

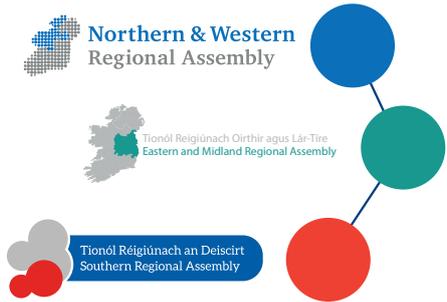


Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy

Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report



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



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1 INTRODUCTION

The Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is currently preparing a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The main statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of the draft National Planning Framework (NPF), also known as *Ireland 2040 - Our Plan*, and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the three regions: Eastern & Midland; Southern; and Northern & Western. The Eastern & Midland RSES will be a strategic plan which identifies regional assets, opportunities and pressures and will provide appropriate policy, objective and target responses. It will put in place policies and recommendations that will better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the region.

This Scoping Document forms part of the official Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping under S.I. 436 of 2004 as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011. The purpose of this scoping document is to provide preliminary information on the proposed Eastern & Midland RSES with a view to establishing the scope, level of detail and approach required for the SEA which will follow. It is intended that the information contained within the report will enable meaningful consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees in relation to the proposed Eastern & Midland RSES.

In parallel to the SEA scoping, the EMRA have published for consultation an Issues Paper which outlines the scope of issues to be addressed under the Eastern & Midland RSES. Further information on the Issues Paper can be found at: <http://emra.ie/regional-strategies/issues-paper/>.

1.1 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Strategic Environmental Assessment is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental consequences of implementing plan/ programme initiatives prepared by authorities at a national, regional or local level or which are prepared by an authority for adoption through legislative means. The purpose is to ensure that the environmental consequences of plans and programmes are assessed both during their preparation and prior to adoption. The SEA process also gives interested parties an opportunity to comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed plan or programme and to be kept informed during the decision making process.

The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004), as amended.

Under Article 3 of the Directive, an environmental assessment shall be carried out for plans and programmes, including those related to land use planning. SEA Screening was undertaken and it was determined that SEA of the Eastern & Midland RSES would be required (see **Section 3.1.1** for more information on the screening process). The next step in the SEA process requires definition of the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the SEA Environmental Report. This scoping is the focus of this report.

This Scoping Report has been prepared independently by RPS on behalf of the EMRA.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE EASTERN & MIDLAND RSES

2.1 BACKGROUND

Under the 2012 Government’s policy paper “*Putting People First*”, and the Local Government Reform Act 2014, the former two Regional Assemblies (RAs) and former eight Regional Authorities were reconfigured into three new RAs, namely the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA), and the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA). The main strategic planning functions of the RAs include the preparation and adoption of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs).

At a national level, the NPF replaces the National Spatial Strategy, first published in November 2002, and will form Ireland’s long-term strategy for the next 20 years which will set the groundwork for the spatial and economic development of Ireland. The NPF will lay the groundwork for a better quality of life for all and a basis for balanced and sustainable economic growth. It provides a focal point for spatial plans throughout the planning hierarchy, including the RSESs at the regional tier, and will assist in the achievement of more effective regional development. It will also coordinate the strategic planning of urban and rural areas in a regional development context to secure overall proper planning and development as well as co-ordination of the RSES’s. **Figure 2.1** shows Ireland’s planning hierarchy.

The current Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) have been a key aspect of the Government’s programme for spatial planning to date. New planning legislation under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) allows for the RSESs to replace the RPGs. The regional planning function will therefore be enhanced under the new RSESs through the inclusion of a significant economic strategy. The combined spatial and economic elements will establish a broad framework to allow for integrated local authority policy development and associated actions, outline the roles of government departments and other agencies, and to strengthen and clarify the role of local authorities in economic development and enterprise support/ promotion.

The Eastern & Midland RSES shall be prepared and adopted in accordance with the provision of Chapter III of Part II of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended).

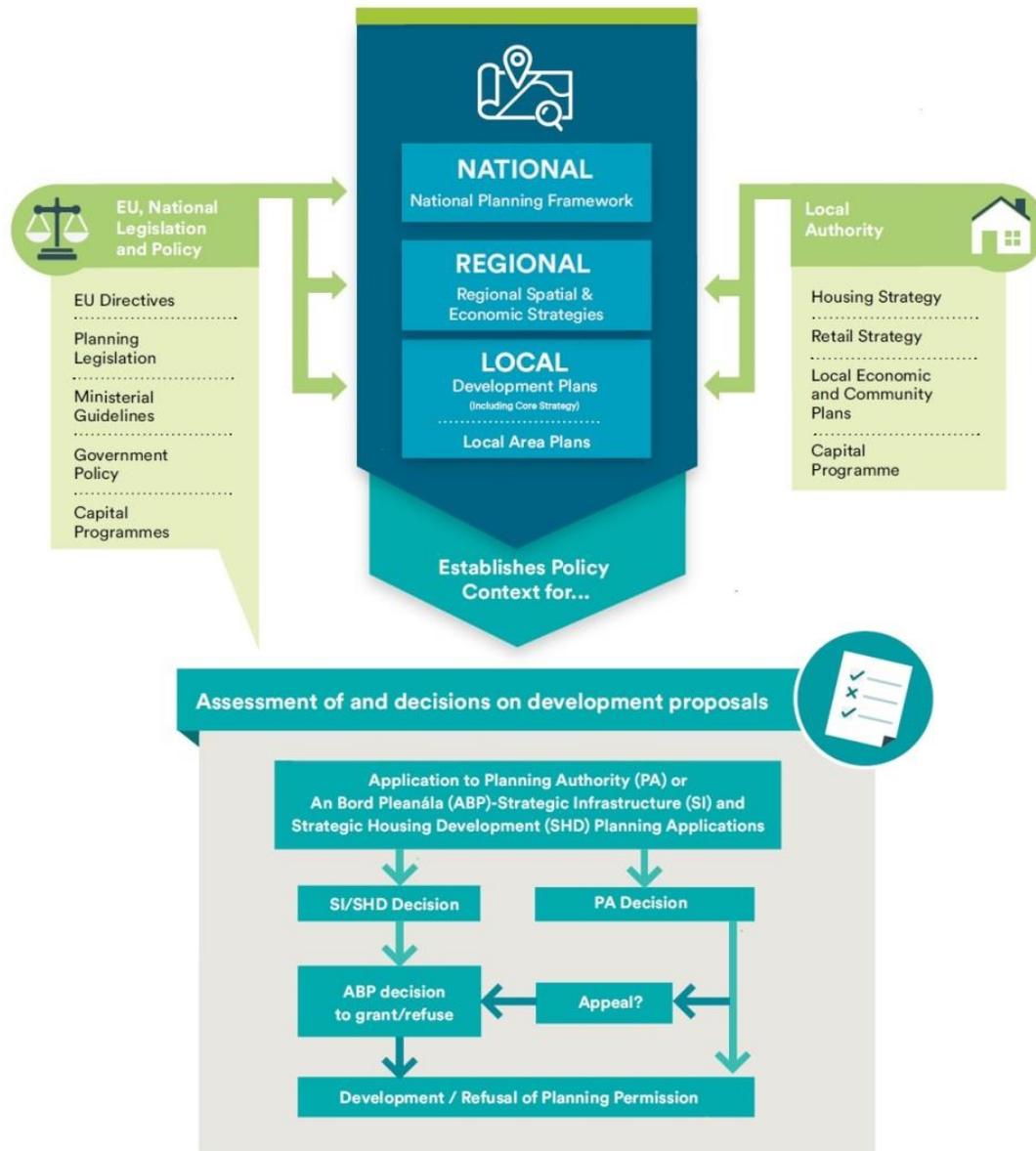


Figure 2.1 – Overview of Ireland’s Planning System¹

2.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE EASTERN & MIDLAND RSES

One of the principle functions of the Eastern & Midland RSES will be to practically support and advance the delivery of the national policy objectives contained in the NPF. The EMRA will bring forward the NPF in a manner which best reflects the challenges and opportunities of the region. It has been anticipated by the NPF that each of the three regional assemblies will begin to fill out the national policy objectives, in some cases giving them geographic or temporal context and in other cases elaborating on project concepts. The Eastern & Midland RSES will support the delivery of the NPF removing the top-down perception and replacing it with a shared responsibility and understanding.

