



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

EU Just Transition Fund Programme

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA)

RSK Project no: 604200



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Author	<u>Poppy Grange,</u>	Technical reviewer	<u>Rob Edwards</u>
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Legislative Context

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic process for evaluating the environmental consequences of proposed plans or programmes to ensure environmental issues are fully integrated and addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision making, with a view to promoting sustainable development. The process of SEA was introduced under European Directive 2001/42/EC12 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive), and came into force in 2001.

The requirements of the SEA Directive are transposed into Irish domestic law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (SI 435/2004 and SI 200/2011), and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI 436/2004 and SI 201/2011). Hereafter collectively referred to as ‘the SEA Regulations’.

RSK Ireland Ltd (hereafter ‘RSK’) has been instructed by the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) to carry out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the EU Just Transition Fund (JTF) Programme (hereafter referred to as ‘the Programme’). The process consists of four main components.

- The preparation of an Environmental Report, where the likely significant effects of the Programme are identified and assessed. The Environmental Report is the principal document in the SEA process and summarises the likely effects of the Programme on the environment, and measures which would mitigate any significant adverse effects.
- A consultation on the Environmental Report and Programme with the public, statutory environmental bodies, and any other EU Member State which might be affected.
- The consideration of the findings of the Environmental Report and the consultation process in deciding whether to adopt or modify the draft Programme.
- The publishing of the decision to adopt the Programme and how the SEA process influenced the final outcome.

The Programme was published in December 2022. As such in accordance with Statutory Instrument No 436/2004 (as amended), a statement is required to be prepared providing information on this decision (the “SEA Statement”).

1.2 Summary of the SEA Process

SEA guidance was initially produced by the Government of Ireland in 2004. This guidance has since been replaced in March 2022 by the ‘Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities’ (DHLGH, 2022). In common with a number of SEA guidance documents, Table 1.1 sets out a five-stage process for carrying out SEA.

Table 1.1: Stages in the SEA Process

Stage	Tasks
SEA Screening	If SEA is not mandatory, screen for possible significant environmental effects
Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope Initial public consultation	Step 1: Describe briefly the statutory purpose, geographic area, population, and timeframe of the plan, and its relationship (both vertical and horizontal) with other plans/programmes.
	Step 2: Summarise the main findings of the survey and analysis stage.
	Step 3: Describe in general terms the current state of the physical environment of the area, with particular reference to (a) areas of environmental importance (such as protected sites); and (b) areas experiencing environmental problems (such as waste, or air or water pollution) at present. Describe how that environment would be likely to evolve on the basis of current development trends but no change in current policies.
	Step 4: Define (a) broad planning policy objectives for the area based on Steps 1 and 2; and (b) relevant environmental policy objectives for the area taking account of national policy and any relevant international legal obligations (e.g. EU Directives).
	Consult the Consultation Bodies on the scope of the SEA.
Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects	Step 5: Identify a number of reasonable alternative development strategies for the area which are capable of fulfilling the policy objectives established in Step 4.
	Step 6: Evaluate these alternative strategies against the chosen planning and environmental policy objectives (step 4), with a view to establishing the most sustainable option.
	Step 7: Select the preferred strategy (which may combine elements of different strategies), stating reasons for the choice, and work it up with detailed policy objectives.
	Step 8: Carry out an environmental assessment of the preferred strategy to determine whether implementation would be likely to cause any significant effects on the environment (in particular, the aspects listed in Annex I of the SEA Directive, such as biodiversity, air, cultural heritage, etc.).
Stage C: Preparing the Environmental Report	Step 9: Modify the preferred strategy to eliminate, reduce or offset any significant adverse effects, as appropriate.
	Step 10: Propose monitoring measures in relation to any likely significant environmental impacts.
	Step 11: Prepare a non-technical summary.
Stage D: Consulting on the draft plan or programme and the Environmental Report	Step 12: Consult the public and Consultation Bodies on the draft plan or programme and the Environmental Report.
	Step 13: Assess significant changes.

Stage	Tasks
	Step 14: Make decisions and provide information.
Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan or programme on the environment	Step 15: Develop aims and methods for monitoring.
	Step 16: Respond to adverse effects.

Interaction between EMRA and RSK to prepare the Scoping Report (end of Stage A), the Consultation Environmental Report (end of Stage C) and the final Environmental Report (end of Stage D) was an iterative process. The consultation phases on these documents with statutory environmental authorities (“Consultation Bodies”), the public, and other EU Member States were more formal in nature and are described in Section 3 below.

1.3 Purpose of the SEA Statement

The main purpose of the SEA Statement is to document how environmental considerations, the views of statutory consultees, and other submissions received during the consultation stages have been taken into account during the preparation of the Programme and related monitoring measures.

Upon adoption of the Programme, the SEA Statement must be made available to the Consultation Bodies, the public, and where relevant other EU Member States in relation to any transboundary consultations. The SEA statement includes a summary of the following:

- How environmental considerations were integrated into the Programme;
- How submissions and observations made to EMRA, consultation outcomes, and the Environmental Report were integrated into the Programme;
- The reasons for choosing the Programme as adopted, in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered; and
- The measures decided upon to monitor any significant adverse effects, as well as any potential unforeseen adverse effects arising from the implementation of the Programme.

1.4 Overview of Programme Priorities

To achieve the specific objective of the EU JTF, the Programme will address the investment needs via the three complementary priorities listed below. These are each cross-cut by the key objectives of supporting research, upskilling and reskilling through investments which build on regional strengths to address the socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition process in the Territory and facilitate the transition towards climate-neutrality:

- JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy by supporting productive investments in enterprise, SMEs and community actions, focusing on sectors and activities which can address the economic challenge of the transition.

- JTF2: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets to enable the transition towards climate-neutrality while also facilitating the diversification and modernisation of the economy of the Territory.
- JTF3: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition by supporting clean, green mobility to build regional attractiveness and support economic development.

2 SUMMARY OF HOW ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE INTEGRATED INTO THE PROGRAMME

2.1 Introduction

Environmental considerations were integrated into the Programme through the SEA process, which was carried out in parallel with the drafting of the Programme. Results from the different stages of the SEA process were fed back to EMRA through the draft reports and presentations by the SEA team at meetings.

2.2 Environmental Baseline

An analysis of baseline information has been carried out to provide an evidence base for current and likely future environmental conditions without the Programme. Key environmental and sustainability issues for Ireland have also been identified. This process has been undertaken to identify any potential environmental sensitivities or constraints which need to be taken into consideration in the preparation of the Programme.

Information for this section has been obtained from The Central Statistics Office (CSO) (Ireland's national statistical office), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and the Department of Health. Alongside the 2020 EPA report 'Ireland's Environment' and other documents as referenced in the Environmental Report.

The environmental sensitivities were mapped (Appendix A of the Environmental Report) and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified for each of eleven sustainability topics. These were fed back to the EMRA through the draft Scoping Report and draft Environmental Report.

The environmental baseline conditions along with responses received during consultation on the Scoping Report and review of other relevant plans and programmes, led to the identification of a number of SEA objectives.

2.3 Preparation of the Environmental Report

The Environmental Report was prepared to carry out an evaluation of the likely environmental effects of the implementation of the Programme.

The draft Programme was assessed against the SEA objectives. These objectives were used within high level and detailed assessment matrices to ascertain the magnitude of likely effects, the sensitivity or value of the receiving environment (including people and wildlife) and thus the significance of effects of the Programme priorities and associated actions.

Assessments of alternatives to the Programme as a whole have been undertaken, along with an assessment of likely cumulative effects of the priorities within the draft Programme and likely in-combination effects of the draft Programme with other plans and programmes.

The results of the assessment are detailed in the Environmental Report and these have been fed back to EMRA through the draft report.

