

Gas Networks Ireland  
**Network Development Plan**  
Report for the Purposes of  
Appropriate Assessment Screening

Ref/1

Issue | December 2020

This report takes into account the particular instructions and requirements of our client.

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Job number 272409

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# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Introduction

Gas Networks Ireland (referred to hereinafter as GNI) is in the process of preparing the 2020 ten-year Network Development Plan (referred to hereinafter as the NDP). The NDP provides a view of how the gas network may develop over a ten-year period. It is based on current supply and demand for gas, as well as projections for growth in gas consumption and development of infrastructure over the time period of the plan.

Arup has been commissioned by GNI to prepare a Report for the Purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening with regards to the NDP.

Specifically, this report contains information required for the competent authority, to undertake an AA Screening Assessment of the NDP. The aims of this report are to:

- Provide information on, and assess the potential for the proposed plan to significantly effect Natura 2000 Sites (also known as European sites);
- Determine whether the proposed plan is directly connected with, or necessary to, the conservation management of any Natura 2000 sites; *and*
- Determine whether it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information and beyond reasonable scientific doubt, that the proposed plan, alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will have significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites in view of their conservation objectives.

## 1.2 The Requirement for Habitats Directive Assessment

Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA), also known as Appropriate Assessment, is a requirement under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. The Habitats Directive indicates the need for plans and projects to be subject to Appropriate Assessment if the plan or project is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site but is likely to have a significant effect either individually or in combination with other plans or projects on Natura 2000 sites.

## 1.3 The Purpose of Appropriate Assessment

The purpose of Appropriate Assessment is to identify the possible effects of implementing a plan (or project) on the conservation status of designated Natura 2000 sites within the sphere of influence of the plan (or project).

Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna – the ‘Habitats Directive’ provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Article 2 of the Habitats Directive requires the maintenance or restoration of habitats and species of interest to the EU in a favourable condition.

The Directive was transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, SI 94/1997.

Under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive an Appropriate Assessment must be undertaken for any plan or program that is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site. Article 6 paragraph 3 states:

*“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.”*

Therefore, an AA is an evaluation of the potential impacts of a plan on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site, and the development, where necessary, of mitigation or avoidance measures to preclude adverse effects. In a situation where it is not possible to fully demonstrate that adverse effects on the site integrity would occur, options must be explored so that any risk of damaging designated sites is avoided.

Plans can only be adopted after having ascertained that there will be no significant adverse effects on the integrity of the sites in question.

## **1.4 Habitats Directive Assessment Process in relation to the Preparation of the NDP**

In the preparation of this Report for the Purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening which provides the information required by the competent authority to carry out an AA Screening Assessment, the following documents have been reviewed:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities (2009);
- European Commissions: Managing Natura 2000 Sites. The provisions of Article 6, of the ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC;
- European Commission: Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- Guidance document on Article 6(4) of 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC; and
- Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) Circular letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08 dated 15 February 2008.

A full bibliography of material referenced and researched in preparation of this report is included in the references section at the end of this report.

The European Commission's Methodological Guidance recommends a four-stage approach to Appropriate Assessment:

### **Stage 1 Screening:**

Determining whether the plan 'either alone or in combination with other plans or projects' is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site.

### **Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment:**

Determining whether, in view of the site's conservation objectives, the plan 'either alone or in combination with other plans or projects' would have an adverse effect (or risk of this) on the integrity of the site. If not, the plan can proceed.

### **Stage 3: Assessment of Alternative Solutions:**

Where it has not been proven that measures considered will not avoid or mitigate the adverse effect on the Natura 2000 site, then an assessment of the alternatives will be required; and if none are acceptable then stage 4 is required to be considered.

### **Stage 4: Assessment where no Alternative Solutions Exist and where Adverse Impacts Remain**

This will involve assessment where the Plan is considered to result in adverse impacts on the Natura 2000 site and no alternative solutions remain – the imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI) test must be met before authorisation, permission or adoption of the Plan is agreed. This includes the agreement of compensatory measures.

This is based on available ecological information and an adequate description of the plan and its likely effects. It also takes into account any policies or proposals that will set the terms for future development. The AA Screening Assessment determination by the competent authority, will also be recorded and made available to the public.

In any case where, following screening, it is found that the draft NDP or amendment may have an impact on the conservation objectives of a Natura 2000 site or that such an impact cannot be ruled out, adopting a precautionary approach, a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment of the NDP must be carried out and - in any case where a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) would not otherwise be required, it must also be carried out.

When the results of the Stage 2 AA under Article 6(3) indicate that there is a likelihood for adverse environmental effects, or where the findings are uncertain, then the provisions of Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive apply. That is, where:

- The plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of the site; and,
- Doubts remain as to the absence of adverse effects on the integrity of the site linked to the plan or project concerned.

## 1.5 Overview of Stage One Screening

The Screening Stage of the report is used to identify whether the Plan, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. This report follows European Commission (2001) guidance which recommends that screening should follow a four-step process as outlined below:

- Determine whether the plan is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site. If it is, then no further assessment is necessary;
- Describe the plan and other plans and projects that, ‘in combination’, have the potential to have significant effects on a European site;
- Identify the potential effects on the European site; and
- Assess the significance of any effects on the European site.

The key to deciding if an AA of a plan would be required is determined by an assessment of whether the plan and its policies and objectives are likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. The decision should not be determined by the size of the plan area alone. It will also be influenced by the nature and extent of the development likely to be proposed in the plan, and the plan area’s *in situ, ex situ* and in combination relationship to adjoining Natura 2000 sites and the wider Natura 2000 network.

When screening the plan and its policies and objectives there are two possible outcomes:

- the plan poses no risk of a significant effect and as such requires no further assessment; and
- the plan has potential to have a significant effect (or this is uncertain) and AA of the plan is necessary.