¹ DHPLG (September 2017) Ireland 2040 Our Plan – Draft National Planning Framework

The Issues Paper for the Eastern & Midland RSES sets out its core functions, which includes:

- Placing strategic planning as its core function;
- Meeting the needs of the EMRA's citizens e.g. meeting the need to access employment opportunities, services, travel options and well-being;
- Taking account of national policy i.e. the NPF;
- Support, reflect and link economic policies/ government objectives with spatial planning objectives;
- Consider the qualities, population size, service offering and location of towns and cities in the region;
- Support balanced economic development building on the strengths of the region;
- Strengthen links between planning policy and economic trends; and
- Identifying important regional attributes to improve economic performance, the quality of the environment, and other assets/ amenities.

The draft NPF has also introduced a strategic focus on the five cities in Ireland and their metropolitan areas. Following direction from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans (MASPs) will be prepared for each of the five cities. In the case of the Eastern & Midland RSES, a MASP will be developed for Dublin. This MASP will be provided with statutory underpinning to act as a twelve-year strategic planning and investment framework for city metropolitan areas addressing high level and long term strategic development issues including:

- Physical development patterns and strategic growth areas.
- Strategic infrastructure, particularly in the transportation and water service area.
- Large scale regeneration and the location of housing and employment.
- Metropolitan scale amenities such as regional parks and walking and cycling networks.

It is intended that the Dublin MASP will align with and inform national level sectoral investment plans to guide and coordinate investment within the metropolitan area, coordinating land use planning and strategic infrastructure.

2.3 SUPPORTING STUDIES

In developing the RSES it will be important to establish a strong empirical evidence base to support policy formulation and implementation. Key aspects will include the development of economic and demographic projections based on past trends and the generation of a range of future spatial development scenarios. In addition to the Issues Paper, the EMRA has produced a Socio-Economic Evidence Baseline Report with input from the All Island Research Observatory (AIRO).²

² Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (November 2017) Socio-Economic Evidence Baseline Report

3 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

3.1 STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental quality and consequences of policy, plan or programme initiatives by statutory bodies. The purpose is to ensure that the environmental consequences of plans and programmes are assessed both during their preparation and prior to adoption. The SEA process also gives interested parties an opportunity to comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed plan or programme and to be kept informed during the decision making process.

The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004). Both pieces of legislation were amended in 2011 under S.I. 200/2011 and S.I. 201/2011. The SEA process is comprised of the following principle steps:

- Screening: Decision on whether or not an SEA of the Eastern & Midland RSES is required;
- Scoping: Consultation with the defined statutory bodies on the scope and level of detail to be considered in the assessment;
- Environmental Assessment: An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the Eastern & Midland RSES, leading to the production of an Environmental Report;
- Consultation on the draft Eastern & Midland RSES and associated Environmental Report;
- Evaluation of the submissions and observations made on the draft RSES and Environmental Report prior to finalising the Eastern & Midland RSES;
- Issuance of an SEA Statement identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the final Eastern & Midland RSES.

Figure 3.1 shows the key steps required to complete the statutory SEA process in accordance with the relevant national legislation.

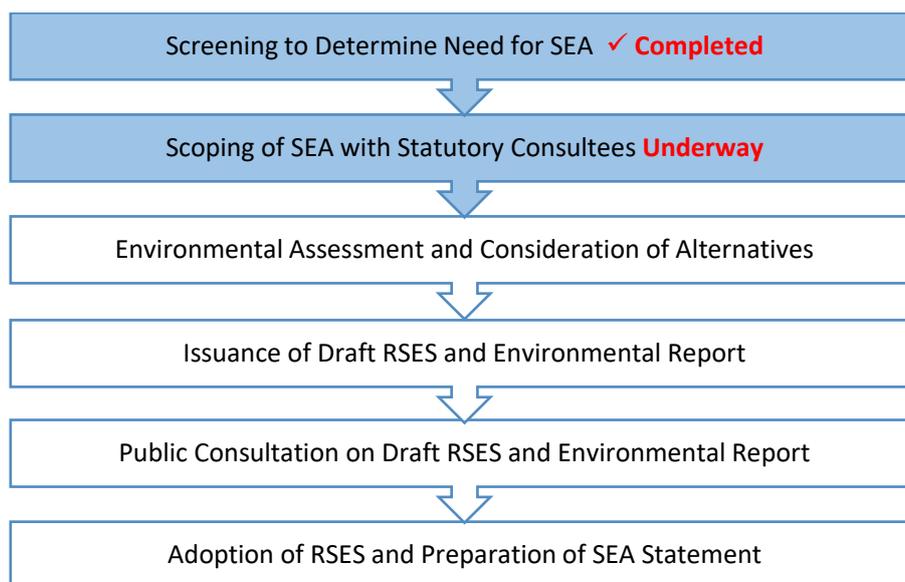


Figure 3.1 – Overview of SEA Process

3.1.1 SEA Screening Stage

The SEA Directive requires that certain plans and programmes, prepared by statutory bodies, which are likely to have a significant impact on the environment, be subject to the SEA process. It was determined that the administrative provisions of Article 10 of the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004) have been met and that an SEA is required on Eastern & Midland RSES.

3.1.2 SEA Scoping Stage

Under Article 6 of the SEA Directive, the competent authority preparing the plan or programme is required to consult with specific “environmental authorities” (statutory consultees) on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report. The competent authority in relation to the Eastern & Midland RSES is the EMRA. The statutory consultees for SEA are established within the national legislation. It is noted however that a number of government departments have changed name and certain responsibilities have migrated between these newly named departments. The SEA legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these changes however, for clarity the relevant new department is noted in the **Table 3.1**.

Table 3.1 – Statutory Consultees for SEA

Statutory Consultees under National SEA Legislation	Newly Named Departments
Environmental Protection Agency	N/A
Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG)	Department of the Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG)
	Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG)	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG)

Statutory Consultees under National SEA Legislation	Newly Named Departments
Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR)	Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCAE)
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)	N/A

The need for transboundary consultation has been identified within the SEA process and this scoping documentation will therefore be sent to the relevant authority for SEA in Northern Ireland: Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA).

The main objective of scoping is to identify key issues of concern that should be addressed in the assessment of the plan and the appropriate level of detail to which they should be considered. The scoping exercise should answer the following questions:

- *What are the relevant significant issues to be addressed by the SEA?*
- *Against what environmental objectives should the potential options be evaluated?*

While the issuance of a Scoping Report is not a formal requirement of the SEA Regulations, it is recommended as good practice. A Scoping Report can inform stakeholders about the key environmental issues and the key elements of the plan/ programme/ strategy. In addition, the Scoping Report can be used as a tool to generate comments from stakeholders on the scope and approach of the SEA. This Scoping Report has been compiled by RPS on behalf of the EMRA who are the competent authority for the Eastern & Midland RSES.

3.1.3 Environmental Assessment

An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the Eastern & Midland RSES will be undertaken in due course. This will include, as relevant, a description of the baseline, an assessment of likely significant impacts, mitigation measures to offset negative impacts and provision of a monitoring programme. The output from this stage is an Environmental Report; further details on these issues are presented later in this document. In parallel to this assessment, Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) will also be undertaken and this will inform the SEA and development of the Eastern & Midland RSES.