2.4 Mitigation Measures

Annex 1 of the SEA Directive requires the Environmental Report to set out ‘the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme’. No significant adverse effects were identified in the ER and therefore there is no mandatory requirement for mitigation. Nevertheless the mitigation measures were identified in the detailed matrix assessment in order to reduce the potential for adverse, non-significant effects.

The development of the Programme has been undertaken alongside the SEA, as per the SEA Regulations. This promotes a hierarchy beginning with avoidance before considering mitigation measures. Through iterative discussion during the preparation of the Programme, potential impacts have been identified and addressed where possible at an early stage, this includes the provision of environmental protection wording within the Programme in the form of an Environmental Reports and Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Statement.

The SEA, AA and DNSH process has resulted in specific changes to the Programme text. The environmental statement was added into the Programme in order to demonstrate its commitment to environmental protection through high level principles for economic activities arising out of investments associated with the Programme.

There is potential for adverse, non-significant, effects in respect of JTF1 on ecology and nature conservation, soil and land use, water, air quality, historic environment, landscape, and as a result, natural capital. New building developments which may result from funding under JTF1 will be subject to controls through project design, the planning process and relevant regulations that act to ensure any effects are not significant. Existing consenting mechanisms and where relevant Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) at the project level prior to work being undertaken can reduce the potential for adverse effects.

However, as this assessment is limited by the level of project information available at this stage, a project level environmental appraisal should be undertaken prior to making a final decision regarding the funding of projects. Funding should not be granted to projects that are likely to result in adverse effects without adequate mitigation measures.

Although overall beneficial effects are predicted from JTF2 due to peatland restoration, it is acknowledged that increased visitor numbers to peatland areas could have some adverse effects, particularly on sensitive sites such as SACs. A requirement of funding could be to include measures to reduce potential visitor disturbance such as:

- Appropriate signage and information boards to raise awareness of sensitivities of the site;
- Clearly marked paths and routes;

- Requirement to keep dogs on leads;
- Restricting access to more sensitive areas within sites; and
Having a warden at the more sensitive sites.

3 SUMMARY OF HOW SUBMISSIONS, OBSERVATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS WERE INTEGRATED INTO THE PROGRAMME

3.1 SEA Scoping Consultation

The first stage of the SEA process is Scoping; this aims to identify the key issues, the main areas of interaction between the Programme and the SEA objectives and set the scope of the SEA. This was completed by RSK and EMRA in September 2022, with the findings published in the SEA Scoping Report.

The SEA Directive requires the EMRA as the managing authority to give notice to the consultation bodies indicating that a submission on the scope and level of detail of the information which must be included in the Environmental Report (Article 5(4)) may be made to the planning authority within four weeks of the date of notice. The Directive does not require full consultation with the public or bodies other than Consultation Bodies until the Environmental Report on the programme is finalised.

The scoping notice was issued to the Consultation Bodies below in September 2022.

- The EPA;
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM);
- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC); and
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

Consultation responses were received from the EPA and Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) (a division of the DECC). Consultation responses provided at the scoping stage are reproduced in Appendix A, along with a comment on how they have been accounted for in the preparation of the Environmental Report. The scoping consultation comments were taken on board in the production of the Environmental Report resulting in:

- Additional plans and programmes reviewed;
- Additional baseline information added;
- Additional guidance reviewed;
- Points raised taken into consideration during the impact assessment; and
- Recommendations taken into consideration in development of the mitigation and monitoring measures.

3.2 Consultation on the Draft Programme and Environmental Report

The Environmental Report and draft Programme, as well as the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Natura Impact Statement (NIS), were presented for public and statutory consultation over the period of 4 weeks in November 2022.

On the 1st of November 2022, the EMRA wrote directly to each of the Consultation Bodies inviting submissions, observations and comments on the Natura Impact Statement and Strategic Environmental Assessment. The EMRA also published a notice in a national newspaper inviting readers to respond to the public consultation on their website. The deadline for submissions was the 29th November 2022.

The following Consultation Bodies responded to this stage of the consultation process.

- EPA;
- DHLGH: and
- The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) on behalf of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Including the following:
 - Natural Environment Division (NED);
 - Historic Environment Division – Department for Communities;
 - Water Management Unit; and
 - Marine and Fisheries Division.

The purpose of this stage was to give the public and the Consultation Bodies an opportunity to express their opinions on the findings of the Environmental Report.

In line with the SEA Directive and SI 435/2004, comments were duly noted and considered, and if appropriate addressed in the final Programme document. The consultation responses are reproduced in Appendix B, along with a comment on the action taken in response to the comments within the Environmental Report. In response to the consultation comments, the following changes were made to the Environmental Report:

- Additions made to the environmental baseline;
- Clarification on transboundary effects;
- Incorporation of additional plan and programmes; and
- Additions made to the environmental monitoring proposals.

3.3 Transboundary Considerations

The potential for transboundary effects was identified in relation to Northern Ireland. As described above, the NIEA was consulted as part of the public consultation stages of the SEA. The Programme covers the JTF Territory, which does not border Northern Ireland. However, JTF2 may also extend to include the restoration and rehabilitation of peatland sites adjacent to the Programme Territory, which may be closer to the Northern Ireland border.

However no significant adverse transboundary effects are anticipated because the few potentially adverse effects predicted were due to localised small scale impacts of projects funded under the Programme which are no more than minor adverse significance.

Projects funded under the Programme will need to comply with cross jurisdiction environmental legislation. Projects flowing from the Programme must act in accordance with EU and national environmental assessment requirements and legislation, specifically Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment, within the jurisdiction of which they fall. Where transboundary effects are identified at the project

level, the relevant transboundary authorities should be consulted and a suitable monitoring framework established.

Transboundary impacts for the UK and other EU jurisdictions were considered, however due to the nature of the Programme any effects are likely to be negligible.

3.4 Post-consultation Modification to the Programme

There were minor post consultation modifications of the Programme which included programme wording revisions and clarification. None of the revisions changed the structure of the programme, or the policies and actions which have been assessed through the SEA. All consultee comments have been addressed through modifications to the SEA ER and NIS, responses can be found in Appendix A and B.

4 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

4.1 Introduction

Consideration of alternatives is a key feature of the SEA process as defined by the SEA Directive and the SEA Regulations. In practical terms, it refers to possible alternative mechanisms for delivering the goals of the Programme, and the assessment of the impacts of each of these options against the SEA objectives.

The recommended approach to consideration of Alternatives is addressed in the EPA Research Report; *Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment* (EPA, 2015).

SEA guidance recognises that it is not for the SEA to decide on the options to be considered. This SEA therefore focuses on the alternative delivery options actually considered in the preparation of the Programme by EMRA.

4.2 Outline Summary of Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives were identified, which are described below.

Alternative 1: The Programme as Proposed

Alternative 1 comprises the programme as currently proposed. This programme was developed on the basis of in-depth engagement with the European Commission, national and regional stakeholders, and potential delivery partners and beneficiaries to complement the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) as well as other national and EU funded programmes.

Alternative 2: Reallocation of Resources

Alternative 2 addresses the same Specific Objective as Alternative 1. The difference is that it proposes an alternative budget allocation, split more evenly across the three priorities.

Alternative 3: Alternative Action

Alternative 3 addresses the same specific objective as Alternatives 1 and 2. The key difference is that it proposes four priorities as set out in the Draft TJTP. These priorities and actions are drawn primarily from the recommendations of the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP) analysis commissioned by the European Commission.

Alternative 4: 'Do Nothing'

This alternative assumes that the EU JTF is not allocated within the Programme Territory and assesses the impact on the SEA objectives in the absence of a JTF Programme.

