat available in ecologically important sites outside the SPA	Wintering population uses habitats outside the SPA for foraging and roosting. Temporary disturbance impacts in draw areas are unlikely to significantly reduce the availability or quality of these supporting habitats.	No

4.5.14 Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) [A193]

Common Tern is a summer migrant to Ireland, arriving in April and departing by September, and is mainly found around coastal habitats such as estuaries, lagoons, sheltered bays, and offshore islands. The species breeds colonially, nesting on shingle, sandy beaches, grassy islets, and artificial structures such as pontoons. In Ireland, Common Tern is amber-listed due to pressures including predation, disturbance, loss of suitable nesting sites, and changes in prey availability linked to marine ecosystem shifts. For this SPA, it is the breeding population of Common Tern that is the qualifying interest (NPWS, 2025). The conservation objective for Common Tern

is to restore the Favourable conservation condition of this species in the Lough Ree SPA. The specific Attributes and Targets for Common Tern, developed to support the Conservation Objectives of the SPA, are set out in **Table 4-17**, below. An assessment of the effects of the project against these measures is also included.

Table 4-17. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Common Tern [A193]' (NPWS, 2025).

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Breeding population size/ Number of Apparently Occupied Nests (AON)	Long term SPA population trend is stable or increasing	Lough Ree SPA is situated in counties Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath. As part of the 1995 all-Ireland tern survey an estimated 90 pairs were recorded in Lough Ree on the Black Islands in the Co. Longford section of the lake (Hannon et al., 1997). In 2018 an estimated 105 pairs nested within the SPA with breeding recorded in all three counties (NPWS, 2018). The most recent population estimate of 64 pairs, all within Co. Longford, represents a decline of 29% since 1995 (NPWS internal files). This contrasts to the national population trend of Common Tern that has increased by 91% from 2,469 pairs in 1998 - 2002 to 4,728 pairs in 2015 - 2021 (Burnell et al., 2023). The national population trend has seen a significant increase in the Common Tern population but this can be partially attributed to the growth of the colony at the Rockabill SPA where the population has increased rapidly since the establishment of a wardening project in the 1980s (Burnell et al., 2023). Available information does not demonstrate that traditional commercial draft-net fishing has resulted in a reduction in the Common Tern breeding population. However, the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding period and the location of breeding colonies may vary between years. In the absence of mitigation, disturbance associated with netting activity in proximity to an active colony could interfere with breeding behaviour and an adverse effect on achievement of the breeding population target cannot therefore be excluded with sufficient certainty over the 2027–2031 period.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Productivity rate/ Number of fledged young per breeding pair	Sufficient to maintain a stable or increasing population	Colonies such as Rockabill Island have supported a stable/growing Common Tern population with a productivity rate between 0.6 and 1.1 (Allbrook et al., 2022). The water levels in Lough Ree SPA are controlled and Common Tern abundance and productivity are likely to be impacted due to flooding when water levels are raised. Disturbance of breeding adults or repeated activity in proximity to an active colony has the potential to interfere with breeding behaviour and could affect reproductive success. Given the annual recurrence of commercial netting during the 2027–2031 period and potential interannual variation in colony location, an adverse effect on the productivity target cannot be excluded in the absence of mitigation.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Distribution: extent of	Sufficient availability of	Common Tern are ground nesting birds. Typically, colonies are found in open areas with loose substrate, such as	No