Public consultation will be carried out on the draft Eastern & Midland RSES, the SEA Environmental Report, the Regional Flood Risk Appraisal (RFRA) and associated documentation in support of the AA. The submissions and observations made on these documents will be reviewed and considered during finalisation of the Eastern & Midland RSES.

3.1.4 SEA Statement

An SEA Statement identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the Eastern & Midland RSES will be provided for information alongside the final RSES.

3.1.5 SEA Guidance

The Environmental Report will contain the findings of the assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment resulting from implementation of the RSES. It will reflect the requirements of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and also the transposed regulations in Ireland (S.I. 436/2004) as amended in 2011. The following principal sources of guidance will be used during the overall SEA process and during preparation of the Environmental Report.

- SEA Spatial Information Sources, April 2017, Environmental Protection Agency.
- SEA Scoping Guidance Document, 2017, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Integrating Climate Change into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland - A Guidance Note, 2015, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment – Good Practice Guidance, 2015, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack, 2016, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Environmental Protection Agency’s 2012 Review of SEA Effectiveness in Ireland.
- GISEA Manual, 2017, Environmental Protection Agency.
- Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment – Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner’s Manual. EPA Strive Programme 2007-2013. Strive Report Series No. 106.
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Checklist - Consultation Draft. January 2008. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. Synthesis Report. 2003. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. Guidelines for Regional Planning Authorities. November 2004. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The SEA will also have regard to the findings of the EPA’s 2012 Review of SEA Effectiveness in Ireland and any initial findings released from the forthcoming Review of SEA Effectiveness which will commence in 2018

3.1.6 Department Circulars

In addition a number of relevant circulars in relation to SEA have been issued³ which will have relevance for the environmental assessment of the proposed Southern RSES and will be taken into account during the course of the SEA. These circulars are as follows:

- PSSP 6/2011: ‘Further Transposition of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)’; and
- Circular PL 9 of 2013: ‘Article 8 (Decision Making) of EU Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as amended’.

³ Issued by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, now referred to as the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

3.2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT (AA)

The EU Habitats Directive places strict legal obligations on member states to ensure the protection, conservation and management of the habitats and species of conservation interest in all European Sites. The Habitats Directive has been transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Article 6 of the Directive obliges member states to undertake an ‘appropriate assessment’ (AA) for any plan or project which may have a likely significant effect on any European Site. The outcome of such AA fundamentally affects the decisions that may lawfully be made by competent national authorities in relation to the approval of plans or projects.

Article 6(3) states:

Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In 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.

Article 6(4) states:

If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest [IROPI], including those of a social or economic nature, Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

The RSES is not directly connected to the conservation of any European Sites, however as a regional strategy, it has the potential to impact on habitats and species for which Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) have been designated. In acknowledgement of this, early consideration has been given to the need for AA and screening for AA has been carried out in parallel to the SEA Scoping. It has been concluded, through the AA Screening Stage that full AA is warranted for the Eastern & Midland RSES and as such a Natura Impact Report (NIR) will be prepared. The NIR will consider the potential for the emerging policy and measures to impact on the integrity of any European Sites, in view of the conservation objectives of the site.

It is noted that there are requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives that are not encompassed by AA (e.g. annex IV species as per Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive, landscape features outside designated sites which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna as per Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and disturbance and deterioration of bird habitats as per article 4(4) of the Birds Directive and these will be addressed in the SEA.

3.3 REGIONAL FLOOD RISK APPRAISAL (RFRA)

Increased flood risk as a result of land use planning has, above all else has been one of the most costly (environmental, social and economic) legacy issue of previous national and regional and local land use decisions. The decisions taken now in the development of the Eastern & Midland RSES will both assist the legacy issue and future proof new plans. The objective of the RFRA is to inform the policy decisions surrounding the potential themes of the Eastern & Midland RSES such as:

- Maximising the potential of our cities, towns and rural areas to be successful, sustainable places;
- Identifying infrastructural priorities;
- Transitioning to a low carbon society; and
- Ensuring the resilience of our natural resources and cultural assets.

The RFRA will provide an assessment of all types of flood risk within a regional context to assist the EMRA to make informed strategic planning decisions in respect of the Eastern & Midland RSES. The flood risk information will enable EMRA to apply the Flood Risk Guidelines⁴ to appraise development and growth areas and identify how flood risk can be reduced as part of the Eastern & Midland RSES.

3.4 INTEGRATION OF THE PROCESSES

The Eastern & Midland RSES development process is running in parallel with the SEA, AA and RFRA processes as outlined in **Figure 3.2**.



Figure 3.2 – Integration of Strategy, SEA, AA and RFRA

⁴ DEHLG and OPW (November 2009) The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, and Circular PL02/2014 (August 2014) referred to hereafter as 'The Guidelines'

4 OTHER RELEVANT PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

As part of the SEA process, it will be necessary to consider the environmental protection objectives, established at the international, European and national level, which are relevant to the Eastern & Midland RSES, and how they have been taken into account during the preparation of the strategy. In particular the interaction of the environmental protection objectives and standards included within these plans and programmes with the RSES requires consideration. For the purposes of scoping, the list below summarises key related legislation and documents which will be considered.

A more detailed list will be compiled as part of the Environmental Report and suggestions are welcomed as part of the scoping consultation as to environmental protection objectives that are relevant to the Eastern & Midland RSES. Reference will also be made to feedback relevant plans and programmes received as part of the public consultation for the draft NPF for suggestions provided. However it is noted that this is not intended to be a register of all legislation/ plans/ policies/ programmes, but rather an examination of the key environmental protection objectives relevant to the Eastern & Midland RSES.

Table 4.1 – International and EU Legislation, Plans/ Policies/ Programmes

International and EU Legislation	International and EU Plans/ Policies/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) ▪ EIA Directive (85/337/EC as amended) ▪ Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) ▪ Birds Directive (2009/147/EC- codified version of 79/409/EEC) ▪ Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and associated directives which have been subsumed as follows: Drinking Water Abstraction Directive; Sampling Drinking Water Directive; Exchange of Information on Quality of Surface Freshwater Directive; Shellfish Directive; Freshwater Fish Directive; Groundwater (Dangerous Substances) Directive; and Dangerous Substances Directive ▪ Drinking Water Directive (98/83/EC) ▪ Bathing Water Directive (revised) 2006 (2006/7/EC) ▪ Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC) ▪ Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) ▪ Maritime Spatial Planning Directive (2014/89/EU) ▪ Sewage Sludge Directive (86/278/EEC) ▪ Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) ▪ Nitrates Directive (91/676/EC) ▪ Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive (2008/1/EC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Seventh Environmental Action Programme (EAP) of the European Community 2013- 2020 ▪ The EU Biodiversity Strategy ▪ Bern Convention (Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats) ▪ Kyoto Protocol 1997 ▪ Bali Road Map 2007 ▪ Cancun Agreements 2010 ▪ Doha Climate Gateway 2012 ▪ Paris Agreement (COP21) ▪ EU 20-20-20 Agreement ▪ Europe 2020 Strategy ▪ 2030 EU Climate and Energy Framework ▪ EU Climate Change Programme (ECCP II) ▪ The Valletta Convention (1992) ▪ EU Common Agricultural Policy ▪ EU REACH Initiative ▪ Stockholm Convention ▪ Ramsar Convention ▪ OSPAR Convention

International and EU Legislation	International and EU Plans/ Policies/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plant Protection (Products) Directive 2009/127/EC ▪ Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) ▪ Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) and proposal for a revised directive (COM/2016/0767 final/2) ▪ Biofuels Directive (2003/30/EC) ▪ Indirect Land Use Change Directive [(EU) 2015/1513]] ▪ Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (2014/94/EU) ▪ Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU) ▪ Seveso III Directive (2012/18/EU) ▪ Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) Directive (2008/50/EC) ▪ EU White Paper on Transport 2011 ▪ EU Action Plan on Urban Mobility 2009 ▪ European Circular Economy Strategy 	