4.3 Assessment of Alternatives

Alternative 1 – The Programme as Proposed

As indicated by the matrix, strong beneficial effects are anticipated on populations and socio-economics due to 58% of funding under the Programme directed at JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy. Beneficial outcomes are anticipated for most of the SEA objectives due to the cross cutting nature of providing funding for the regeneration of peatlands. JTF3 may have beneficial effects on air quality and climate change with the effects on the remaining SEA objectives likely to be neutral.

Uncertain effects are anticipated on a number of SEA objectives including ecology and nature conservation, soil and land use, water, air quality, historic environment, landscape and natural capital as JTF1 may involve construction activities associated with businesses diversifying and expanding. This may lead to habitat loss or disturbance, soil compaction, water pollution, dust and emissions, changes to the site and setting of historic assets and potential loss of landscape quality and character. JTF2 also leads to uncertain effects on ecology and nature conservations due to possibility of disturbance through increased visitor numbers to peatlands.

Alternative 2 - Reallocation of Resources

Alternative 2 would support same three JTF priorities funded under Alternative 1 with different funding allocations. Some funding from JTF1 would be reallocated to JTF3 while the funding under JTF2 would remain similar. This would mean that the beneficial effects of peatland restoration under JTF2 would still remain under Alternative 2. Less funding would be directed toward economic diversification of the territory and support for the implementation of economic strategies under JTF1 reducing its beneficial effects on the socio-economic SEA objective. However, conversely this may lead to less requirement for business expansion and reduce the risk associated with new development. Increased funding for JTF3 under Alternative 2 may see a higher number of buses replaced with electric buses and a higher uptake of electric vehicles due to the provision of publicly available high and fast power charging points which would have beneficial effects on air quality and climate change.

Alternative 3 – Alternative Actions

Alternative 3 has a strong population and socio-economic focus with JTF1, JTF2 and JTF4 supporting the modernisation of business, creating employment opportunities, enhancing skills profile and enhancing the potential of the region as a place to live and work. Resulting in strong beneficial effects.

Alternative 3 would see a small number of actions associated with peatland restoration and funding for EU LIFE Projects. In comparison to Alternative 1, it would lack the beneficial effects resulting from large scale regeneration and restoration of peatland on SEA objectives such as soil and land use, water, climate change, material assets.

Alternative 4 - Do Nothing

The 'do nothing' scenario performs worst overall. Strong adverse effects are anticipated as many people would be left unsupported in the transition to a climate neutral economy. Without significant financial support and employment opportunities made available to rural communities this would likely lead to increased joblessness, deprivation and poverty, and continuing population decline in rural areas.

Adverse effects are also anticipated on health and quality of life, ecology and nature conservation, soil and land use, water, climate change, material assets historic environment, landscape and natural capital. This is mainly due to the lack of funding for the regeneration of peatlands and the beneficial effects that are present in Alternatives 1 and 2.

4.4 Reasons for Selection of Chosen Strategic Alternative

Alternative 1 represents the selected chosen strategic alternative.

This alternative provides a strong socio-economic funding stream which is aligned with the EU JTF regulation. JTF1 will help to generate employment for former peat communities and increase diversification in the local economy. It also supports the regeneration and repurposing of peatlands which is of key importance in the mitigation of climate change, combating soil degradation, biodiversity loss, water quality and flood regulation. Overall, this alternative supports a balanced approach which will achieve the aim of the EU JTF.

The EU JTF also has a very specific spending timeline. The budget is composed of an MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) element and a Next Generation EU element. The latter has a much shorter spending deadline which means that out of the €84.5 million Ireland is set to receive under the Fund, €60 million will have to have been spent by the end of 2026. This is reflected in the budget structure which provides for early spending in the programme lifetime through types of actions which are more likely to be ready quickly (excluding for instance actions requiring lengthy preparatory phases, planning permission requests etc.)

5 MONITORING FRAMEWORK

5.1 Statutory Requirement

Article 10 of the SEA Directive requires the Managing Authority, to monitor significant environmental effects of implementing the Programme. This must be done in such a way as to also identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take appropriate remedial action.

Monitoring should commence as soon as the programme is adopted, with annual reporting carried out for the life of the programme. It may be necessary to revise the monitoring programme periodically so that it takes account of new methods and increased understanding of the baseline environment.

It is important that any monitoring proposed by the SEA should aim to specifically monitor the impact of the Programme rather than monitoring trends in the baseline environment that would have occurred regardless. In accordance with the Ireland SEA Regulations, monitoring should also focus on aspects of the Programme where environmental impacts are predicted to be significant (or uncertain). However, the SEA did not predict any significant adverse effects of the Programme being implemented.

5.2 Monitoring Arrangement

Article 10 of the SEA Directive requires EMRA, as the Managing Authority, to monitor significant environmental effects of implementing the Programme. This must be done in such a way as to also identify unforeseen adverse effects and to take appropriate remedial action. As concluded in the ER (Section 7), residual adverse environmental effects of the programme (i.e. after mitigation measures have been adopted) are likely to be negligible only and thus not significant. The ER therefore proposed environmental monitoring measures (Appendix E of ER) that could be taken into account by the MA and the Programme Monitoring Committee to monitor potential unforeseen or uncertain effects on the environment.

EMRA will take into account the findings of the SEA when developing an environmental monitoring framework. SEA environmental monitoring and Programme related monitoring and reporting will be linked to allow the potential for likely significant effects, including cumulative effects, to be identified during Programme implementation and appropriate remedial action to be undertaken where necessary. To facilitate this approach and in line with horizontal principles, membership of the Programme Monitoring Committee will include appropriate expertise drawn from a relevant government department or state agency.

It is considered good practice to use existing monitoring programmes where relevant, rather than duplicating the data gathering exercise. It is the responsibility of EMRA to coordinate the monitoring of their programme however it is acknowledged that the EMRA will, in some cases, rely on monitoring programmes managed by other agencies such as the EPA. It is the responsibility of EMRA to liaise with additional data holders to access this data.

Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC)

A key monitoring mechanism for EUJTF implementation will be a Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC), which will be set up within three months of the date of the approval of the EU JTF Programme, meeting at least once a year to review progress in programme implementation. Reflecting the “Partnership Principle” and the European Code of Conduct on Partnership. Membership, which will be published on the programme website, will include representatives from:

- Member State (DPER and DECC);
- Regional, local, national, and other relevant public authorities, including those responsible for implementation and Government Departments representing the horizontal principles;
- Audit authority;
- Intermediate Bodies, relevant Departments and Agencies;
- Elected representatives at local and regional level of the EU JTF Territory;
- Economic and social partners;
- Civil society bodies – environmental partners, non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination;
- Representatives from other EU shared management funds in Ireland; and
- European Commission in an advisory capacity.

The PMC will meet at least once yearly to examine and make recommendations on all issues affecting programme implementation, progress in achieving milestones and targets and measures taken to address issues, including relevant programme contributions to Ireland’s country-specific recommendations, evaluations and follow up to associated findings, progress on implementation of communications and visibility actions and implementing operations of strategic importance, actions to ensure fulfilment of enabling conditions, progress in administrative capacity-building for public bodies, partners, and beneficiaries, as relevant.

A Programme evaluation plan, will be submitted to the PMC by EMRA within a year of Programme approval and a mid-term evaluation carried out in 2025 to track progress made in achieving milestones for output indicators delivered.