available nesting options within the SPA/ Numbers and spatial distribution	suitable nesting sites throughout the SPA to maintain a stable or increasing population	sand or shingle, with some scattered vegetation to provide cover for chicks (Arnold et al., 2020). Common Tern have nested on multiple islands in this SPA but the Black Islands in the Co. Longford section have been the stronghold of this species. Three tern rafts were deployed on the lake in 2024 and at least one pair nested on the raft. Commercial netting does not remove or otherwise physically alter island, shoreline or artificial nesting habitat available to Common Tern. Accordingly, no reduction in the extent or availability of nesting habitat is predicted. Potential avoidance of otherwise suitable locations as a consequence of disturbance is considered under the disturbance attributes below.	
Forage spatial distribution, extent, abundance and availability/ Location and hectares, and forage biomass	Sufficient number of locations, area of suitable habitat and available forage biomass to support the population target	Common Tern are largely piscivorous, feeding on small fish up to 150mm in length (Arnold et al., 2020). Common Tern feed almost entirely on live, aquatic prey (Arnold et al., 2020) so are dependent on Lough Ree and adjacent freshwater habitats for food. Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) of Common Tern foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season, which are 6.4km, 18km, and 30km respectively (see Power et al., 2021). There will be no reduction in the number of forage locations, area of suitable habitat, and available forage biomass as a result of the commercial netting.	No
Disturbance at the breeding site/ Intensity, frequency, timing and duration	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on birds at the breeding site	Disturbance events at the nest site/breeding colony level can result in a reduction of overall productivity and even lead to the abandonment of the breeding colony. The impact of any significant disturbance (direct or indirect) to the breeding population will ultimately affect the achievement of targets for population size and/or spatial distribution. Disturbance contributes to increased energetic expenditure which can result in increased likelihood of mortality or reduced fitness (if energy expenditure is greater than energy gain) and, in turn, negatively impact population trends. The fishing season overlaps with the Common Tern breeding period. Although individual netting operations are temporary, their location relative to active colonies may differ between years as colony distribution changes. In the absence of mitigation, disturbance arising from boat movements or shoreline activity in proximity to an active breeding colony could affect breeding behaviour and the achievement of this target.	Yes – see **Section 4.8**
Disturbance at areas ecologically connected to the colony/ Intensity, frequency,	Disturbance occurs at levels that do not significantly impact on breeding population	Common tern, as many seabird species, use areas near their breeding colonies for non-site-specific maintenance behaviours such as bathing, preening, wing-drying and courtship and may use areas outside the breeding colony but not in water for some behaviours such as roosting. Common Tern may use waters surrounding breeding colonies for foraging and maintenance behaviours. Commercial netting does not prevent access to these waters,	Yes – see **Section 4.8**

timing and duration		but temporary disturbance may occur where netting activity coincides spatially with areas being used by breeding birds. Given the potential for this interaction to recur over successive seasons, an adverse effect cannot be excluded in the absence of mitigation.	
Barriers to connectivity/ Number; location; shape; area (hectares)	No significant increase	Terns, particularly during the breeding season, require regular access to waters ecologically connected to the colony in order to forage, as well as to engage in other maintenance behaviours. Based on several studies, Woodward et al. (2019) provide estimates (i.e. overall mean, mean of maximum distances across all studies, and maximum distance recorded) of Common Tern foraging ranges from the nest site during the breeding season, which are 6.4km, 18km, and 30km respectively (see Power et al., 2021). While it is unlikely the commercial netting activity will present a significant barrier to connectivity, could impact prey items and reduce quality/availability of common tern foraging resources. However potential disturbance could affect prey items. Therefore mitigation regarding potential disturbance will be applied as a precaution.	No

4.6 Assessment of Effects on the Conservation Objectives of Lough Ree SAC [000440]

An evaluation was undertaken to identify which of the QIs of the Lough Ree SAC (see Section 4.2.1 above) potentially lie within the zone of influence of the commercial netting activity and require further assessment in the NIS. This was done through a scientific examination of ecological evidence and data listed in Section 3.7, above, or referenced, as well as the results of the ecological field surveys (Section 3.3, above). In this case, one SCI was selected for further assessment (listed in Table 4-1, above).

Following this, the potentially significant effects that may arise because of the commercial netting were assessed in Section 4.4, above, and a determination was made as to whether the integrity of the SAC is likely to be adversely affected by the proposal. The SCI species of the SAC have been assessed against the measures designed to achieve the conservation objectives of the site and the outcome of this assessment is presented in the following sections.

4.6.1 Otter [1355]

The conservation objective for otter is to restore the favourable conservation condition of this species in the SAC. The specific species Attributes and Targets defined in relation to the achievement of Conservation Objectives for the SAC are presented in **Table 4-18,** with an assessment of the effects of the project against these measures.