Table 4.2 – National/ Regional Legislation, Plans/Policies/Programmes

National Legislation	National/ Regional Plans/ Policies/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) ▪ Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016 ▪ Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004) as amended by S.I. 201 of 2011; ▪ The Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 ▪ European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011 as amended) ▪ Waste Management Act 1996 as amended ▪ Quality of Bathing Waters Regulations 1988 (S.I. 84 of 1988) as amended ▪ European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003, (S.I. 722 of 2003) ▪ European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Water) Regulations (S.I. 272 of 2009) ▪ European Communities Environmental Objectives (FPM) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 296 of 2009) ▪ European Communities Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations 2010 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework (Draft) ▪ Southern and Northern & Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies ▪ Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment (2016-2021) (DPER, 2015) ▪ Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness ▪ Capital Investment Plan 2016-2021 ▪ National Policy Position on Climate Action ▪ National Climate Change Mitigation Plan ▪ National Climate Change Adaptation Framework 2012 and sectoral Adaptation Plans ▪ National Clean Air Strategy (Draft) ▪ Bioenergy Plan [in prep] ▪ Renewable Electricity Plan [in prep] ▪ Second Cycle River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021 ▪ Water Services Strategic Plan 2015 ▪ National Water Resources Plan [in prep] ▪ Lead in Drinking Water Mitigation Plan ▪ National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan 2016

National Legislation	National/ Regional Plans/ Policies/ Programmes
<p>(S.I. 9 of 2010)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ European Communities (Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters) Regulations 2014 (S.I. No. 31 of 2014) ▪ Quality of Bathing Waters Regulations 1988 (S.I. 84 of 1988) as amended ▪ Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seafood Operation Programme 2014 ▪ Aquaculture Plan 2014 ▪ National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 ▪ National Peatlands Strategy 2015 ▪ Regional Waste Management Plan 2015-2021 ▪ National Hazardous Waste Management Plan 2010-2020 ▪ Construction 2020 ▪ NPWS Conservation Plans and/ or Conservation Objectives for SAC and SPAs ▪ National Heritage Plan (2002) ▪ Culture 2025 ▪ Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland (1997) (DEHLG) ▪ National Broadband Plan Intervention Strategy (Draft) ▪ National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015 – 2025 ▪ Healthy Ireland – a Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025 ▪ Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines ▪ Wind Energy Guidelines ▪ Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 ▪ Realising our Rural Potential, Action Plan for Rural Development ▪ Ireland’s Fourth Nitrates Action Programme ▪ Forestry Programme 2014-2020 ▪ Forest Policy Review: Forests, Products and People – A Renewed Vision (2014) ▪ Foodwise 2025 ▪ Green Low-Carbon Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) ▪ Organic Farming Scheme ▪ Teagasc Better Farm Program ▪ Delivering a Sustainable Energy Future for Ireland (Energy White Paper) 2007 and 2015 update ▪ National Renewable Energy Action Plan ▪ Strategy for Renewable Energy 2012-2020 ▪ Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan ▪ Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth ▪ All Island Grid Study 2008 ▪ Smarter Travel ‘A New Transport Policy for Ireland’ 2009-2020

National Legislation	National/ Regional Plans/ Policies/ Programmes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020 ▪ National ITS Strategy (Draft) ▪ Investing in our transport future – A Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport ▪ National Aviation Policy 2015 ▪ National Ports Policy 2013 ▪ Greater Dublin Area (GDA) Transport Strategy 2016-2035 ▪ National Policy Framework for the Development of Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport (Draft) ▪ Sectoral Plan for Accessible Transport 2013 ▪ Electric Vehicles Grant Scheme and VRT Relief ▪ Social Housing Strategy ▪ Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015 (2009) ▪ Catchment Flood Risk and Management Studies ▪ Flood Risk Management Plans (Draft) ▪ The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2009 ▪ Regional Development Strategy 2035 ▪ Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019 ▪ DBEI Policy for Enterprise 2015-2025 ▪ Regional Action Plans for Jobs ▪ European Structural & Investment Funds 2014-2020 ▪ Our Communities: A Framework Policy for Local and Community Development in Ireland (2015)

5 SCOPING

5.1 GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE

The SEA of the Eastern & Midland RSES will cover the geographic area of the EMRA. The EMRA was established in January 2015 and covers nine counties and 12 local authorities, including: Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois, Louth, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, as well as the four Dublin local authorities of Fingal, South Dublin and Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Dublin City. The EMRA is further divided into three sub-regions, or Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs) comprising the Dublin Region, the Eastern Region and the Midland Region; see **Figure 5.1**. As one of the three Regional Assemblies in Ireland, the EMRA has a land area of almost 14,500 km² and contains almost half of the Ireland’s 4.6 million inhabitants (approximately 816,000 households).⁵

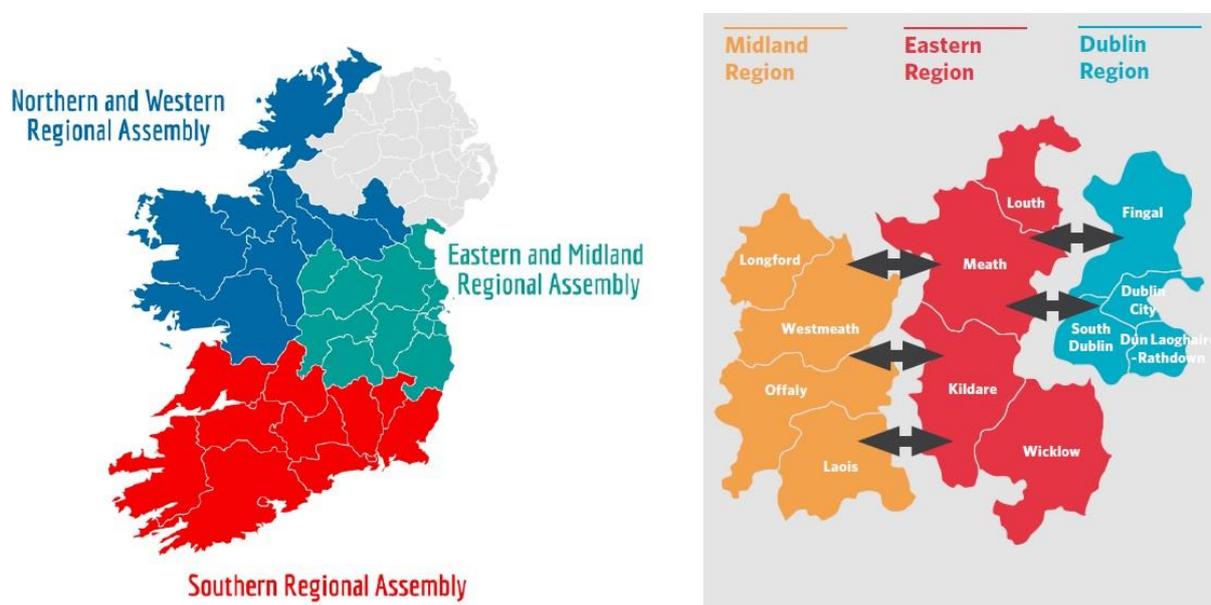


Figure 5.1 – Regional Assemblies and the Eastern and Midland Region⁵

5.2 TEMPORAL SCOPE

In line with the SEA Directive, short, medium and long-term impacts (including reference to secondary, cumulative, synergistic, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects) will be considered during the assessment. The recommendations put forward in the Eastern & Midland RSES may have a longer perspective and could take a number of years for certain aspects to be implemented and take effect. As a result the time lines proposed for assessment of long-term impacts extends beyond the timeframe of the actual strategy. For the purpose of the SEA, a short term horizon of 2024 in line with the first cycle of the RSES, a medium term horizon up to 2040 in line with the life cycle of the NPF, and a long term horizon of beyond 2040 will be considered.