5.3 Monitoring Indicators

Output and results indicators have been set against each of the Priorities of the Programme in order to monitor performance and progress. Many of the indicators to be used to monitor the progress and results of the Programme are EU common indicators as provided in Annex III of the Regulation. These are made up of Regional Policy Common Output Indicators (RCO) and Regional Policy Common Results Indicators (RCR). Overall, the Programme will use two Programme-specific Output Indicators (PSO) and three Programme-specific Result Indicators (PSR). These are outlined below in table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Output and result indicators

Priority	Output Indicators	Result Indicators
P1: Diversification of local economy	<p>RCO01 – Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)</p> <p>RCO02 – Enterprises supported by grants</p> <p>RCO10 – Enterprises cooperating with research organisations</p> <p>PSO1 – Local and regional economic strategies supported</p>	<p>RCR01 – Jobs created in supported entities</p> <p>RCR03 – Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) introducing product or process innovation</p> <p>RCR04 – SMEs introducing marketing or organisational innovation</p> <p>PSR1 – Population covered by local or regional economic strategies supported</p>
P2: Regeneration and repurposing of Peatland	<p>RCO38 – Surface area of rehabilitated land supported</p>	<p>RCR 52 – Rehabilitated land used for green areas, social housing, economic or other uses</p> <p>PSR2 - Rehabilitated land used to support the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and/or improve hydrological status</p>
P3: Smart and Sustainable local mobility	<p>RCO01 – Enterprises supported (of which: micro, small, medium, large)</p> <p>RCO02 – Enterprises supported by grants</p> <p>RCO04 – Enterprises with non-financial support</p> <p>RCO57 – Capacity of environmentally friendly rolling stock for collective public transport</p> <p>PSO2 – Alternative fuels infrastructure (refuelling/ recharging points)</p>	<p>RCR29 – Estimated greenhouse gas emissions</p> <p>RCR03 – Small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) introducing product or process innovation</p> <p>PSR3 – Annual active usage time of newly installed EV charging points</p>

6 REFERENCES

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022) Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning authorities.

EPA (2020) SEA Pack.

EPA (2015) Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Gonzalez, Therival, Gaughran and Bullock (2020) Guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statements and Monitoring.

Government of Ireland (2004) Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities.

APPENDIX A: SCOPING CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Comment ref.	Page of letter	Comment	How will this be addressed
EPA			
6th October 2022			
1	1	The Executive Summary of Ireland’s Environment - An Assessment-2020 and Chapter 16-Conclusions, sets out the “Key Environmental Messages for Ireland” that should be considered in preparing the Programme and the associated SEA Environmental Report.	Used in section 4.4.4
2	2	<p>Scope of the SEA</p> <p>The Programme should clearly set out the scope, remit and implementation related elements of the Programme. These will have implications for the SEA, in terms of guiding the level of assessment applicable at the appropriate level for the Programme. Where it is envisaged that measures proposed in the Programme will be implemented via other plans, which themselves have been or will be subject to SEA, this should be explained in the SEA Environmental Report and taken into account in the assessment.</p>	Noted
3	2	Where specific measures will be implemented directly, further detail should be provided in the SEA Environmental Report and Programme on the relevant environmental assessments to be carried out at the project stage and relevant mitigation measures to be applied, as appropriate. There may be merit in exploring this issue further with the relevant Environmental Authorities during the Programme-preparation and SEA processes.	Noted
4	2	<p>Relevant plans and programmes</p> <p>The Programme should ensure that it aligns with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, such as those included in the Climate Action Plan 2021 (and any subsequent annual updates), as well as any relevant sectoral, regional and local adaptation plans.</p>	Climate action plan references in Programme and in SEA documents

5	3	Some key plans and programmes in Ireland to consider, where relevant and appropriate, include the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, Grid 25 Implementation Plan, National River Basin Management Plan for Ireland, National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport, National Adaptation Framework, National Peatland Strategy, National Marine Planning Framework, Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan, Draft Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Framework (under preparation), National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies.	P+P included where appropriate.
6	3	Integration with other key Plans and Programmes We recommend including schematics in the Programme and SEA Environmental Report, showing the links and key inter-relationships with other key relevant national, regional, sectoral and environmental plans.	Noted
7	3	Some plans to consider include the Renewable Electricity Spatial Policy Framework (DECC, in prep), Ireland's 4th Biodiversity Action Plan (NPWS, in prep.), Cycle Connects (NTA, in prep) and National Water Resources Management Plan (Irish Water). The relevant flood risk management plans prepared as part of the national CFRAMS programme could also be useful to consider.	P+P included where appropriate.
8	3	The integration of the SEA process into the Programme should reflect the overall objective of the SEA Directive "to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes".	Noted
9	3	All recommendations from the SEA and AA processes, including mitigation measures and monitoring proposals, should be integrated into the Programme. We recommend that the Programme includes summary tables outlining the key findings of the SEA and linking the significant environmental effects identified to the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring programme and Programme objectives/measures.	Programme related (Noted)
10	4	The SEA Environmental Report and the Programme should consider including a chapter outlining how the recommendations and mitigation measures from the SEA have been incorporated into the Programme. We recommend that the SEA Environmental Report includes summary tables outlining the key findings of the SEA and linking the significant environmental effects identified to the proposed mitigation measures, monitoring programme and, where relevant, Programme objectives/measures.	This will be outlined where relevant in the SEA Statement

11	4	<p>Monitoring, Review & Reporting The Programme should include a commitment to implement the environmental monitoring programme and associated reporting. We suggest including a separate section on ‘Monitoring, Review and Reporting’ in the Programme, setting out the provisions for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Programme and periodic reviews. There may be merits in aligning the periodic reviews of the Programme with existing cyclical reporting e.g. Ireland’s Environment, National Planning Framework, Water Framework Directive, Marine Strategy Framework Directive etc.</p>	Programme related (Noted)
12	4	<p>In between review periods for the Programme we recommend that Programme-related implementation reports are published annually, or biennially, as appropriate. We recommend aligning the Programme implementation monitoring/reporting with the environmental monitoring required under the SEA legislation. Doing so would enable the environmental performance of the Programme to be evaluated and would also provide for increased transparency during implementation.</p>	Programme related (Noted)
13	4	<p>The SEA-related monitoring should address positive, negative and cumulative effects where they are likely to occur and should include provision for on-going review to facilitate an early response to any environmental issues that may arise. The Environmental Report should specify the monitoring frequency and responsibilities and include provisions for reporting on the monitoring. To avoid duplication in data collection, the same indicators could be used for the Programme-related and SEA-related monitoring where possible.</p>	Monitoring guidance noted
14	4	<p>Data & Knowledge Gaps The Programme should identify any significant data and knowledge gaps, include commitments to help address these on a priority basis during the implementation phase of the Programme. This is with a view to strengthening the evidence base for future reviews and iterations of the Programme.</p>	Noted

15	4	<p>Available Guidance & Resources</p> <p>Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEA process guidance and checklists <p>You can access these guidance notes and other SEA resources at: https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance-/ Integrating climatic factors into SEA (EPA, 2019), Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA (EPA, 2015), and Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment (EPA, 2012)),</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA, - topic specific SEA guidance (including Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment (EPA, 2020), Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring (EPA, 2020). 	Noted
16	5	<p>Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Webtool</p> <p>The ESM Webtool is a decision support tool to assist SEA and planning processes in Ireland. The tool brings together over 100 datasets and allows users to explore environmental considerations within a particular area and create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners anticipate potential land-use conflicts and help identify suitable development locations, while also protecting the environment. The ESM Webtool is available at www.enviromap.ie.</p>	Noted
17	5	<p>EPA SEA WebGIS Tool</p> <p>Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now publicly available at https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA. It allows public authorities to produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.</p>	Noted
18	5	<p>EPA WFD Application</p> <p>Our WFD Application provides access to water quality and catchment data from the national WFD monitoring programme. The Application is accessed through the www.catchments.ie website.</p>	Noted