Screening can be used to establish which policies and objectives have potential to have significant effects, and therefore the ones that require further attention at the AA stage.

An important element of the AA process is the identification of the “Conservation Objectives”, “Qualifying Interests” (QIs) and/ or “Special Conservation Interests” (SCIs) of European sites requiring assessment. QIs are the habitat features and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Habitats Directive for which each European site has been designated and afforded protection. SCIs are wetland habitats and bird species listed within Annexes I and II of the Birds Directive.

It is also vital that the threats to the ecological/environmental conditions that are required to support QIs and SCIs are considered as part of the assessment.

Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) have been designed to define favourable conservation status for a particular habitat or species at that site. According to the European Commission interpretation document ‘Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC’, paragraph 4.6(3) states:

*“The integrity of a site involves its ecological functions. The decision as to whether it is adversely affected should focus on and be limited to the site’s conservation objectives.”*

The screening stage of the AA takes account of the elements as relevant with regard to the details and characteristics of the NDP to determine if potential for significant effects on European sites are likely.

## **1.6 Appropriate Assessment Process in Tandem with NDP Progression**

As the NDP is progressed through the plan making process, the AA process will be continued by the competent authority, GNI, in tandem and will inform the decision-making process in terms of any likely significant impacts arising from the NDP on Natura 2000 sites.

This report contains the findings of the assessment which was carried out on the draft NDP.

## **1.7 Data Sources**

This Report for the Purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening in relation to the NDP is based on a review of information relating to relevant European and Natura sites and to the habitats and species that they support. Information relied upon includes the following information sources, which included maps, ecological and water quality data:

- Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography available from [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie);
- Online data available on European sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie);
- Information on land-use zoning from the online mapping of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government <http://www.myplan.ie/en/index.html>;
- Information on water quality in the area available from [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie);
- Information on soils, geology and hydrogeology in the area available from [www.gsi.ie](http://www.gsi.ie);
- Information on the status of EU protected habitats in Ireland (National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2013a and 2013b);
- National Biodiversity Data Centre - Biodiversity Maps;



## 2 Description of the NDP and other Plans and Projects

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### 2.1 Legislative Background

GNI is a wholly owned subsidiary of Ervia and was established in accordance with the Gas Regulation Act 2013, as amended. It owns and operates the natural gas transmission and distribution networks in Ireland.

As Ireland's gas Transmission System Operator (TSO), GNI is required to submit a ten-year NDP to the Commission of Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in accordance with Article 22 of EU Directive 2009/73/EC and Article 11 of the EC (Internal Market in Natural Gas and Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.

GNI is also obliged to submit a long-term development statement to the CRU in accordance with condition 11 of its Transmission System Operator (TSO) and Distribution System Operator (DSO) licences.

The publication of the NDP also satisfies the requirements of Section 19 of the Gas (Interim) (Regulations) Act 2002, as amended by the European Communities (Security of Natural Gas Supply) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 697 of 2007). This requires the CRU to monitor and publish a report outlining gas supply and demand in Ireland over a seven-year period.

### 2.2 Plan Overview

#### 2.2.1 Gas Trends in Ireland 2019/2020

Annual ROI gas demands for 2019/20 increased 1.5% on 2018/19. This follows increases of 2.0% and 2.3% respectively in the previous years. In the power generation sector, annual gas demand for 2019/20 was 2.2% above 2018/19 levels, following a 3.5% increase the previous year. It is noted that power sector gas demand has grown by over 36% since 2014/15. The increase in power sector gas demands in this period, despite growth in wind capacity can be attributed to increasing electricity demand, reduced electricity interconnector imports from Great Britain, and more recently carbon and fuel prices favouring gas-fired generation ahead of coal in the merit order for electricity generation. Following the introduction of updates to the wholesale electricity market in October 2018, electrical interconnector behaviour has generally displayed efficient behaviour in that the interconnectors are generally importing to Ireland when Irish electricity prices are higher than Great Britain markets, and exporting at times of high wind when Irish electricity prices are lower than in Great Britain.

The Industrial & Commercial (I/C) sector annual gas demand for 2019/20 decreased by 1.6% compared to 2018/19 levels. It is noted that the first half of the gas year demonstrated strong growth in this sector (3.5% based on year-on-year comparison of October – March period), while the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions drove a 7.4% reduction in this sector in the second half of the gas year.

Within the I/C sector, Daily Metered (DM) demand reduced by 1.2%, with the Non-Daily Metered (NDM) portion of I/C demand down by 2.5%. It is worth noting that the NDM sector is heavily influenced by weather.

Residential demand increased by 5.6% for 2019/20, following a decrease of 8.1% in 2018/19 on the previous year. As Residential demand is highly dependent on weather factors the increase in Degree Day (DD) and Composite Weather Variable (CWV) for 2019/20 by 7% and 4% respectively were in line with the demand increase. Similarly, the relatively high demand winter period experienced an even larger increase in DD (13%) and CWV (7%) in 2019/20 over the milder winter of 2018/19 which contributed significantly to the overall demand increase.

In 2019 approximately 47% of Ireland's gas demand was supplied from indigenous sources (Corrib and Kinsale). The balance of supply, almost 53% came through the subsea interconnectors via the Moffat Entry Point in Scotland.

It is noted that 2019/20 marked the final year of commercial volumes of gas supply from the Kinsale gas fields onto the Gas Networks Ireland transmission system via the Inch Entry Point.

In 2019/20 ROI peak day gas demand of 225.4 GWh/d was 3.2% higher than the 2018/19 peak day gas demand. The ROI peak day occurred on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Gas demand in the power generation sector, which represented 57% of the total gas demand on the peak day increased by 14.5% in comparison to the 2018/19 peak day.