Table 4-18. Assessment of effects on conservation objectives of 'Otter [1355]' (NPWS, 2026)

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Distribution/ percentage positive survey sites	No significant decline	The waters within Lough Ree are considered optimal otter foraging habitat and it is very likely that some of the SAC otter population use these waters as foraging grounds. The commercial netting has potential to result in disturbance possible near haul-in points, but activity is temporary and localized. Thus, these attributes are unlikely to be negatively affected by the commercial netting activity.	No
Extent of terrestrial habitat/ ha	No significant decline. Area mapped and calculated as 330.6ha along river banks/lake shoreline/around pools	The commercial netting will not result in any significant decline in the extent of terrestrial/freshwater (river) or freshwater (lake) habitat for otter. Thus, these attributes are unlikely to be negatively affected by the commercial netting activity.	No
Extent of freshwater (river) habitat/ km	No significant decline. Length mapped as 22.7 km		
Extent of freshwater (lake) habitat/ ha	No significant decline. Area mapped as 2097.4 ha		
Couching sites and holts/ number	No significant decline	Due to the location and nature of the activity no decline in the number of couching sites and holts for otter are anticipated. The commercial netting has potential to result in disturbance possible near haul-in points, but activity is temporary and localized. Thus, these attributes are unlikely to be negatively affected by the commercial netting activity.	No

Attribute/Measure	Target	Assessment of Potentially Significant Effects	Mitigation Required
Fish biomass available/ kilograms	No significant decline	Ample food supply is normally associated with high water quality. Commercial netting activities do not have the potential to result in release of pollutants and affect otter prey biomass.	No
Barriers to connectivity/ number	No significant increase.	The project is confined to the draw areas within Lough Ree and will not impede the movement of otter. No effects to this attribute are anticipated.	No

4.7 Assessment of Potentially Significant Cumulative Effects

When assessing in-combination impacts, it is necessary to identify the types of effects that may result from the proposed commercial netting project in conjunction with other plans, projects, and ongoing activities that could cumulatively influence the structure and function of relevant European sites (EC, 2021). Relevant plans and projects in the Lough Ree catchment, including the Roscommon, Longford, and Westmeath County Development Plans (2021–2028), and permitted or ongoing developments near the draw areas are summarised in Section 3.5 above. The in-combination assessment has been undertaken having regard to the maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season and the potential for the commercial netting activity to recur during successive fishing seasons throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period.

4.7.1 Ongoing Activities

The Lough Ree catchment is subject to a range of anthropogenic pressures that may affect water quality and the habitats of SCI species. Agriculture and localised commercial conifer plantations dominate land use in the area, while historical peat extraction and small-scale residential or extractive developments occur in the north of the lake. These activities have the potential to contribute to nutrient runoff, sedimentation, and changes in hydrology (EPA, 2021; O'Boyle et al., 2019).

Recreational and tourism activities along Lough Ree, including boating, angling, water sports, and associated infrastructure, increase human activity and potential disturbance to waterbirds. Urban settlements such as Athlone and smaller villages, including Ballyleague and Lanesborough, further influence land use patterns and environmental conditions. Of particular relevance to the present assessment is the potential for disturbance associated with commercial netting to interact with other lake-based recreational activity during individual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031.

Industrial facilities within the wider area, including IEL-licensed operations such as the Electricity Supply Board's Lough Ree Power Station (~188 m north) and other facilities up to 13 km away (e.g., Kepak Athleague P0168-02), are located outside SAC or SPA boundaries but may contribute cumulatively to water quality pressures. Relevant EPA-licensed or registered activities are identified in Section 3.5 and have been considered where a credible pathway to the European sites exists. No IPPC or IPC facilities are present immediately adjacent to the draw areas.

The Natura 2000 Data Forms[61] for Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA identify a range of existing threats and pressures relevant to the ecological functioning of the sites. Those of relevance to the potential impact pathways considered in this NIS are summarised in Table 4-19, below.

Table 4-19. Threats and pressures identified for Lough Ree SAC and Lough Ree SPA in the associated Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms.

Threat Level	Threats and Pressures Code	Reference
High	J02.11.02; K03.05; G01.01	Other siltation rate changes; antagonism arising from introduction of species; nautical sports
Medium	H01.08; H02.06; A04; A08; B02;	Diffuse pollution to surface waters due to household sewage

[61] Lough Ree SAC (IE0000440 - SCI) Accessed: 30th August 2026

Threat Level	Threats and Pressures Code	Reference
	F03.01; F02.03; G01.01; G01.02; A03.03; E01.03; I01	and waste waters; diffuse groundwater pollution due to agricultural and forestry activities; grazing; fertilisation; forest and plantation management and use; leisure fishing; hunting; nautical sports; walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles; abandonment / lack of mowing; dispersed habitation; invasive non-native species
Low	G01.02; J02.04; L08; D03.01.02; H06.03; B	Walking, horse-riding and non-motorised vehicles; Flooding modifications; Other anthropogenic activities; Piers, tourist harbours or recreational piers; Thermal pollution of water bodies; Forestry (general)

The Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms identify a range of pressures relevant to Lough Ree SPA and Lough Ree SAC. These include high-level pressures such as changes in siltation rates, antagonism arising from the introduction of species, and invasive non-native species. Medium-level pressures encompass diffuse pollution of surface waters and groundwater, grazing, fertilisation, forest and plantation management, leisure fishing, hunting, nautical sports, walking, horse riding, non-motorised vehicles, abandonment of mowing, dispersed habitation, and invasive non-native species. Low-level pressures cover walking, horse riding, non-motorised vehicles, flooding modifications, other anthropogenic activities, construction of piers or recreational harbours, thermal pollution of water bodies, and general forestry activities.

No significant in-combination effects are predicted to arise as a result of the proposed commercial netting activity when considered alongside the other existing or planned activities identified in Section 3.5. The assessment has not identified a material contribution from the commercial netting activity to existing water-quality pressures, and the activity will not result in permanent loss, degradation or fragmentation of wetland habitats or qualifying habitats of Lough Ree SAC. The potential for these effects to recur over successive annual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031 has also been considered, and no progressive physical effect is predicted as the activity does not create a permanent footprint between fishing seasons.

The precautionary principal potential interaction identified relates to temporary disturbance of SCI bird species, which may also be subject to disturbance from other routine activities on the lake. The potential for commercial netting and other lake-based activities to occur concurrently, and for such interactions to recur during successive annual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031, has therefore been considered. Given the limited spatial extent, short duration, seasonal nature and regulated operation of the commercial netting activity, no significant in-combination disturbance effects are predicted. However, as the location of sensitive breeding birds may vary between years, the mitigation measures set out in Section 4.8 provide for awareness, communication and operational measures to minimise disturbance where sensitive breeding activity is identified.

Mitigation measures are included on a precautionary basis to further reduce the potential for disturbance to sensitive bird species during the 2027–2031 assessment period. Taking account of the nature and scale of the activity, the potential for repeated seasonal operation, the relevant plans, projects and ongoing activities identified in Section 3.5, and the implementation of the measures set out in Section 4.8, it is concluded that the commercial netting activity will not undermine the achievement of the conservation objectives of Lough Ree SPA or Lough Ree SAC, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, over the 2027–2031 assessment period.

4.8 Mitigation (Potential Disturbance to SPA Qualifying Interest Species)

The assessment in Sections 4.4 and 4.5 identifies that commercial draft-net fishing on Lough Ree is a long-established, low-frequency activity undertaken at a limited number of traditional draw locations. The available information provided by NPWS does not demonstrate a negative association between traditional draft-net fishing and breeding bird presence or productivity. Nevertheless, the commercial netting season overlaps with the breeding periods of disturbance-sensitive SCI species, particularly Common Scoter and Common Tern, and the distribution of breeding activity may vary between years.

Given the proposed continuation of the activity over successive annual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031, the potential for commercial netting to occur in proximity to sensitive breeding locations cannot be excluded in every year. In the absence of mitigation, temporary disturbance associated with boat movements and shoreline net retrieval could therefore affect breeding activity where spatial and temporal overlap occurs. Mitigation is consequently required to avoid or reduce this potential interaction and to ensure that disturbance associated with the commercial netting activity does not adversely affect the achievement of the conservation objectives for the relevant SCI species.

The mitigation measures set out below focus on awareness, communication, operational good practice and coordination in response to the location of sensitive breeding activity. This approach takes account of the information and recommendations provided by NPWS and provides a proportionate means of addressing the identified disturbance pathway while recognising the potential for breeding bird distribution to vary during the 2027–2031 assessment period.

4.8.1 Pre-season Awareness and Information

Prior to each annual fishing season between 2027 and 2031, IFI will ensure that all licensed draft-net fishers will be provided with targeted awareness information relating to breeding bird species present on Lough Ree, including Common Tern, Common Scoter, ground-nesting waders, and other waterbirds, as well as species such as Otter. This information will focus on recognising signs of bird breeding activity, understanding disturbance-sensitive behaviours, and identify species-specific periods when birds may be more vulnerable. The aim of this measure is to ensure that fishers, as regular lake users, are informed and able to avoid inadvertent disturbance should breeding activity be encountered during fishing operations.