19	5	<p>EPA AA GeoTool</p> <p>Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the NPWS. It allows users to select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool.</p>	Noted
20	5	<p>State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020</p> <p>Our State of Environment Report, Ireland’s Environment - An Integrated Assessment 2020 (SOER2020) should be considered, in preparing the Programme and SEA as relevant and appropriate. It identifies thirteen Key Messages for Ireland. Delivering Ireland’s long-term sustainable development and environmental protection goals will require a concerted effort by government departments to address these key actions. The report recognises the need for full implementation of existing environmental legislation and review of governance/coordination on environmental protection across public bodies.</p>	Used in section 4.4.4 of ER.
21	6	<p>In finalising the Programme and integrating the findings of the SEA into the Programme, the relevant recommendations, key issues and challenges described in the EPAs SOER2020 should be taken into account.</p>	Used in section 4.4.4 of ER.
22	6	<p>Consultation with the Environmental Authorities</p> <p>Under the SEA Regulations, you should consult with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection Agency; • Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; • Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; • Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. 	All consulted
23	6	<p>Where transboundary consultation on the Programme and SEA is considered, this should take account of the SEA Protocol consultation requirements.</p>	Noted
Geological Survey Ireland (GSI) (DECC)			
25-Oct-22			
24	1	<p>Geological Survey Ireland would encourage use of and reference to our datasets. This data can add to the content and robustness of the SEA process. We note an absence of reference to or use of Geological Survey Ireland data throughout the SEA report.</p>	Noted

25	1	<p>With this in mind please find attached a list of our publicly available datasets that may be useful to the environmental assessment and planning process. We recommend that you review this list and refer to any datasets you consider relevant to your assessment. The remainder of this letter and following sections provide more detail on some of these datasets which would be of benefit to section 4 in particular of your SEA report.</p>	Noted dataset reviewed
26	1	<p>Geoheritage Geological Survey Ireland is in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage), to identify and select important geological and geomorphological sites throughout the country for designation as geological NHAs (Natural Heritage Areas). This is addressed by the Geoheritage Programme of Geological Survey Ireland, under 16 different geological themes, in which the minimum number of scientifically significant sites that best represent the theme are rigorously selected by a panel of theme experts.</p> <p>County Geological Sites (CGSs), as adopted under the National Heritage Plan, include additional sites that may also be of national importance, but which were not selected as the very best examples for NHA designation. All geological heritage sites identified by Geological Survey Ireland are categorised as CGS pending any further NHA designation by NPWS. CGSs are now routinely included in County Development Plans and in the GIS of planning departments, to ensure the recognition and appropriate protection of geological heritage within the planning system. CGSs can be viewed online under the Geological Heritage tab on the online Map Viewer.</p>	Noted
27	1	<p>County Geological Sites have been adopted in the National Heritage Plan, and will form a major strand of geological nature conservation to complement the various ecological and cultural conservation measures. It is important to note however, that management issues for the majority of geological heritage sites may differ from ecological sites, and in some cases development may facilitate enhanced geological understanding of a site by exposing more rock sections - for example, in a quarry extension. Consultation at the earliest stages can identify any issues relevant to an individual site or proposed development.</p>	Noted - No individual sites or development location known at this level of assessment.

28	2	<p>Culture and Tourism I note your reference to UNESCO word Heritage sites however, over the past number of years geology has become a large part of Irish tourism. Ireland currently has three UNESCO Global Geoparks, and a number of other geotourism projects. The Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark in Fermanagh and Cavan seek to promote geotourism in these counties. These Geoparks, along with other tourism initiatives such as the Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Ancient East, and Irelands Hidden Heartlands have bolstered tourism in various parts of Ireland and helped to increase its levels in areas that were previously not as popular with tourists. We would encourage the Eastern and Midland Regional Programme to continue this trend, and to use the geological audit information making it easily available to the general public. We would encourage geology to be a significant part of any tourism or economic initiative that may be introduced.</p>	Noted added to baseline section in ER.
	2	<p>Groundwater Geological Survey Ireland’s Groundwater and Geothermal Unit, provides advice, data and maps relating to groundwater distribution, quality and use, which is especially relevant for safe and secure drinking water supplies and healthy ecosystems. Proposed developments need to consider any potential impact on specific groundwater abstractions and on groundwater resources in general. We recommend using the groundwater maps on our Map viewer which should include: wells; drinking water source protection areas; the national map suite - aquifer, groundwater vulnerability, groundwater recharge and subsoil permeability maps. For areas underlain by limestone, please refer to the karst specific data layers (karst features, tracer test database; turlough water levels (gwlevel.ie). Background information is also provided in the Groundwater Body Descriptions. Please read all disclaimers carefully when using Geological Survey Ireland data.</p>	Noted - No individual sites or development location known at this level of assessment.
29	3	<p>Geohazards Geohazards can cause widespread damage to landscapes, wildlife, human property and human life. In Ireland, landslides, flooding and coastal erosion are the most prevalent of these hazards. We recommend that geohazards be taken into consideration, especially when developing areas where these risks are prevalent, and we encourage the use of our data when doing so.</p>	Noted

30	4	<p>Natural Resources (Minerals/Aggregates)</p> <p>Geological Survey Ireland is of the view that the sustainable development of our natural resources should be an integral part of all development plans from a national to regional to local level to ensure that the materials required for our society are available when required. Geological Survey Ireland highlights the consideration of mineral resources and potential resources as a material asset which should be explicitly recognised within the environmental assessment process.</p>	<p>Material assets forms part of the SEA assessment.</p>
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APPENDIX B: ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation Responses			
Comment ref.	Page of letter	Comment	How has this be addressed?
Organisation: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)			
Date received: 24th November 2022			
1	1	The layout and content of the Environmental Report is well laid out and easy to follow.	Noted.
2	2	The EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027 and accompanying Environmental Report have been made available to designated authorities, transboundary bodies, and the public. However, DAERA note that previous consultations, including the SEA screening and scoping have not been made available to DAERA for consideration.	Noted.
3	2	DAERA note that while the provisional identified areas do not abut Northern Ireland, potential for transboundary should be highlight particularly if later other areas are identified.	Noted.
4	2	DAERA request that should any further recommendations which are likely to impact Northern Ireland be included, then DAERA should be re-consulted.	Noted.
Organisation: Natural Environment Division (NED) (Via DAERA)			
5	2	NED note that the SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Statement for the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027 is limited to within Ireland and welcome the acknowledgement and consideration of transboundary environmental effects within the SEA.	Noted.
6	2	NED, however, also reiterates wider DAERA comments outlined above in relation to the lack of comments on transboundary impacts within the	Text added regarding monitoring of transboundary effects to 6.9.3 of the ER.

		monitoring measures section. NED also recommends that monitoring should consider any potential transboundary effects.	
7	2	NED acknowledge that the specific locations for environmental effects from the EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-2027 are unknown at this stage and as such no detailed, site-specific environmental assessment is therefore currently possible.	Noted.
8	2	Full assessment relating to the types of impacts and effects will have to be undertaken when specific project details and locations are known.	The Programme states: At the project level, all applications for development consents for activities that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment must be accompanied by the following, as relevant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEA Environmental Report • Flood Risk Assessment • Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report • Appropriate Assessment
9	3	NED notes that in relation to JTF 2 that works could potentially take place outwith the territory's boundary and therefore closer to Northern Ireland. NED also notes that impacts in relation to JTF 2 have been assessed as being of major/moderately beneficial.	Noted.
10	3	Further, NED notes within Section 6.9 that projects funded under JTF1 are less likely to be located near the border and that any impacts are considered minor adverse. However, NED note that there is therefore the potential for works to take place near or on the border with Northern Ireland albeit less likely. NED therefore welcomes comments made within Section 6.9.3 of the Environmental Report that projects funded under the programme will need to comply with cross jurisdiction environmental legislation and must act in accordance with EU and national environmental assessment requirements and legislation, specifically AA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), within the jurisdiction of which they fall.	Noted.