The Gas Networks Ireland system 2019/20 peak day gas demand was up by 0.5% compared to the 2018/19 peak. The NI and IOM combined peak day gas demand was -7.1% lower than in 2018/19.

## 2.2.2 Plan Overview

GNI's NDP provides a view of how the gas network may develop over a ten-year period. It is based on current supply and demand for gas, as well as projections for growth in gas consumption and development of infrastructure over the time period of the plan.

The purpose of the NDP is to assess the gas network's capacity based on existing and forecast supply and demand in order to guarantee the adequacy of the gas transmission system and security of supply.

In order to inform how the gas network may develop over a ten-year period, and to provide a comprehensive analysis, Gas Networks Ireland has developed three gas demand scenarios for the period 2019/20 to 2028/29, namely Low, Best estimate and High demand scenarios. These scenarios are designed to represent a broad range of likely outcomes and are informed by a range of external and internal factors. The NDP Best Estimate scenario is aligned to the ENTSOG/ENTSOE TYNDP Best Estimate and National Trends scenarios.

In the Best Estimate demand scenario annual ROI gas demand is expected to grow by 23% between 2019/20 and 2028/29 with 7% growth forecast in the Low demand scenario and growth of 45% forecast in the High demand scenarios respectively over the same horizon. These trends are dominated by the strong continued requirement for gas fired power generation in the electricity system to meet the projected levels of demand growth in the electricity system.

The development of peak day demands across the various scenarios shows the same broad trends as the annual demand forecasts. However, there are a number of key differences, particularly regarding the power generation sector gas demand profile. Over the forecast horizon 1-in-50 peak day demand is predicted to grow by 19.1%, and by 21.5% for the average year peak in the Best Estimate demand scenario.

The Corrib gas field is expected to meet approximately 27% of annual Gas Networks Ireland system demands (35% of ROI demand) in 2020/21, with the Moffat Entry Point providing the remaining 73%.

GNI is targeting the conversion of 24% of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) and 13% of buses to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by 2030. By the end of the current NDP period (2028/29), GNI is expecting to see annual CNG demand of circa 837.8 GWh/yr. GNI is conducting a project for a nationwide CNG fuelling network, co-located in existing forecourts, on major routes and/or close to urban centres. This will help satisfy the requirements of the EU's (European Union) Alternative Fuels Directive which aims to establish CNG refuelling facilities along the TEN-T Core Road Network.

Capacity limitations are identified on the network and addressed through appropriate capital investment programmes in order to ensure continuity of supply to all customers. In 2019, 11 projects were completed including 3 AGI Capacity Upgrades, 7 Reinforcements of the Distribution Network and 1 CNG station located in Cashel.

GNI continues to mitigate against these modelled system constraints to maintain system resilience and security of supply. The NDP outlines a number of capital projects which will be delivered over the coming years, including future proposed large capital projects and proposed new technologies.

### **2.2.3 Positioning of the NDP in the GNI Plan Framework**

In 2020, GNI prepared a draft Network Implementation Plan (NIP) 2020-2023. The purpose of the NIP is to set out in more detail, the manner in which the short-term capital investment proposals identified in the NDP will be developed in the Plan area over the three-year plan period 2020 - 2023. This includes greater detail on the capital investment proposals included in the NDP, including their locations, nature, extent etc.

The draft NIP was subject to SEA in accordance with the SEA Directive.

At the time of writing this SEA Screening Report for the 2020 NDP, the draft NIP is being updated following a period of public consultation in accordance with Article 6 of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC):

## Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

### 2.2.4 Plan Area

GNI maintains over 14,390 km of gas pipelines and two sub-sea interconnectors.

The GNI transmission network includes onshore Scotland, interconnectors and the onshore ROI network. The interconnector (IC) sub-system comprises of two subsea interconnectors between ROI and Scotland; and compressor stations at Beattock and Brighthouse Bay. The interconnector system connects to Great Britain's (GB) National Transmission System (NTS) at Moffat in Scotland. It also supplies gas to the Northern Ireland (NI) market at Twynholm and the Isle of Man (IOM) market via the second subsea interconnector (IC2).

GNI builds, develops and operates Ireland's world-class gas infrastructure, maintaining over 14,521 km of gas pipelines and two sub-sea interconnectors. The GNI transmission network includes onshore Scotland, interconnectors and the onshore ROI network. The interconnector (IC) sub-system comprises of two subsea interconnectors between ROI and Scotland; compressor stations at Beattock and Brighthouse Bay. The interconnector system connects to Great Britain's (GB) National Transmission System (NTS) at Moffat in Scotland. It also supplies gas to the Northern Ireland (NI) market via Twynholm, Scotland and the Isle of Man (IOM) market via the second subsea interconnector (IC2).

The NDP Plan area is identified in **Figure 2.1**.



Figure 2.1: NDP Plan Area

## 2.2.5 Plan Programme

The NDP is an annual rolling document. It is updated by GNI on an annual basis, setting out a view of how the gas network may develop over the next ten-year period.

## 2.3 Capital Investment Proposals

The NDP outlines a number of capital projects which will be delivered over the coming years, including future proposed large capital projects and proposed new technologies. Thus, it should be examined as to whether the proposed capital investment proposals would have the potential to result in significant negative effects on Natura 2000 sites or species.

Section 10.1 of the NDP outlines the Capital Investments which are proposed to be delivered over the coming years, including future proposed large capital projects and proposed new technologies. The NDP sets out these capital investment proposals under those planned to be implemented in the ‘Short-Term’ (next 3 years), and those planned to be implemented in the ‘Long-Term’ (next 10 years). Refer to **Table 2.1** for the Capital Investment Proposals. It should be noted that none of the Capital Investment Proposals listed in the 2020 NDP are located in either Northern Ireland, or Scotland.