⁵ EMRA (November 2017) Consultation Issues Paper

5.3 SCOPING OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TOPICS

In accordance with S.I. 436 of 2004, as amended, consideration has been given to whether the environmental effects, both positive and negative, of the Eastern & Midland RSES are likely to be significant. The EMRA Issues Paper has been reviewed to inform consideration of the scope of impacts that may result from the RSES. A summary of the conclusions are presented in the following sections, with reference to the likely significant effects on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, land use, geology, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage), landscape and the interrelationships between the above factors.

5.3.1 Population and Human Health

The RSES is first and foremost a spatial and economic framework to guide development and investment in housing, water services, transport, communications, energy, health and education infrastructure. It will shape the Eastern & Midland Region future by determining how settlement patterns develop and how they are supported by inter-related strategies for economy and development. The Eastern & Midland RSES has significant potential to effect population and human health of future generations for both better and worse.

Key supporting policy: *HSE Healthy Ireland Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2015-2025*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
<p>Population and Human Health</p>	<p>In</p>	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More coherent population distribution, being cognisant of the potential of settlements and their surrounding catchments in determining future targeted growth patterns and alignment with the draft National Planning Framework; ▪ Better understanding and realisation of settlement needs; ▪ Refocus of urban/ rural partnerships; ▪ Improved health and well-being by encouraging physical activity and reducing pollution and hazards; ▪ Better integration of services; ▪ Strengthening of communities and neighbourhoods; ▪ Improved integration of settlement pattern and nature through access to greenspace and outdoors; ▪ Inclusion of sustainable transport; ▪ Opportunities to improve community cohesion; ▪ Promotion of natural asset-based economic growth, particularly in the Midland Strategic Planning Area (SPA); and ▪ Attract and expand foreign direct investment. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Addressing historic settlement patterns leading to sprawl and unbalanced regional development; ▪ Increased capacity/ infrastructural requirements for water and

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<p>wastewater treatment to service population growth;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased requirements for public transport services and cycle corridors to service population growth and commuter belts; ▪ Increasing car dependency and associated emissions to air; ▪ Changing demographic patterns and needs e.g. increase in aging population, future pressure for places in third level education; ▪ Uneven distribution of health; ▪ Increasing rates of obesity; ▪ Homelessness, housing availability (quantity and quality), affordability; ▪ Disparities between where people work and where they live; ▪ Proximity to employment opportunities, including smaller clusters of employment and achieving better alignment between both population and employment growth; ▪ Access to education, childcare, healthcare; ▪ Avoidance of inequalities and addressing intra-regional disparities e.g. economic performance, between the sub-regions; and ▪ The Eastern & Midland Region, as the most productive/ competitive of the three regions, will need to consider the implications of achieving NPF targets for population/ economic growth.
	Draft SEA Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>To create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a more healthy Ireland.</i>
	Suggested draft SEA Target(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life.</i> ▪ <i>Increase by 20% the proportion of the population undertaking regular physical activity.</i>

5.3.2 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

The spatial dimension of the Eastern & Midland RSES has direct and indirect relevance for biodiversity, flora and fauna in Ireland. On the one hand, it presents a threat to the well-being and survival of our native flora and fauna through habitat loss and disturbance. It also offers the opportunity to integrate nature into decision making and allow the benefits of biodiversity to be appreciated and where appropriate harnessed. The natural environment provides ecosystem services in the form of food, fuel, water purification, flood alleviation and more.

Key supporting policy: *National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Biodiversity Flora and Fauna	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved integration of key conservation legislation in overarching land use planning decisions; ▪ More coherent protection and enhancement of biodiversity as a whole

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<p>on a regional and local level;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consideration of the economic potential of biodiversity, flora and fauna to contribute to settlements, communities and regions; ▪ Integration of ecosystem services into decision making; ▪ Potential for interactions with landscape features e.g. provision of green infrastructure; ▪ Develop and enhance connectivity and natural corridors between areas; ▪ Potential for interactions with population and human health e.g. access to outdoors and wildlife and natural amenity-based tourism; and ▪ Better integration with water quality objectives under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD); and Catchment Flood Risk Management Programme (CFRAMS). <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balancing the need for growth with protecting wild places and protected areas; ▪ Realising amenity-based tourism without causing recreational pressures; ▪ Effects on protected areas: European (e.g. SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites) and National (e.g. (p)NHAs); ▪ Effects on protected species, including biodiversity loss; ▪ Potential for habitat loss and fragmentation; ▪ Potential introduction / spread of alien species and invasive species; ▪ Potential for interaction with Habitats Directive, i.e. Articles 6, 10,12; ▪ Disturbance effects from recreation or tourism activities; ▪ Loss or disturbance of habitats and species from land use change and changes to land management; and ▪ In-combination/ cumulative effects without land use plans and programmes e.g. forestry, fisheries, agriculture.
Draft SEA Objective		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>To preserve, protect, maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Require all regional, county and local level land use plans to include ecosystem services and green/ blue infrastructure provisions in their land use plans and as a minimum, to have regard to the required targets in relation to the conservation of European sites, other nature conservation sites, ecological networks, and protected species.</i>

5.3.3 Soil

The Irish economy relies heavily on its agricultural base and as such the importance of the soil resource cannot be under estimated. In addition to supplying the raw material for the agricultural and forestry sectors, it also provides other essential services such as: a groundwater resource; habitat for flora and fauna; provides nutrient cycling; and hosts historical artefacts and evidence. Despite this, there is very little policy or legislative protection for soils in Europe or Ireland.

Key supporting policy: *There is no specific national or EU policy available. Existing EU policies relate to soil in the context of waste, water, agriculture etc.*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Soil	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage sustainable soil management; ▪ Value soils including prime agricultural land; ▪ Protect soils with high carbon content e.g. peatlands; ▪ Protect and promote lands with ecosystem services e.g. peatlands, wetlands, hedgerows, grasslands; ▪ Utilisation of existing brownfield sites; ▪ Remediation of contaminated sites; and ▪ Zoning and development of lands to ensure sustainable development. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balancing competing land uses with regional growth; ▪ Intended and unintended land use change; ▪ Inappropriate agricultural and forestry activities; ▪ Loss of prime agricultural land for development; ▪ Erosion of soils; ▪ Long-term strategy for the transition from peat extraction towards a natural asset-based rural economy; ▪ Spread of invasive species; ▪ Soil pollution; ▪ Effects on geomorphology (i.e. landforms and river channels); ▪ Sealing of soils; and ▪ Increase in extent of built up areas/ urbanisation.
Draft SEA Objective		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Protect soils against pollution, and prevent degradation of the soil resource.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Maintain built surface cover nationally to below EU average of 4%.⁶</i> ▪ <i>To avoid or minimise adverse effects on mineral resources, important geological and geomorphological sites and soils.</i>

5.3.4 Water

Ireland is currently preparing the second cycle River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) which is the mechanism by which the objectives of the WFD can be implemented. The WFD aims to maintain the “high status” of waters where it exists, prevent deterioration in existing status of waters and to achieve at least “good status” in relation to all waters. A significant aspect of achieving those objectives lies in land use planning strategy, where people live and work and what infrastructure is provided. As such this is a key area of interaction for the Eastern & Midland RSES.