11	3	As such NED advise that any further guidance developed could benefit from engagement with relevant NI authorities and stakeholders. NED are of the opinion that there should be a solid commitment within the SEA report and the Natura Impact Assessment to consult with the relevant authorities in NI at project level should transboundary effects be identified or likely.	Text added to section 6.9.3 of the ER to reiterate transboundary authorities should be consulted at project level where necessary.
12	3	NED also advises that the SEA should consider mobile and migratory species which form part of Northern Irish populations. As it is unclear on the geographical location of plans resulting from the program the precautionary principle must be adhered to, and consideration must be made in respect to mobile and migratory species such as salmon and protected bird species.	There are no significant adverse effects anticipated on ecology and nature conservation within Ireland or Northern Ireland. Irrespective of this, support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.
13	3	NED notes within Appendix B which details the strategy's relationship with legislation and other plans and programmes that no Northern Ireland legislation or programs have been included. Given that details are not available at present in relation to projects which could result from the programme and therefore potential impacts within Northern Ireland the following should be included as part of the SEA Environmental Report:	Updated plans and programmes section to include NI where relevant.

14	4	<p>It may be worth including in your considerations the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wildlife (NI) Order 1985 (as amended) • Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (NI) 2011 • The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) • The Environment (NI) Order 2002 • The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 • The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland • Planning Policy Statements (PPS – in particular PPS2 and PPS18). It should be noted that the PPS’s will be superseded by Local Development Plans when they are adopted. • Biodiversity Strategy for NI to 2020 https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/biodiversity-strategy-northern-ireland-2020-0 • Draft Environment Strategy https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/esni-public-discussion-document • The Draft NI peatland policy: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/ni-peatland-strategy-consultation. • The Draft Green Growth Strategy Consultation on the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk) • Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050 Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050 Department for the Economy (economy-ni.gov.uk) 	Updated plans and programmes section to include NI where relevant.
15	4	<p>NED acknowledges receipt of the Natura Impact Statement (NIS). NED notes that the area in which the works are to take place for JTF1 and JTF3 are within the territorial boundary as shown within Figure 1 of the NIS. However, within Section 6.9 of the SEA Environmental Report it states that projects funded within JTF1 are less likely to be located near the border and that any impacts are considered minor adverse.</p>	Noted.

16	4 & 5	However, at this stage they cannot be ruled out. Works under JTF2 which are defined as Supporting the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets, may potentially take place outwith this boundary and therefore potentially closer to Northern Ireland. NED acknowledge that it is difficult at this stage to know the geographical extent of works in relation to JTF1 & JTF2 and therefore the distance of any works from Northern Ireland.	Noted.
17	5	NED therefore recommend that due to this ambiguity in relation to the location of works and adhering to the precautionary principle the boundary of the territory and therefore the Zone of Influence should be amended to reflect the potential greatest extent of works and therefore include and assess the additional Natura 2000 sites as part of the NIS. NED also notes that this could require amendments to Appendix A which lists European Sites. NED also notes that migratory species have been mentioned only in relation to aquatic species. NED advise that migratory species are not limited to aquatic species and that the NIS should be amended to reflect this.	While there is the potential for peatland restoration occurring along the boundary of the JTF Territory to extend into adjacent areas; the 15km zone of influence would encompass any potential impacts that could arise from the types of projects coming forward for funding through JTF2. Reference to other types of migratory species add to the NIS, as appropriate.
18	5	NED however, does acknowledge that transboundary issues have been considered throughout the NIS. NED advises that should the NIS change in respect to impacts upon Northern Irish European Designated sites then NED should be re-consulted.	Noted.
Organisation: Water Management Unit Comments (Via DAERA)			
19	5	The Programme covers the JTF Territory, which does not border Northern Ireland. However JTF2 may also extend to include the restoration and rehabilitation of peatland sites adjacent to the Programme Territory, which may be closer to the Northern Ireland border.	Noted, see below.

20	5	<p>If this is the case the SEA should consider any potential transboundary issues, including the potential disturbance to/impact on NI/ROI migratory/mobile species such as salmon. Such species rely and can be impacted by water quality and water resource issues.</p>	<p>Transboundary effects were considered throughout the SEA and NIS. Restoration under JTF2 including drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017. Where relevant, the standard of rehabilitation shall be agreed with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the designated State body for the implementation of National and EU legislation and policies for nature conservation and biodiversity. There were no significant adverse effects anticipated from JTF2 on water or ecology and nature conservation.</p>
21	6	<p>Cross border river basins require special attention as ecological functionality cross jurisdictional boundaries. The SEA should consider all potential impacts including those which may impact Northern Ireland both directly and indirectly.</p>	<p>The SEA found no significant adverse effects on water or ecology and nature conservation either in Ireland or Northern Ireland. At the project level, all applications for development consents for activities that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment must be accompanied by the following, as relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEA Environmental Report • Flood Risk Assessment • Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report • Appropriate Assessment

22	6	DAERA has published the Draft River Basin Management Plan for the 3rd cycle period which runs from 2021-2027 which should also be considered as part of the assessment. The draft plan provides an update on the health of Northern Ireland's water environment (the status of water bodies) and sets out our targets (objectives) and actions (programme of measures) on how we want to improve our water environment in the next six years. The draft plan covers the North Western, Neagh Bann and North Eastern river basin districts (RBD) and includes detailed status updates on each RBD.	The plan has been considered as part of the SEA assessment.
23	6	The documents can be downloaded from the consultation webpage: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-draft-3rd-cycle-river-basin-management-plan-2021-2027 It should be noted that the finalised 3rd Cycle River Basin Management Plans are due to be published later in 2022.	Noted.
24	6	A number of useful information sources are available that highlight the current state of the environment in Northern Ireland at a regional level which could be referenced including: Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Reports: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report	Noted.
Organisation: Marine and Fisheries Division (Via DAERA)			
25	7	Marine Conservation Response MCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly- EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-27 and where the proposals are in close proximity to Carlingford Lough the following should be considered: Marine Protected Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carlingford Lough SPA and Carlingford Marine pSPA, which are designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended); • Carlingford Lough MCZ, which is designated under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013; • Carlingford Lough ASSI, which is declared under the Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002, and 	Given the inland location/size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding, impacts on marine sites/ marine mammals have not been considered in the assessment.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carlingford Lough Ramsar site, which is designated under the Ramsar Convention. 	
26	7	<p>Furthermore, recent advice, relating to MPAs which have marine mammals as a site selection feature, recommends the following ranges should be used when considering for either Harbour (Phoca vitulina) or Grey seals (Halichoerus grypus) and Harbour porpoise (Phocoena phocoena):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all SACs within 100km of the project should be screened for Grey seals (Halichoerus grypus) • all SACs within 50km should be screened for Harbour seals (Phoca vitulina) • all SACs within 100km should be screened for Harbour porpoise (Phocoena phocoena) 	
27	8	Therefore, Murlough SAC and Strangford Lough SAC should be considered for Harbour seal and the North Channel SAC should be considered for Harbour porpoise. Please refer to the DAERA Marine Map Viewer for details.	
28	8	<p>Marine Species</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Priority Species List can be viewed here: https://www.daerani.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doe/northern-ireland-priority-specieslist.pdf</p>	Noted.
29	8	<p>Seascape</p> <p>The Newry Estuary Regional Seascape Character Area and the Carlingford Lough Regional Seascape Character Area should be considered.</p> <p>In accordance with the UK Marine Policy Statement 2.6.5.3 and 4, in considering the impact of an activity or development on seascape, the public authority should take into account existing character and quality, how highly it is valued and its capacity to accommodate change specific to any development.</p>	Any developments flowing from the Programme will be within the JTF boundary which does not include coastal area. Restoration and regeneration under JTF2 may extend beyond this boundary however overall beneficial effects are anticipated.
30	8	Please refer to the DAERA Marine Map Viewer for details and Northern Ireland Regional Seascape Character Assessment.	Noted.