**Table 2.1: Proposed Capital Investment Proposals in the NDP**

<b>Provisions of Section 10.1 of the NDP ‘Capital Investment’</b>
<b>Short-term Requirements (next 3 years)</b>
The provision of Above Ground Installations (AGI) capacity upgrade works to: 1 No. AGI in the Northern and Western Region, 3 No. AGIs in the Eastern and Midlands Region and 1 No. AGI in the Southern Region.
The provision of 1 No. new AGI in the Eastern and Midlands Region.
The delivery of new Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) stations, located along core urban and regional road networks throughout Ireland, including: 1 No. CNG station in the Northern and Western Region. 8 No. CNG stations in the Eastern and Midland Region and 2 No. CNG stations in the Southern Region.
The provision of 1 No. new Centralised Gas Injection (CGI) facility in the Southern Region, located on the gas transmission network where Renewable Gas quality will be verified, and the grid injection process will be managed and metered
<b>Long-term Requirements (next 10 years)</b>
The provision of AGI capacity upgrade works to: 6 No. AGIs in the Eastern and Midlands Region and 1 No. AGI in the Southern Region.
The provision of 2 No. new AGIs in the Eastern and Midlands Region.

GNI is currently preparing an NIP which will set out in more detail the manner in which the capital investment proposals identified in the NDP will be developed. At the time of writing this SEA Screening Report for the 2020 NDP, the draft NIP is being updated following a period of public consultation in accordance with Article 6 of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

## 3 Natura 2000 Sites

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### 3.1 Zone of Influence

The Zone of Influence (ZoI) comprises the area within which the plan or project may potentially affect the conservation objectives, QI's, or SCIs of a Natura 2000 site. There is no recommended zone of influence, and guidance from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) recommends that the distance should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, the sensitivities of the ecological receptors and the potential for in-combination (cumulative) effects. A distance of 15 km is currently recommended in the case of plans.

As previously outlined, the GNI transmission network includes onshore Scotland, interconnectors and the onshore ROI network and these locations therefore make up the 'plan area'. However, it should be noted that the Capital Investment Proposals detailed in the 2020 NDP relate to the Republic of Ireland only. No proposals relate to Northern Ireland or Scotland.

Thus, the ZoI for the NDP is considered to be the entirety of the island of Ireland, and within 15km of the border of the Republic of Ireland. The ZoI is illustrated in **Figure 3.1**.

Natura 2000 sites (European sites) are only at risk from significant effects where a source-pathway-receptor link exists between a proposed development and a Natura 2000 site(s). This can take the form of a direct effect (e.g. where the proposed development and/or associated construction works are located within the boundary of the Natura 2000 site(s)) or an indirect effect where effects outside of the Natura 2000 site(s) affect ecological receptors within the Natura 2000 site (e.g. effects to water quality which can affect riparian habitats at a distance from the impact source). Consideration is therefore given to the source-pathway-receptor linkage and associated risks between the NDP and Natura 2000 sites.

### 3.2 Natura 2000 sites within the ZoI

As outlined in Section 3.1, the NDP is a National Plan. Thus, all European sites in the Republic of Ireland as well as those within 15km of the Republic of Ireland are considered to be within the ZoI for the purposes of this plan. There are some 433 No. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and 154 No. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within the ZoI of the NDP. European sites that occur in the Republic of Ireland are illustrated in **Figure 3.1** below.

Details on the specific qualifying interests and conservation objectives of each European site can be found on the NPWS website which has a dedicated database for European sites. NPWS data for Irish sites was reviewed and considered in the preparation of this Report for the Purposes of Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening.

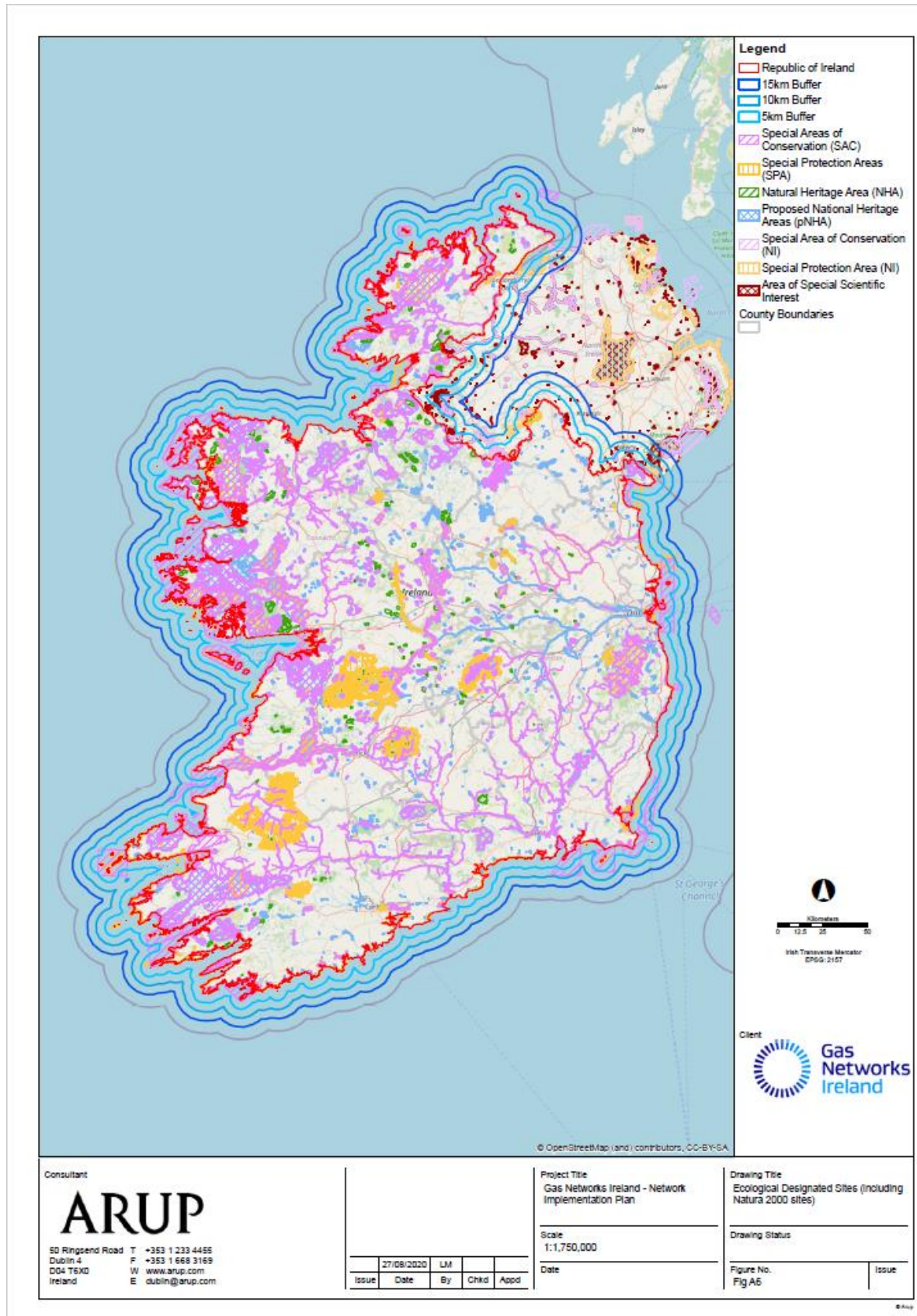
It is acknowledged that the number of European Sites designated, and their boundaries, are subject to change over time and must therefore be verified on an ongoing basis. Ireland has a higher density of Natura 2000 sites in Galway, Donegal and Mayo where habitats such as blanket bogs, semi-natural grasslands and high-quality water dependent habitats are located. Natura 2000 sites are also concentrated along major river catchments in Carlow and along the coast in Wicklow and Waterford and in the south east of Ireland.