All new licence holders will be required to attend an awareness talk delivered by either NPWS or the Breeding Waders EIP, which will cover identification of breeding birds relevant to Lough Ree, recognition of disturbance-sensitive behaviours, and guidance on avoiding disturbance during fishing operations. Licence holders will also receive breeding-season maps highlighting high-sensitivity areas, including active nesting sites, from NPWS or the Breeding Waders EIP.

This awareness approach is consistent with NPWS recommendations and builds on existing trust-based relationships between local fishing families, conservation projects, and statutory bodies operating on Lough Ree.

4.8.2 Operational Good Practice During the Breeding Season

During the main breeding season, draft-net fishing will continue to be undertaken in a manner that minimises disturbance, consistent with established practice on the lake. Where active nesting or colony behaviour is observed in close proximity to a draw location, fishers will avoid repeated approaches to that area and where practicable, move operations to an alternative draw. To further reduce potential disturbance, it is recommended that fishing will not occur close to active nests or colonies, and boat speeds will be reduced

within close proximity of nesting colonies, while unnecessary circling or repeated passes near sensitive areas will be avoided. These measures reflect existing behaviour observed during draft-net operations and do not require substantive changes to fishing practice. Given the availability of multiple traditional draws and the low frequency of fishing events, this measure provides a practical and flexible means of avoiding disturbance without imposing blanket restrictions.

4.8.3 Liaison and Adaptive Management

Ongoing liaison will be maintained between licence holders, IFI, and NPWS staff active on the lake, including the Breeding Waders EIP. This will facilitate informal information exchange on bird activity during the season and allow for adaptive responses should unexpected sensitivities arise in any particular year, such as colony relocation due to water-level changes.

Where training or knowledge-exchange opportunities are offered by NPWS or associated conservation projects, participation by licence holders will be supported as a positive, measurable mitigation measure that enhances long-term conservation outcomes. This approach is consistent with NPWS recommendations that knowledge exchange and trust-based collaboration are more effective than blanket timing or spatial restrictions.

4.8.4 Monitoring and Review

Existing NPWS and Breeding Waders EIP monitoring programmes provide an ongoing evidence base regarding breeding bird distribution and productivity on Lough Ree. These programmes will continue independently of the draft-net fishery. Should future monitoring identify any emerging interaction between draft-net activity and breeding bird conservation objectives, mitigation measures can be reviewed and refined in consultation with NPWS, ensuring that management remains evidence-led, proportionate and clearly linked to risk reduction, while maintaining the strong working relationships with local communities essential to effective conservation.

5. Residual Impacts

Based on the best scientific information available, including long-term monitoring data provided by the 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. For the purposes of the present assessment, the activity has been assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 draft-net licences in any annual fishing season during the 2027–2031 assessment period. The precautionary 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 for species such as the Otter 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. The potential for the identified effects to recur during successive annual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031 has also been considered. While individual disturbance events are temporary and localised, the distribution of breeding birds may vary between years and the degree of spatial overlap with established draw areas may therefore also vary.

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 apply throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period and provide for relevant ecological information to be taken into account where the distribution of sensitive breeding birds changes between individual fishing seasons. The 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.

The potential for residual effects to act in combination with other plans, projects and ongoing activities has also been considered throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period. Following implementation of the specified mitigation measures, no adverse residual effects on the integrity of Lough Ree SPA or Lough Ree SAC are predicted as a result of the proposed commercial netting activity, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, including where the activity recurs during successive annual fishing seasons between 2027 and 2031.

6. Conclusion

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 SACs designated for habitats, plants and non-avian species, and 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 proposed commercial draft-net fishing activity on Lough Ree, assessed on the basis of a maximum scenario of 12 licences in any annual fishing season during the 2027–2031 period, 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 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 26 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

examination, analysis and evaluation of the relevant information and best scientific knowledge, and subject to the full implementation of the mitigation measures specified in Section 4.8 throughout the 2027–2031 assessment period, it is concluded that the proposed commercial draft-net fishing activity will not adversely affect, either directly or indirectly, the integrity of Lough Ree SPA (004064) or Lough Ree SAC (000440), either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, in view of the conservation objectives of each site.

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