⁶ http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/environmentalindicators/#land_and_soil

Key supporting policy: *River Basin Management Plan and Programme of Measures; Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Programme of Measures; Water Services Strategic Plan (Irish Water); Irish Water Investment Programme*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Water	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve water quality by influencing the location and type of development within all catchments, but particularly those with water quality issues; ▪ Improve water quality by identifying and addressing its impacts on the water environment; and ▪ Improve water infrastructure networks and ensure development is matched with current and future infrastructure capacity. ▪ Reduce flooding by ensuring new development does not increase current risk; ▪ Reduce flooding by ensuring new development is not located in areas of high flood risk; ▪ Potential to further develop permeable lands and sustainable drainage systems in urban areas; ▪ Support the fishing industry and encourage other value-added activities; ▪ Plan for the long-term development of Dublin Port; ▪ Realise the potential of strategic marine assets in the region e.g. the extensive eastern coastline, Blue Flag beaches, Dublin Bay UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Facilitating growth and development without compromising achievement of WFD and MSFD objectives; ▪ Facilitating upcoming marine spatial planning requirements; ▪ Ensure adequate drinking water and wastewater treatment is available to accommodate planned growth and development; ▪ Protect water dependant ecosystems from pollution; ▪ Prevent the introduction and/ or spread of invasive species; ▪ Morphological impacts on water bodies from engineering and other works, taking into account of flood risk; ▪ Water pollution from point or diffuse sources; ▪ Preparing for and taking account of coastal hazards such as erosion and impacts from climate change such as sea level rises, increased flooding events and extreme weather events; ▪ Impacts on water bodies from construction of new wastewater treatment facilities and infrastructure; ▪ Impacts on water bodies from abstraction (including fish passage); and ▪ Impacts on combined storm water overflows.
Draft SEA Objective		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Ensure that the status of water bodies is protected, maintained and improved in line with the requirements of the WFD and MSFD.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The stated expected outcomes of the second cycle of the River Basin Management Plan are achieved by 2021.</i>

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The stated expected outcomes of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive are achieved by 2021.

5.3.5 Air Quality

The EPA has reported that emissions of nitrogen oxides (NO_x) have been consistently above the previous 2010 limit in the EU Directive on National Emissions Ceilings, with revised limits applicable from 2020 onwards; much of this is related to road transport. It is therefore essential for the protection of the environment and human health that national and regional planning takes account of the need to reduce overall car dependency.

Key supporting policy: *National Clean Air Strategy; Smarter Travel; Bioenergy Plan; National Alternative Fuels Framework; Renewable Electricity Framework*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Air Quality	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce direct emissions from energy generation; Reduce transport related emissions and increase energy efficiency across all transport modes; Encourage modal shift, especially in towns and cities; and Integrate planning, economy and transport to reduce transport demand. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car dependant culture; Social isolation in rural areas; Increasing NO_x and particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) emissions as a result of road transport and solid fuel combustion; Combustion emissions resulting from alternative fuels e.g. biofuels. Modal shift away from road transport; Switch to alternative fuels; Reduce transport demand; and Naturally occurring concentrations of radon.
Draft SEA Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air. Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the proportion of journeys made by private fossil fuel-based cars compared to 2016 National travel Survey levels.⁷ Decrease in emissions from the agricultural sector. Decrease in emission from energy generation.

⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-nts/nts2016/>

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adoption of the National Clean Air Strategy

5.3.6 Climatic Factors

A key consideration in relation to the Eastern & Midland RSES is in relation to planning for climate change into the future. This is both in terms of planning for predicted effects of climate change e.g. avoiding flood risk areas; and also ensuring that Ireland’s commitments to move to a zero carbon economy by 2050 are supported by land-use policy decisions now e.g. degree of fossil fuel car dependency.

Key supporting policy: *The National Policy Statement on climate change (DECLG, 2014); National Climate Change Mitigation Plan; National Adaptation Framework*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Climatic Factors	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate pathways to carbon neutrality across the relevant sectors; Reduce direct emissions from the generation of energy; Enhance renewable energy offering; Encourage modal shift, especially in towns and cities; and Reduce transport related emissions and increase energy efficiency across all transport modes. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car dependant culture; Social isolation in rural areas; Radon; Climate adaptation and mitigation plans; Increased risk of extreme weather events; Flood risk; and Coastal zone management.
Draft SEA Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To minimise emissions of greenhouse gases.
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. A net reduction in the GHG emissions from transport as outlined in the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. (Inventory for 2016 reported a 3.7% increase in carbon dioxide equivalent emissions). The Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) set a target for all Member States to reach a 10% share of renewable energy in transport by 2020. Increased density and penetration of the public transport network including frequency of service – eg. for urban and rural bus services. Reduce overall emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) by at least 80-95% of 1990 levels by 2050. To promote reduced energy consumption and support the uptake of

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<i>renewable options and a move away from solid fuels for residential heating.</i>

5.3.7 Material Assets

There is no clear definition of material assets under the SEA Directive however it typically overlaps with other areas such as biodiversity, water, land, soils etc. In the context of the SEA for the Eastern & Midland RSES, this section addresses issues relating to land use and services in the main.

Key supporting policy: *National Forestry Programme 2014-2020; Food Wise 2025; Rural Development Plan; Eastern and Midland Regional Waste Management Plan; Greater Dublin Area (GDA) Transport Strategy 2016-2035; National Broadband Plan; Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan; Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Material Assets	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan for settlement to be aligned with required transport, water, energy infrastructure; ▪ Balance competing requirements for land use and natural resources; ▪ Investment in supporting infrastructure e.g. water infrastructure; and ▪ Realising the region’s offshore energy potential and the need to contribute to renewable energy targets e.g. Ireland’s first major offshore wind farm on the Arklow Bank. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Infrastructure-led development driven by market changes; ▪ Scale or pace of development not in keeping with level of service provision/ adequate capacity e.g. serviced land, water supply and drainage, road/ port/ airport capacity; ▪ Competing land uses; ▪ Shift toward intensification in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, renewable energy sectors; ▪ Provision of infrastructure which is adaptable to the impacts of climate change; ▪ Increased waste generated and waste service provision e.g. 19% of households in the Eastern & Midland Region without a waste service; ▪ Increased demands on water supply and critical levels of demand e.g. need for a new water supply for the Eastern & Midland Region; ▪ Many rural and peripheral areas poorly served by broadband; ▪ Conflicting policy and guidance between sectors; and ▪ In-combination impacts on biodiversity, water, soils, landscape, cultural heritage, soils etc. from competing sectors.
Draft SEA Objectives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Consolidate growth and limit urban sprawl.</i> ▪ <i>Optimise existing infrastructure and provide new infrastructure to</i>

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
		<i>match population distribution in the Eastern & Midland RSES.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Achieve transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050.</i> ▪ <i>Increased budget spend on water and wastewater infrastructure.</i> ▪ <i>By 2020 all citizens will have access to speeds of 30Mbps, and that 50% of citizens will be subscribing to speeds of 100Mbps.</i>

5.3.8 Cultural Heritage

The main issue for archaeological, architectural and cultural heritage associated with the implementation of the Eastern & Midland RSES is the resulting potential for both direct and indirect impacts on archaeological and architectural features and their settings as a result of infrastructure requirements, settlement patterns and changes to land cover. Cultural heritage features are often tightly linked to landscape and visual considerations of the wider setting of recognised sites.