Energy networks are extensive across Ireland and infrastructure from all sectors interact with Natura 2000 sites. Prospective energy network developments are routinely screened for Appropriate Assessment in order to determine whether there are any potential implications for Natura sites.

According to the European Commission ‘*Guidance on Energy Transmission Infrastructure and EU Nature legislation*,’ when assessing the potential impacts on nature and wildlife it is important to consider not just the main infrastructure itself, but also all associated installations and facilities such as temporary access roads, contractors facilities and equipment storage, construction compounds, concrete foundations, temporary cabling, spoils and areas for soil surplus etc. The impacts may be temporary or permanent, on-site or off-site, cumulative and may come into play at different times during the project cycle (e.g. during construction, renovation, maintenance and/or decommissioning phases). All these factors must be taken into consideration.

The EU Nature Directives’ species protection provisions must to be taken into account where there is a risk that the energy infrastructure plan or project may cause the death or injury, or deliberate disturbance during breeding, rearing, hibernation and migration, or the deterioration or destruction of breeding sites or resting places of species protected under the two Directives (e.g. such as eagles and marine mammals). This strict protection regime applies across the wider countryside, i.e. both inside and outside Natura 2000 sites.





**Figure 3.1: Natura 2000 Sites within the ZoI of the NDP**

### 3.3 Assessment of Likely Effects on Natura 2000 Sites

The purpose of the 2020 NDP is to provide a view of how the gas network may develop over a ten-year period. It is based on current supply and demand for gas, as well as projections for growth in gas consumption and development of infrastructure. As outlined in Section 3.1 of the NDP, the NDP is required in order to:

- Comply with the requirement to submit a ten-year Network Development Plan to the Commission of Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in accordance with Article 22 of EU Directive 2009/73/EC and Article 11 of the EC[1] (Internal Market in Natural Gas and Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.
- Comply with the requirement to submit a long-term development statement to the CRU in accordance with condition 11 of its Transmission System Operator and Distribution System Operator licences.
- Comply the requirements of Section 19 of the Gas (Interim) (Regulations) Act 2002, as amended by the European Communities (Security of Natural Gas Supply) Regulations 2007 (S.I. No. 697 of 2007). This requires the CRU to monitor and publish a report outlining gas supply and demand in Ireland over seven years.

Section 4.3.2 of the European Commission document on managing Natura 2000 sites, *The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Communities, 2000) states that “*it does not seem appropriate to treat policy documents, which show the general political will or intention of a ministry or lower authority as 'plans' for the purpose of Article 6(3)*”. According to this guidance, this is particularly relevant if any initiatives deriving from such policy statements must pass through the intermediary of a land-use or sectoral plan.

Having reviewed the 2020 NDP, it could be considered that the NDP constitutes one such high-level policy document and therefore does not seem appropriate to treat it as a “plan” for the purpose of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. To further strengthen this viewpoint, it is important to note that, as outlined in Section 2.1.3, GNI is currently preparing a NIP which will set out in more detail the manner in which capital investment proposals identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared. At the time of writing this SEA Screening Report for the 2020 NDP, the draft NIP is being updated following a period of public consultation in accordance with Article 6 of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

Nevertheless, having regard to the precautionary principle, and the capital investment proposals outlined in the NDP, it was considered prudent to screen the 2020 NDP as a whole, in itself, for its potential to give rise to significant effects, in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

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<sup>[1]</sup> European Commission

While the NDP does outline the capital investment proposals to be implemented over the next 10 years, including AGI upgrade works and installations, and the provision of new CNG and CGI stations, it does not define the exact location, nature, size/operating conditions of any proposals, nor does it allocate resources to a specific area in Ireland.

As outlined in the European Communities guidance, “*where one or more specific projects are included in a plan in a general way but not in terms of project details, the assessment made at plan level does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, when much more details about them are known.*”

The capital investment proposals referred to in the NDP have themselves been separately subjected to AA at a plan level in the NIP Natura Impact Report and will also be subjected to AA at a project level at a later date.