31	13	<p>The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 Marine Policy Statement 2011 The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland (consultation 2018) Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 An Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy for Northern Ireland 2006-2026</p>	<p>The JTF boundary does not include coastal or marine areas. Added to Plans and Programmes assessment where relevant.</p>
32	14	<p>Marine Litter Marine litter is defined as items arising from human activity, deliberately discarded or unintentionally lost, that end up in the sea and on beaches and coastlines. Marine litter is any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material discarded, disposed of or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment. Marine litter can cause significant impacts to marine ecosystems, including direct damage to wildlife through entanglement, entrapment and/ or ingestion and can also destroy coastal habitats, by interfering with biological production and smothering of the seabed.</p>	<p>The JTF boundary does not include coastal or marine areas.</p>
33	14	<p>Policy Requirement – Marine litter considerations The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, as amended, impose a general duty on government departments to take measures to achieve good environmental status in marine waters. They also place a duty on public authorities to have regard to the UK Marine Strategy which has been developed in accordance with the Regulations when exercising their functions. The objective of the UK Marine Strategy is to achieve good environmental status in marine waters. In respect of marine litter, this is ensuring that the properties and quantities of marine litter do not cause harm to the coastal and marine environments.</p>	<p>The JTF boundary does not include coastal or marine areas.</p>
<p>Organisation: EPA</p>			
<p>Date received: 24th November 2022</p>			

34	2	<p>Comments on the Programme</p> <p>In addition to supporting achievement of the Programme objectives and priorities, the Programme should consider and promote compliance with the requirements of the relevant environmental European directives (Water Framework, Floods Directive, Waste Framework, Air Quality, Habitats, Birds, Floods, SEA, EIA, etc), EU environmental legislation and relevant international environmental commitments, in implementing projects supported by this Programme.</p>	<p>All envisaged operations will be reviewed to ensure that they promote compliance with the requirements of the relevant environmental European directives (Water Framework, Floods Directive, Waste Framework, Air Quality, Habitats, Birds, Floods, SEA, EIA, etc), EU environmental legislation and relevant international environmental commitments.</p>
35	2	<p>We also suggest linking the SEA environmental monitoring and Programme related monitoring and reporting. This would allow the potential for likely significant effects, including cumulative effects, to be identified during Programme implementation and appropriate remedial action to be undertaken where necessary.</p>	<p>SEA environmental monitoring and Programme related monitoring and reporting will be linked to allow the potential for likely significant effects, including cumulative effects, to be identified during Programme implementation and appropriate remedial action to be undertaken where necessary. To facilitate this approach and in line with horizontal principles, membership of the Programme Monitoring Committee will include appropriate expertise drawn from a relevant government department or state agency.</p>
36	2	<p>Some key relevant plans and programmes in Ireland, at national and regional level to consider where appropriate, include the Climate Action Plan 2021, National Adaptation Framework (2018), Grid 25 Implementation Plan (2019), National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport (2017), National Hazardous Waste Management Plan (2021), Nitrates Action Programme¹, the Rural Development Programme, Food Wise 2025, National Peatlands Strategy, the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan and the National Biodiversity Action Plan. Over the lifetime of the Programme, any updated iterations of these plans/programmes/strategies should be taken into consideration, as appropriate.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>

37	2	<p>Additionally, the relevant flood risk management plans prepared as part of the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management Study programme should also be considered where appropriate.</p>	<p>Noted, flood risk assessments to be undertaken at the project stage where necessary.</p>
38	2	<p>You should consider the EU Life ‘Peatlands & People’ Project in finalising and in implementing the Programme. This significant project looks to support the realisation of a carbon-neutral, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable country. One of the Pillars of the project is to work to develop a world-class sustainable visitor attraction in Ireland’s Midlands. Set on the peatlands, the vision for the visitor experience is to be a transformative hub and showcase for climate solutions and sustainability, as well as providing an exhibition centre for community, ecological and economic change. Further information is available at: Ireland’s Climate Action Catalyst Peatlands & People (peatlandsandpeople.ie)</p>	<p>The Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) contains the following text "The EU LIFE Peatlands and People Programme is developing a regional Peatlands Knowledge Centre of Excellence, a Just Transition Accelerator, Accelerate Green, to support enterprise development in the region, and an immersive People’s Discovery Attraction. EU JTF supports to rural SMEs and wetlands restoration is complementary to the EU LIFE programme. The actions revolving around wetlands restoration supported by the JTF, including restoration measures and some research activities on carbon sequestration can add value to the work carried out by the EU LIFE project." All envisaged operations implemented under the Programme will be reviewed to ensure that they demonstrate complementarities with other forms of support from the EU, as well as national and regional support as set out in the TJTP.</p>
39	2	<p>Comments on the SEA Environmental Report We note the SEA recommendations presented in Section 7 of the SEA, which cover both recommendations for the Programme, and recommendations associated with its implementation. We recommend that in finalising the Programme, the SEA recommendations are reflected in the Programme.</p>	<p>EMRA considers that all recommendations presented in Section 7 of the SEA are already included in the Programme scope and that further definition will only emerge at the implementation stage. As stated at 7.4.3. the recommendations proposed recognise that the Programme is limited in scope and funding availability and therefore only measures considered to be realistic in terms of funding</p>

			<p>provision and consistent with wider Programme objectives are proposed.</p> <p>Furthermore, as stated in the programme text "[a]ny reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity as a minimum), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required."</p>
40	3	<p>Integration of environmental considerations</p> <p>In finalising the Programme, we recommend that a summary the key recommendations from the SEA (and AA) and how they have been considered and integrated into the Programme as an additional appendix.</p>	<p>A summary of the key recommendations from the SEA (and AA) and how they have been considered will be included as part of the SEA Statement which will be published after the adoption of the Programme.</p>
41	3	<p>Programme implementation, monitoring and review</p> <p>We note that the Programme covers a timeframe out to 2027. We recommend that periodic reviews of the Programme are carried out to report on progress implementing the Programme to achieve the Programme objectives.</p>	<p>The Programme Monitoring Committee will meet at least once a year to review progress in programme implementation. It will make recommendations to accommodate new challenges impacting programme implementation, monitor progress in achieving milestones and targets and measures taken to address issues.</p>

42	3	The Programme implementation, monitoring and reporting should be aligned with the environmental monitoring required under the SEA legislation, and as set out in the SEA Environmental Report. This will assist in enabling the environmental performance of the Programme to be evaluated as part of the periodic reviews.	The programme performance will be reviewed annually along with environmental monitoring.
43	3	State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2020 In preparing the Programme and associated SEA, the recommendations, key issues and challenges described in our State of the Environment Report Ireland’s Environment – An integrated Assessment 2020 (EPA, 2020) should be considered, as relevant and appropriate to the Programme.	The report has been utilised as part of the SEA.
44	4	SEA Mitigation Measures We note the proposed mitigation measures as set out in Section 7 of the SEA. In finalising and implementing the Programme, the proposed mitigation measures and recommendations arising from the SEA, including the proposed enhancement measures set out in Section 7.4 – Environmental Enhancements should be fully incorporated into the Programme and reflected in the various projects arising out of its implementation.	The EMRA will monitor the implementation of environmental enhancement measures set out in subsection 7.4-Environmental Enhancements by building this into performance reporting by the beneficiaries as appropriate. This reporting will be aggregated and communicated to meetings of the Programme Monitoring Committee.
45	4	In subsection 7.3.5 (Minimising Adverse Effects), we note that increased visitor numbers to peatland areas could have adverse effects. In this context, we suggest that Fáilte Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Visitor Management Plan and Waterways Ireland Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon might also be useful to consider, regarding tourism activities in proximity to peatland areas, within the Programme area.	EMRA to consult with Fáilte Ireland when considering visitor number monitoring where appropriate.
46	4	Additionally, the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (currently under preparation by the NPWS), the National Peatland Strategy and the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan should be taken into account. In addition, the Bord Na Mona Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2021 (and subsequent updates that may occur over the lifetime of the Programme) should also be taken into account.	Noted.