Key supporting national policy: *Built Heritage Policy; Architectural Heritage Policy; National Landscape Strategy; Culture 2025*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Cultural Heritage	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support national level policies at regional level to protect and enhance the region’s varied archaeological and architectural heritage assets; ▪ Integration of cultural heritage into the design of future developments; ▪ Promotion of the cultural heritage resource as a source of economic benefit for communities e.g. tourism; ▪ Promotion of the region’s unique cultural wealth and assets; and ▪ Cultural contribution to wider social and economic goals e.g. a heritage-based approach to renewal and tourism. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To preserve and protect the cultural heritage including architecture, archaeology and cultural heritage; ▪ Impacts on archaeological features and setting; and ▪ Impacts for underwater archaeological features during construction of new infrastructure and/ or upgrades.
Draft SEA Objective		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological or architectural heritage.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>No unauthorised physical significant damage or alteration of the context of cultural heritage features.</i>

5.3.9 Landscape

The National Landscape Strategy (NLS) for Ireland (2015-2025) was produced in line with Ireland's obligations under the European Landscape Convention. Existing pressures on landscape and visual resources are primarily related to infrastructure development and significant land use change such as afforestation. Issues of spatial planning, land use and soil quality are interdependent, and this should be reflected in integrated policies and plans at national, regional and local levels. The main drivers of land use change over the coming decade will be the forestry and agricultural policies including the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 and Food Wise 2025.

Key supporting national policy: *National Landscape Strategy; Food Wise 2025; Forestry Programme 2014-2020; Bioenergy Plan*

SEA Issue	Scope In/Out	Potential Significant Environmental Issues for Consideration in the Environmental Report
Landscape	In	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support national level policies at regional level to protect and enhance heritage assets including landscapes and seascapes; ▪ To integrate landscape considerations into the design of future developments; ▪ To develop requirements for design statements for villages, towns, cities; and ▪ Develop a coordinated approach to identify scenic routes and associated key attractions coupled with infrastructure provision for the creation of safe, segregated pathways. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Impacts on designated landscapes; ▪ Impacts on landscape character; ▪ Indirect land use changes associated with other key policies e.g. forestry and biofuels; and ▪ No national landscape character assessment.
Draft SEA Objective		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>To provide a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention.</i>
Suggested draft SEA Target(s)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Avoid damage to designated landscapes as a result of Eastern & Midland RSES implementation.</i>

6 PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

In line with the SEA Directive, an environmental baseline will be compiled for the Eastern & Midland RSES. This will include: a description of the state of the environment at present; a discussion of the key problems/ issues currently being faced nationally; and a description of the expected evolution of the environment should the Eastern & Midland RSES not be implemented.

The SEA Environmental Report will present a full description of the relevant aspects of the national environmental baseline data. The baseline will reflect the strategic nature of the Eastern & Midland RSES. The environmental baseline will be presented in the Environmental Report under a number of Strategic Environmental Assessment topic headings as follows:

- Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF);
- Population (P);
- Human Health (HH);
- Soil (S);
- Water (W);
- Air Quality (AQ)
- Climatic Factors (CF);
- Material Assets (MA);
- Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural Heritage (AACH); and
- Landscape (L).

Under each of the SEA topic heading the current state of the environment will be identified along with the key problems/ issues and the expected evolution of the environment in the absence of the plan. The data sources that will be used to compile the current state of the environment are identified in **Section 6.1**.

6.1 BASELINE DATA SOURCES

It will be key that the current state of the environment is described using the most up to date environmental data, information and reports. Where updates of significant environmental data and associated reports become available during the SEA process, consideration will be given to incorporating the new information into the description of the current state of the environment. Where data gaps are found for particular aspects of the current state of the environment, the significance of these data gaps will be clearly stated. In addition, it will be stated whether these gaps can be reasonably and realistically addressed during the SEA process.

A key document that will be referenced will be the EPA State of the Environment Report which was published in Q4 2016. The broad environmental messages identified by the EPA relate to:

- **Environment and Health and Well-being** – Recognising the benefits of a good quality environment to health and well-being.
- **Climate Change** – Accelerate mitigation actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implement adaptation measures to increase our resilience in dealing with adverse climate impacts.
- **Implementation of Legislation** – Improve the tracking of plans and policies and the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation to protect the environment.

The Eastern & Midland RSES will be put in context in relation to these three components and furthermore will have regard to the key topic messages of: Restore & Protect Water Quality; Sustainable Economic Activities; Nature & Wild Places; and Community Engagement.

It is intended to utilise Geographic Information Systems (GIS) where possible to display and analyse information relevant to the region. **Table 6.1** provides a preliminary overview of each of the SEA topics that will be outlined in the SEA baseline. The table also includes a non-exhaustive list of the potential data sources that will be used to compile the baseline and in addition it outlines the preliminary extent of the assessment based on these available data sources. Given the strategic nature of the Eastern & Midland RSES, it is recognised that there are limitations on the extent of the scope of an environmental assessment and therefore it is beneficial to outline such limitations at this early stage.

Table 6.1 – Baseline Data Sources and Extent of Assessment

SEA Topic	Potential Data Sources	Potential Extent of Assessment based on Data Sources
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) database; National Biodiversity Data Centre; Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan; Invasive Species Ireland website; WFD Ireland website; MSFD Ireland website; EPA Geoportal.	Datasets are available for aspects relating to biodiversity, flora and fauna. Given the scale of the Eastern & Midland RSES, the assessment will be focussed on designated sites such as SPAs, SACs and (p)NHAs.
Population	Central Statistics Office (CSO) database, including census 2016 data	Datasets are available for population density and distribution and the potential impacts of the Eastern & Midland RSES can be assessed relative to the available information.
Human Health	EPA Geoportal; Central Statistics Office (CSO) database, including census 2016 data; HSE Healthy Ireland; See also Soils, Water and Air Quality entries.	Reference will be made to the Institute of Public Health for appropriate information if available and also the HSE.
Soils	Corine Land Cover and Land Use Database; Coillte Forestry Database; Teagasc Soil Information; Geological Survey of Ireland Online Mapping.	Datasets are available for soil and land use resources at a county/ national scale. This is in keeping with the strategic nature of the Eastern & Midland RSES and is considered adequate at this scale.

SEA Topic	Potential Data Sources	Potential Extent of Assessment based on Data Sources
Water	EPA ENVision (Environmental Mapping); EPA Geoportal; EPA database reports including but not limited to: Water Quality in Ireland (latest available); Integrated Water Quality Reports (latest available); and Quality of Estuarine and Coastal Waters (latest available); National Catchment Flood Risk Management Programme (CFRAM), Office of Public Works (OPW);	Datasets are available for surface water and groundwater.
Air Quality	EPA database (air quality); Local Authority air quality monitoring network.	Datasets are available for relevant air quality parameters.
Climatic Factors	Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections, EPA (latest available); Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEAI), Energy in Ireland Report (1990-2012) EPA SAFER database	Datasets are available for carbon emissions and greenhouse gases.
Material Assets	EPA GeoPortal; OPW flood data; DAFM datasets; DCCAIE datasets; ESB datasets; GNI datasets.	Datasets are available for certain resources that may be affected by the Eastern & Midland RSES.
Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural, Heritage	National Monuments Service (Archaeological Survey Database); National Inventory of Architectural Heritage; and Discovery Ireland Programme.	Datasets are available for archaeology and architectural heritage, however the scale of the datasets are directed towards local project specific sources.
Landscape	There are no national datasets available for landscape and the information that is available at a county level is not consistent across all counties.	Limited

7 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

A key purpose of scoping is to set out sufficient details about the proposed methodological framework for the assessment of environmental effects to allow the consultees to form a view on this matter. It is proposed to use an objectives-led assessment which will involve comparing the proposed alternatives against defined SEA Environmental Objectives for each of the identified issue areas.

The preceding sections have identified the environmental characteristics and key environmental issues relating to the Eastern & Midland RSES and the key influences from external plans, policies and strategies. This section uses that information to set out a series of draft SEA environmental objectives, indicators and associated targets. These will be used in the environmental report to predict the likely environmental effects of the RSES and, subsequently, monitor implementation of the strategy. The use of these objectives ensures that following this scoping stage, the SEA focuses only on those issues that are most relevant and significant to the study in the Eastern & Midland RSES.