It can therefore be concluded that the provisions of the NDP, as a whole, in itself, have no potential to give rise to significant effects on Natura 2000 sites.

This screening assessment of the NDP has been carried out on the understanding that any proposals referred to in the NDP which could be considered to constitute a ‘project’ within the definition of the Habitats Directive shall be subject AA at project level, as required. Similarly, where the NDP gives rise to other plans or programmes which could be considered to constitute the definition of the same under the Habitats Directive, the plan or programme shall similarly be subject to AA prior to adoption, as required. As previously outlined, GNI is currently preparing an NIP which will set out in more detail the manner in which projects identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared.

Thus, in considering the overall nature of the NDP as a whole, in itself, and in the understanding that this assessment does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, no potential for significant effects on Natura 2000 sites was identified in the assessment of the draft 2020 NDP.

### 3.4 Potential for Cumulative Effects

The potential for cumulative effects should also be taken into consideration when determining the impacts on Natura 2000 sites, as required by Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive. Other relevant plans and projects are considered below. It is considered extremely unlikely that significant in-combination or cumulative effects arising from interaction with other plans or projects could arise as each plan or project has either been subject to the Appropriate Assessment process or provides for appropriate biodiversity protection. Each Stage 2 AA or Stage 1 AA Screening concluded that significant effects on Natura 2000 sites arising from the plan or project in question would not occur.

## National Planning Framework

In accordance with Regulation 42(6) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, RPS, on behalf of the (former) Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government prepared a report for Appropriate Assessment for the National Planning Framework (NPF) and it was determined by the Department in July 2017 that the NPF is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site. Notwithstanding, it could not be concluded at that stage in the process, on the basis of objective scientific information, that the NPF, would not, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, have a significant effect on a European site. As such it was concluded that AA should move to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment and the preparation of an NIS.

An NIR was then prepared by RPS on the draft NPF prior to consultation. This considered the potential for the draft NPF to adversely affect any Natura 2000 site with regard to its qualifying interests, associated conservation status, structure/function of the site and overall site integrity. This pre-consultation version of the NIS concluded that, subject to the mitigation proposed being incorporated into the NPF, there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of any European Sites as a result of implementation of the draft NPF. The post-consultation NIS also concluded the National Planning Framework would not, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, adversely affect the integrity of any designated site within the Natura 2000 network.

Given the above conclusions, no in-combination impacts with the GNI NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

## National Mitigation Plan

The process of Screening for AA was undertaken at an early stage in the drafting of the National Mitigation Plan (NMP). The AA Screening was undertaken before the detailed policy measures were developed and therefore the potential likely significant effects were largely unknown. Given the range of potential detailed policy measures that could have been utilised in the NMP once drafted, e.g. potentially including construction of infrastructure, land use changes or behavioural changes, the AA Screening was undertaken in a strategic manner with cognisance of the precautionary principle. It was concluded that the potential for likely significant effects could not be ruled out given the uncertainty as to what the policy measures might include. The AA process then proceeded to the preparation of a NIS to inform the AA to be undertaken by the Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment.

The conclusion of the NIS for the draft NMP was that subject to the mitigation proposed in the NIS being incorporated, there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of any European Sites as a result of implementation of the NMP.

Given the above, no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

## **National Adaptation Framework**

The Report for the purposes of AA Screening of the National Adaptation Framework determined that *“the purpose of the framework is to set out a policy framework to be pursued in relation to climate change adaptation; it will not identify specific locations, be they Natura 2000 sites or otherwise, nor will it propose adaptation measures or projects in respect of those sites.*

*Adaptation approaches and identification of locations or sites will be detailed via lower level adaptation plans and strategies which may undergo appropriate assessment, as appropriate”.* It was therefore determined that Stage 2 AA was not required.

Given the above, no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

## **Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan for Ireland**

Initially an AA screening exercise was undertaken which identified a number of sites upon which the OREDP could potentially have a significant effect.

An NIS was then prepared. On the basis that the mitigation measures were to be integrated into the final OREDP as specific actions for delivery, the assessment concluded that, based on the level of detail presented in the OREDP and the contents of the plan, the OREDP will not have any likely significant effects on the integrity of any Natura 2000 sites or cetaceans listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive.

Given the above, no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

## **Electricity and Gas Sector Climate Change Adaptation Plan**

The Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Electricity and Gas Networks Sector has been screened for AA. According to the AA Screening Determination *“the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment has made a determination following screening that an Appropriate Assessment is not required. This determination was based on the assessment that the Plan is not directly connected with, or necessary to the management of any European Site and it can be excluded on the basis of objective scientific information that the Plan, individually or in-combination with other plans or projects will have a significant effect on a European site”.*

Given the above, no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

## **National Energy and Climate Plan 2021 - 2030**

In accordance with the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action Regulation, Ireland's draft National Energy & Climate Plan (NECP) 2021-2030 was submitted to the European Commission in December 2018.

The draft NECP took into account energy and climate policies developed up to that point, the levels of demographic and economic growth identified in the Project 2040 process and included all of the climate and energy measures set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027.

The 2019 NECP was prepared to incorporate all planned policies and measures that were identified up to the end of 2019 and which collectively deliver a 30% reduction by 2030 in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions (from 2005 levels).

Under the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future, Ireland is committed to achieving a 7% annual average reduction in greenhouse gas emissions between 2021 and 2030. The NECP was drafted in line with the current EU effort-sharing approach, before the Government committed to this higher level of ambition, and therefore does not reflect this higher commitment. Ireland is currently developing those policies and measures and intends to integrate the revision of the NECP into the process which will be required for increasing the overall EU contribution under the Paris Agreement.