47	4	<p>Monitoring Programme</p> <p>We note that Section 8 (Monitoring) of the SEA sets out the proposed monitoring for the Programme and acknowledge that a programme monitoring committee to be established will be a key element in reviewing the Programme Implementation. We also note that subsection 8.1.3 (Monitoring Proposals) describes that no significant adverse residual effects are anticipated, however there are uncertainties given projects that may arise out of implementation of the Programme not being defined.</p>	Noted.
48	4	<p>The monitoring programme should nonetheless consider describing some key environmental monitoring criteria, where the potential for likely significant effects has been identified or are uncertain. There is merit in considering water quality, biodiversity, air quality, population and human health related monitoring criteria. Additionally, the amount of land-take in peat-soil areas for developments funded by the Programme, may have implications for carbon sequestration potential, so in this context, considering monitoring changes in land use in these areas might also be useful to consider.</p>	Monitoring proposals updated with key environmental monitoring criteria. It is not proposed that developments funded by the programme will result in land take of peat soils.
49	4	<p>The monitoring programme should take account of other relevant monitoring and reporting carried out by other agencies, departments etc, however, the monitoring programme should provide some detail on whether this is proposed.</p>	Noted.
50	4	<p>The EPA has published guidance on SEA-related monitoring is available on the EPA website at https://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/ea/guidanceonseastatementsandmonitoring.html</p>	Noted.
51	5	<p>The monitoring programme should be flexible enough to consider specific environmental issues and unforeseen adverse impacts should they arise. It should also consider and address the possibility of cumulative effects. Monitoring of both positive and negative effects of implementing the Programme should be considered. The monitoring programme should set out the various data sources and responsibilities and should specify the frequency of monitoring for all relevant criteria, where possible.</p>	Noted.

52	5	If the monitoring programme identifies adverse impacts during the implementation of the Programme, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly should ensure that suitable and effective remedial action is taken. Provisions should be included for the reporting on environmental monitoring also.	Noted by EMRA and added to section 8.1.4 of the ER.
53	5	There is merit in also considering taking account of Fáilte Ireland's proposed monitoring programme for Ireland's Draft Hidden Heartlands Visitor Management Plan, as there maybe aspects of relevance, regarding recreation and visitor movements and activities at peatland locations.	EMRA to consult with Fáilte Ireland when considering visitor number monitoring where appropriate.
54	5	<p>Green Procurement Considerations</p> <p>We recommend that the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly consider including a commitment in the Programme, to promote sustainable and green project level procurement practices, for any projects arising out of implementing the Programme. This would help to integrate sustainable and green procurement considerations and look for opportunities to progress national commitments regarding action on climate change and biodiversity and promoting a more circular economy. The EPA's Green Public Procurement Guidance (EPA, 2021) may be useful to consider in this regard.</p>	The programme text states that "When feasible, environmental and social considerations as well as innovation incentives will be incorporated into public procurement procedures." In line with the stated environmental commitments of the Programme as set out in Section 1 (Programme strategy), the EMRA will apply sustainable and green project level procurement practices according to the EPA's Green Public Procurement Guidance (EPA, 2021) and will promote same to Programme beneficiaries.
55	5	<p>Future Amendments to the Programme</p> <p>You should screen any future amendments to the Programme for likely significant effects, using the same method of assessment applied in the "environmental assessment" of the Programme, in accordance with the requirements of the SEA Directive.</p>	Noted, any further revisions would be reassessed where appropriate.

56	5	<p>SEA Statement – “Information on the Decision”</p> <p>Once the Programme is adopted, you should prepare an SEA Statement that summarises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How environmental considerations have been integrated into the Programme; • How the Environmental Report, submissions, observations and consultations have been taken into account during the preparation of the Programme; • The reasons for choosing the Programme adopted in the light of other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and, • The measures decided upon to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementation of the Programme. 	<p>An SEA Statement is in preparation and will be published alongside the Programme post-adoption.</p>
57	6	<p>You should send a copy of the SEA Statement with the above information to any environmental authority consulted during the SEA process.</p> <p>Environmental Authorities</p> <p>Under the SEA Regulations, you should consult with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection Agency; • Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; • Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; and • Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine. 	<p>A copy of the SEA Statement will be sent to the environmental authorities by EMRA once the Programme is published.</p>
<p>Organisation and contact: Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.</p>			
<p>Date received: 29th November 2022</p>			
58	1	<p>The Department welcomes the proposed objectives and actions that will support the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded peatlands. In particular, the proposed support for feasibility and design studies including rehabilitation plans and for the support for restoration plans which are outside of existing funding programmes. The Department also recognises the proposal that where relevant, the standard of the “enhanced rehabilitation” shall be agreed with the National Parks and Wildlife Service.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>

59	1 & 2	<p>The Department agrees with the identification of potential significant effects of the proposed actions on biodiversity and nature conservation issues. In particular, it is noted that there is a risk of disturbance to sensitive species and habitats within sites of nature conservation importance as a result of increasing recreational use of such sites. Nevertheless, it is noted that the proposed mitigation measures proposed in the Programme and described in the SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Statement will be adequate to address such potential impacts providing that they are implemented as full.</p>	Noted.
60	2	<p>The Department welcomes the following key measures that are proposed in the Programme: “At the project level, all applications for development consents for activities that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment must be accompanied by the following, as relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ecological Impact Assessment Report (EclA) · Environmental Report · Environmental Impact Assessment Report · Natura Impact Statement. <p>Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ that has no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, the protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity as a minimum), environmental assessment including EclA to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.”</p>	Noted
61	2	<p>It is imperative that such measures remain in the adopted Programme and are implemented in full. The Department also recommends that during the monitoring of the implementation of the Programme, that compliance with</p>	Noted.

		these requirements is measured and included in monitoring reports which are proposed.	
62	2	The Department notes that in the SEA Environmental Report, the proposed approach to addressing the statutory requirement for monitoring the environmental effects of the Programme is to ensure that projects funded by the Programme propose their own project scale monitoring. It is not clear if this proposed approach would meet the definition of monitoring the effects of the Programme itself. The Department recommends that the SEA Statement clarifies how this project-scale monitoring will allow monitoring of the overall effects of the Programme on the environment.	Project level environmental considerations including monitoring was suggested to add robustness to the project selection process. Environmental monitoring proposals have been amended and clarified within ER and Appendix E.
63	2	Furthermore, it is noted that the proposed monitoring of the implementation of the Programme as stated in Section 8 of the Environmental Report is intended to measure the roll-out of the Programme itself, rather than the environmental effects of the Programme, which is the statutory requirement in the context of the SEA.	Monitoring section covers both programme monitoring and amended environmental monitoring in Appendix E of the ER.
64	2	Finally, the Department notes that there is no reference in any of the documentation to the potential effects that the proposed EU Nature Restoration Law may have on the delivery of the objectives of the Programme. It is necessary that the implications of implementing the proposed Law, as currently drafted, are addressed prior to the adoption of the Programme.	There is no local legislation in Ireland to bring this into effect. Consultations and discussions on the development of the Programme included reference to and consideration of the potential effects of the proposed new EU Nature Restoration Law. However, as the law is in draft and not yet adopted, it was not considered appropriate to make direct reference to it in the Programme text.
65	2	You are requested to send any further communications to this Department's Development Applications Unit (DAU) at manager.dau@npws.gov.ie ,	Noted.