Set out in **Table 7.1** are the draft SEA objectives that are being considered to test the potential environmental impacts of the Eastern & Midland RSES. These objectives are based on the current understanding of the key environmental issues identified. The detailed assessment criteria are examples of the issues that will be considered during the assessment of whether the strategy, including the proposed alternatives, meets the proposed SEA objectives. ***It should be noted that these are draft objectives only and are provided for the purpose of discussion at this scoping stage. The SEA team welcomes feedback on the draft objectives with a view to updating them prior to any assessment.***

Table 7.1 – Draft SEA Environmental Objectives

Related to SEA Topic(s)	Draft Objective and Targets	Suggested draft SEA Target(s)
Population and Human Health (PHH)	Objective 1: <i>To create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play their part in achieving a more healthy Ireland.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life. ▪ Increase by 20% the proportion of the population undertaking regular physical activity.
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF)	Objective 2: <i>To preserve, protect, maintain and, where appropriate, enhance the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require all regional, county and local level land use plans to include ecosystem services and green/ blue infrastructure provisions in their land use plans and as a minimum, to have regard to the required targets in relation to the conservation of European sites, other nature conservation sites, ecological networks, and protected species.
Soil	Objective 3: <i>Protect soils against pollution, and prevent degradation of the</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain built surface cover nationally to below EU average of 4%.⁸

⁸ http://www.epa.ie/irelandsenvironment/environmentalindicators/#land_and_soil

Related to SEA Topic(s)	Draft Objective and Targets	Suggested draft SEA Target(s)
(S)	soil resource.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To avoid or minimise adverse effects on mineral resources, important geological and geomorphological sites and soils.
Water (W)	<p>Objective 4: To ensure that the status of water bodies is protected, maintained and improved in line with the requirements of the WFD and MSFD.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The stated expected outcomes of the second cycle of the River Basin Management Plan are achieved by 2021. ▪ The stated expected outcomes of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive are achieved by 2021.
Air Quality (AQ)	<p>Objective 5(i): To avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole resulting from emissions to air.</p> <p>Objective 5(ii): Maintain and promote continuing improvement in air quality through the reduction of emissions and promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decrease the proportion of journeys made by private fossil fuel-based cars compared to 2016 National travel Survey levels.⁹ ▪ Adoption of the National Clean Air Strategy. ▪ Decrease in emissions from the agriculture sector ▪ Decrease in emissions from the energy sector.
Climatic Factors (C)	<p>Objective 6: To minimise emissions of greenhouse gasses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. ▪ A net reduction in the GHG emissions from the transport as outlined in the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory. (Inventory for 2016 reported a 3.7% increase in carbon dioxide equivalent emissions). ▪ The Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) set a target for all Member States to reach a 10% share of renewable energy in transport by 2020. ▪ Increased density and penetration of the public transport network including frequency of service – eg. for urban and rural bus services. ▪ Reduce overall emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) by at least 80-95% of 1990 levels by 2050. ▪ To promote reduced energy consumption and support the uptake of renewable options and a move away from solid fuels for residential heating.
Material Assets	<p>Objective 7(i): Consolidate growth and limit urban sprawl.</p> <p>Objective 7(ii): Optimise existing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Achieve transition to a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable

⁹ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-nts/nts2016/>

Related to SEA Topic(s)	Draft Objective and Targets	Suggested draft SEA Target(s)
(MA)	<i>infrastructure and provide new infrastructure to match population distribution proposals in the Eastern & Midland RSES.</i>	<p><i>economy by 2050.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Increased budget spend on water and wastewater infrastructure.</i> ▪ <i>By 2020 all citizens will have access to speeds of 30Mbps, and that 50% of citizens will be subscribing to speeds of 100Mbps.</i>
Cultural Heritage (CH)	Objective 8: <i>Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, archaeological or architectural heritage.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>No unauthorised physical significant damage or alteration of the context of cultural heritage features.</i>
Landscape (L)	Objective 9: <i>To provide a framework for identification, assessment, protection, management and planning of landscapes having regard to the European Landscape Convention.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Avoid damage to designated landscapes as a result of Eastern & Midland RSES implementation.</i>

7.1 DRAFT INDICATORS AND TARGETS

Targets will be considered over the duration of the baseline data collection and assessment, and through the consultation process, in order to meet the SEA environmental objectives of the Eastern & Midland RSES. In each case, any target that is set must be attributable to the implementation of the Eastern & Midland RSES. The indicators will also be selected bearing in mind the availability of data and the feasibility of making direct links between any changes in the environment and the implementation of the strategy. These indicators will be developed during the study, including in response to comments received on this Scoping Report. Draft Targets have been presented in **Section 5** of this document.

7.2 IMPACTS, MITIGATION AND MONITORING

In line with the requirements in the legislation the likely significant effects on the environment will be assessed. This includes reference to secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects as well as the interrelationships between the environmental issue areas. Where possible and practical, assessment of these impacts will be quantitative. Any problems encountered during the assessment of impacts, including technical difficulties and/ or lack of information, will be highlighted and described, as appropriate.

With regard to cumulative impacts, the use and application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will be considered, where possible, at the various key stages in the SEA process. GIS, along with other methodologies and depending on the availability of relevant spatial data, will assist in determining the cumulative vulnerability of various environmental resources nationally/ regionally for the Eastern and Midland RSES.

It is proposed that Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) is undertaken using a webtool developed by AIRO through an EPA-funded project. ESM is a useful method for identifying, at a strategic level, environmentally sensitive areas helping to inform the assessment of cumulative and

in-combination effects on the environment. We would propose to utilise this tool and in particular to assist with the generation of alternatives (discussed in **Section 7.3**) and assessment of the preferred scenario.

Where significant adverse impacts are identified during the SEA process, relevant and appropriate mitigation measures will be provided in the Environmental Report. In order to ensure implementation of the recommended measures, monitoring arrangements will be provided and will include, where feasible, details as to the frequency of monitoring, and analysis and reporting on monitoring. As part of the monitoring programme, relevant and appropriate thresholds will be included to determine when remedial action is required for the particular aspect of the environment being monitored.

7.3 OUTLINE OF ALTERNATIVES

The assessment of reasonable alternatives as part of the SEA process is required as part of an Environmental Report under Article 5(1) of the SEA Directive. Alternatives can be described as a range of options available to the strategy-makers for delivering the objectives of the RSES. The identification of alternatives enables more informed decision-making and the assessment allows more sustainable options to be identified. The strategic alternatives to be considered must be realistic, reasonable and relevant. It is anticipated that the environmental report will explore alternatives at a number of levels: strategic; policy actions etc. Recent EPA guidance on development of alternatives will provide a framework for development of alternatives development.

8 NEXT STEPS

As part of the statutory scoping of the SEA for the Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), there will be statutory consultation with the designated consultees for SEA in Ireland. In addition, transboundary consultation will be undertaken with Northern Ireland.

Table 8.1 – Consultees in SEA Scoping Process

Consultee
Environmental Protection Agency
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment
Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Department of Rural & Community Development
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

To further facilitate meaningful discussion, it is envisaged to convene a workshop in Q1 of 2018 with the above listed consultees. This will include presentations from the Eastern & Midland RSES team and the SEA, AA and RFRA team to inform discussions on the scope and level of detail of the assessment. All discussions during this workshop, as well as formal written submissions received will be considered in preparation of the SEA Environmental Report and the Eastern & Midland RSES.

Submissions on the SEA Scoping of the Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy can be made up to 5pm on Friday 26th January 2018

Submissions and observations should be marked “SEA Scoping Eastern & Midland RSES” and can be submitted by:

Email: rses@emra.ie

Online: www.emra.ie/rses

Post: **RSES SEA Scoping Submissions, Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, 3rd Floor North, Ballymun Civic Centre, Ballymun, Dublin 9**