The NECP regularly refers to GNI's NDPs and Section 4.5.2 of the NECP describes the existing gas transmission system in Ireland. Section 4.5.3 describes the existing and projected gas market and energy prices,

Section 5 of the NECP discusses projections of the energy system and associated GHG emissions, and notes that *'the overall total primary energy demand for natural gas is projected to grow from 2020 to 2030.'*

The NECP stresses the need to *"ensure the resilience of the gas network to a long-duration supply disruption, in the context of EU and national climate objectives."*

No publicly available data suggests that this Strategy has undergone Appropriate Assessment. However, the Plan has been reviewed and no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

### **National Energy Efficiency Action Plan**

Article 24 of the EU Energy Efficiency Directive requires Member States to submit a National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) every three years. Ireland's 4th NEEAP was produced in early 2017. It provides a comprehensive overview of:

- The progress made towards the above targets;
- The measures in place to ensure the targets are met;
- The strategies and policies in place across the residential, commercial, transport and public sector.

No publicly available data suggests that this Strategy has undergone Appropriate Assessment. However, the Plan has been reviewed and no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

### **(Eirgrid) Grid Implementation Plan 2017 - 2022**

Screening of the Grid IP was undertaken in April 2017 and it was determined that AA was required.

Thus, the Plan was brought forward for Stage 2 AA, which concludes:

*“The Grid IP has been assessed in terms of examining the likely significant effects of the plan on European Sites and where these effects could lead to adverse effects on the integrity of European sites. Any project(s) arising from the Grid IP shall be required to conform to the mitigation measures and key principles for protecting European sites identified within this NIS. In addition, all projects arising from the implementation of the Grid IP will themselves be subject to Screening for AA/AA when details of locations and design become known or are refined. The conclusion of the NIS for the Grid IP is that, following appropriate mitigation and following the key principles for protecting European sites, there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of any European site(s), either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.”*

Given the above, no in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of its implementation.

### **Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region, Border Region, South-East Region and South-West Region 2010 - 2022**

The RPGs have undergone an AA and recommended specific conditions to protect European sites. These were incorporated into the RPGs where appropriate. No in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of implementation.

### **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for the Eastern and Midland, Northern and Western, and Southern Regions 2019 - 2031**

The RSESs have undergone an AA and recommended specific conditions to protect European sites. These were incorporated into the RSES's where appropriate. No in-combination impacts with the NDP are predicted as a result of implementation.

## **3.5 Potential for Transboundary Effects**

As previously outlined, and as illustrated in **Figure 4.1**, the GNI transmission network includes onshore Scotland, interconnectors and the onshore ROI network and these locations therefore make up the 'plan area'. While none of the Capital Investment Proposals in the NDP relate to Northern Ireland or Scotland, consideration must be had to potential transboundary effects with the UK. In this regard, for example, there are 58 SAC's and 16 SPA's in Northern Ireland.

No potential for significant transboundary effects on Natura 2000 sites or species as a result of the NDP have been identified, for the same reasons as those described in Section 3.3 pertaining to the characteristics of the NDP, and its position in the hierarchy of GNI gas network plans.

## 4 Screening Statement and Conclusions

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The likely impacts that will arise from the 2020 NDP alone and in combination with other plans and programmes have been examined in the context of a number of factors that could potentially have a significant effect on Natura 2000 European Sites. There are some 433 No. SACs and 154 No. SPAs within the ZoI of the NDP.

Section 4.3.2 of the European Commission document on managing Natura 2000 sites, *The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Communities, 2000) states that “*it does not seem appropriate to treat policy documents, which show the general political will or intention of a ministry or lower authority as 'plans' for the purpose of Article 6(3)*”. According to this guidance, this is particularly relevant if any initiatives deriving from such policy statements must pass through the intermediary of a land-use or sectoral plan.

Having reviewed the 2020 NDP, it could be considered that the NDP constitutes one such high-level policy document and therefore does not seem appropriate to treat it as a “plan” for the purpose of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. To further strengthen this viewpoint, it is important to note that, as outlined in Section 2.1.3, GNI is currently preparing a Network Implementation Plan which will set out in more detail the manner in which capital investment proposals identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared.

Nevertheless, having regard to the precautionary principle, and the capital investment proposals outlined in the NDP, it was considered prudent to screen the 2020 NDP as a whole, in itself, for its potential to give rise to significant effects, in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

While the NDP does outline the capital investment proposals to be implemented over the next 10 years, including AGI upgrade works and installations, and the provision of new CNG and CGI stations, it does not define the exact location, nature, size/operating conditions of any proposals, nor does it allocate resources to a specific area in Ireland.

As outlined in the European Communities guidance, “*where one or more specific projects are included in a plan in a general way but not in terms of project details, the assessment made at plan level does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, when much more details about them are known.*”

The capital investment proposals referred to in the NDP have themselves been separately subjected to AA at a plan level in the NIP Natura Impact Report and will also be subjected to AA at a project level at a later date.

It can therefore be concluded that the provisions of the NDP, as a whole, in itself, have no potential to give rise to significant effects on Natura 2000 sites.



This screening assessment of the NDP has been carried out on the understanding that any proposals referred to in the NDP which could be considered to constitute a 'project' within the definition of the Habitats Directive shall be subject AA at project level, as required. Similarly, where the NDP gives rise to other plans or programmes which could be considered to constitute the definition of the same under the Habitats Directive, the plan or programme shall similarly be subject to AA prior to adoption, as required. As previously outlined, GNI is currently preparing an NIP which will set out in more detail the manner in which projects identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared.

Thus, in considering the overall nature of the NDP as a whole, in itself, and in the understanding that this assessment does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, no potential for significant effects on Natura 2000 sites was identified in the assessment of the draft 2020 NDP.

No potential for Transboundary or Cumulative effects have been identified.

On the basis of the findings of this Screening Report to inform Appropriate Assessment by the competent authority, it is concluded that the proposed NDP will not have a significant effect on the Natura 2000 network and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required. The findings of this assessment will enable GNI, as the competent authority, to make an AA Screening Determination.

## 5 References

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*Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2000); [hereafter referred to as MN 2000];

*Guidance on Energy Transmission Infrastructure and EU nature legislation* (European Commission, 2018)

*Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodical Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2001);

*Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.* (European Commission, 2007);

*Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision);

*Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10;*

*Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive* (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011); and

*Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine* (Institute of Ecology and Environmental Assessment, September 2018).

## **Appendix A**

### **Findings of No Significant Effects**

## A1 Findings of No Significant Effects

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### **Name of Project:**

Gas Networks Ireland Network Development Plan 2020

### **Names of Natura 2000 Sites of relevance to the proposed development:**

There are some 433 No. SACs and 154 No. SPAs within the ZoI of the NDP- Refer to Figure 3.1. Detailed information on Irish Natura 2000 sites can be found on the NPWS website.

### **Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site?**

No.

### **Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site?**

No.

## **THE ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE OF EFFECTS**

### **Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site.**

It has been concluded by Arup that it is possible to rule out likely significant impacts on any Natura 2000 sites.

### **Explain why these effects are not considered significant.**

Section 4.3.2 of the European Commission document on managing Natura 2000 sites, *The Provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Communities, 2000) states that “*it does not seem appropriate to treat policy documents, which show the general political will or intention of a ministry or lower authority as 'plans' for the purpose of Article 6(3)*”. According to this guidance, this is particularly relevant if any initiatives deriving from such policy statements must pass through the intermediary of a land-use or sectoral plan.

Having reviewed the 2020 NDP, it could be considered that the NDP constitutes one such high-level policy document and therefore does not seem appropriate to treat it as a “plan” for the purpose of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. To further strengthen this viewpoint, it is important to note that, as outlined in Section 2.1.3, GNI is currently preparing a Network Implementation Plan which will set out in more detail the manner in which capital investment proposals identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared. At the time of writing this SEA Screening Report for the 2020 NDP, the draft NIP is being updated following a period of public consultation in accordance with Article 6 of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

Nevertheless, having regard to the precautionary principle, and the capital investment proposals outlined in the NDP, it was considered prudent to screen the 2020 NDP as a whole, in itself, for its potential to give rise to significant effects, in accordance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive.

While the NDP does outline the capital investment proposals to be implemented over the next 10 years, including AGI upgrade works and installations, and the provision of new CNG and CGI stations, it does not define the exact location, nature, size/operating conditions of any proposals, nor does it allocate resources to a specific area in Ireland.

As outlined in the European Communities guidance, *“where one or more specific projects are included in a plan in a general way but not in terms of project details, the assessment made at plan level does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, when much more details about them are known.”*

The capital investment proposals referred to in the NDP have themselves been separately subjected to AA at a plan level in the NIP Natura Impact Report and will also be subjected to AA at a project level at a later date.

It can therefore be concluded that the provisions of the NDP, as a whole, in itself, have no potential to give rise to significant effects on Natura 2000 sites.

This screening assessment of the NDP has been carried out on the understanding that any proposals referred to in the NDP which could be considered to constitute a ‘project’ within the definition of the Habitats Directive shall be subject AA at project level, as required. Similarly, where the NDP gives rise to other plans or programmes which could be considered to constitute the definition of the same under the Habitats Directive, the plan or programme shall similarly be subject to AA prior to adoption, as required. As previously outlined, GNI is currently preparing an NIP which will set out in more detail the manner in which projects identified in the NDP will be developed. The NIP has been subject to AA and a Natura Impact Report has been prepared. At the time of writing this SEA Screening Report for the 2020 NDP, the draft NIP is being updated following a period of public consultation in accordance with Article 6 of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

Thus, in considering the overall nature of the NDP as a whole, in itself, and in the understanding that this assessment does not exempt the specific projects from the assessment requirements of Article 6(3) at a later stage, no potential for significant effects on Natura 2000 sites was identified in the assessment of the draft 2020 NDP.

No potential for Transboundary or Cumulative effects have been identified.

On the basis of the findings of this Screening Report to inform Appropriate Assessment by the competent authority, it is concluded that the proposed NDP will not have a significant effect on the Natura 2000 network and a Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required. The findings of this assessment will enable GNI, as the competent authority, to make an AA Screening Determination.

## DATA COLLECTED TO CARRY OUT THE ASSESSMENT

### Who carried out the assessment?

The assessment was supervised, checked and completed by Ailsa Doyle of Arup.

### Sources of Data:

This report has been prepared with regard to the following guidance documents, where relevant:

- *Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2000); [hereafter referred to as MN 2000];
- *Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodical Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC* (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2001);
- *Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*. (European Commission, 2007);
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities* (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision);
- *Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10*;
- *Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive* (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011); and
- *Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine* (Institute of Ecology and Environmental Assessment, September 2018).

Sources of information that were used to collect data on the Natura 2000 network of sites and on the existing ecological environment are listed below:

- Google aerial photography (viewed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service online data on European Sites and ([www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)) (viewed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service online data on protected flora and fauna (viewed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020);
- Information on environmental quality data available from [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie) (EPA Online Environmental Map Viewer) (viewed on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2020);
- Information on environmental water quality data available from (EPA, [www.catchments.ie](http://www.catchments.ie)); and

## OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information provided above, and by applying the precautionary principle, it has been concluded by Arup that it can be excluded, on the basis of objective information and beyond a reasonable scientific doubt that the plan will have a significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites. and therefore, it is the view of Arup that it is not necessary to undertake any further stage of the Appropriate Assessment process for GNIs 2020 Network Development Plan. The findings of this assessment will enable GNI, as the competent authority, to make an AA Screening Determination.