

**Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) Request  
AIE/AHG/2014/01 from Mr David Malone, Environmental Action Alliance Ireland**

*Selected text of request in relation to which records are being released:*

1. *A copy of the SEA scoping exercise carried out by the National Parks & Wildlife Service concerning the EirGrid Grid 25 Implementation Programme.*

**Schedule of Records held by the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht  
(as at 11/02/2014)**

**Dept References:**

**G2010/05 (ref. Question 1))**

<b>Record No.</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Brief Description of Record</b>	<b>No. of Pages</b>
1	<b>Development Applications Unit (DAU) on behalf of the Department</b>	Department's letter to EirGrid dated 10/02/2010 regarding Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report for "Grid 25"	7
2	<b>National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service (NPWS) to EirGrid</b>	Email to EirGrid from NPWS dated 20/12/2010	2

**G2011/142 (ref. Question 1)**

<b>Record No.</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Brief Description of Record</b>	<b>No. of Pages</b>
3	<b>DAU on behalf of the Department</b>	Department's letter to EirGrid 29/04/2011 regarding "Grid 25" Implementation Programme - Environmental Assessments	3



Our Reference: **AIE/AHG/2014/01**  
*(Please quote this reference in all related correspondence)*

11 February 2014

Mr David Malone  
Environmental Action Alliance Ireland  
60 St Joseph's Terrace  
Portarlinton  
Co Offaly

Via email: [davmalone@eircom.net](mailto:davmalone@eircom.net)

**Access to Information on the Environment (AIE) request No. AIE/AHG/2014/01**

Dear Mr Malone

I refer to your request under the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations 2007, for access to records held by this Department.

**Summary of Decision**

I have made a decision on your request, which was received on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014. I have identified the records that are relevant to your request and I am releasing those available in full as per the attached schedule.

In regard to Question 1 of your request, please note that it is the applicant or applicant's agent that carries out the scoping exercise for an AA or SEA rather than the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of this Department. The Department is consulted in the matter as a prescribed body. Notwithstanding this, I have included all three responses of the Department sent to EirGrid at the pre-planning stage in relation to scoping (referred to in your letter as the implementation stage).

In relation to Question 2 regarding meetings or workshops attended by NPWS and the outcome of those meetings, representatives of NPWS met with Eirgrid on 9 December, 2009. The outcome of that meeting is that Eirgrid formally consulted the Department via AA and SEA scoping exercises, to which the Department responded to EirGrid in February 2010 and April 2011 (Please see Records Nos. 1-3 attached). The Final SEA and AA documents for the Implementation Programme are in the public domain and are available (per the hyperlinks above) on the Eirgrid Website.

In response to Questions 3, the National Parks & Wildlife Service of this Department has not agreed any monitoring procedures "for the GRID 25 Implementation Programme that includes relevant and appropriate thresholds which should trigger when remedial action should be undertaken for the particular aspect of the environment being monitored" as this does not arise at consultation on the GRID 25 Implementation Programme level but rather is a matter for advice from the Department during the consultation process for the Implementation Programme and later during the statutory planning consent process for the individual component projects contained in the GRID25 Implementation Programme, e.g. North-South 400 kV Interconnection Development or the Grid Link Project (Electricity Transmission Scheme linking Leinster &

Munster). At all points in the planning process the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is a statutory consultee and not the decision-maker or indeed the regulatory authority for oversight of the GRID25 Implementation Programme or its constituent projects.

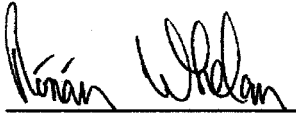
With regard to Question 4 in your letter, this is not a matter for the National Parks & Wildlife Service of this Department, it is entirely a matter for the developer, EirGrid, to identify the reasonable alternatives and cumulative effects that were considered and the methodology applied in the assessment of alternatives and cumulative effects

**Right to seek an internal review of the decision**

Under Regulation 11 of the Access to Information on the Environment Regulations 2007, you have a right to seek an internal review of this decision. An internal review involves a complete reconsideration of the matter by a more senior member of the staff of this Department, who may affirm, vary or annul the original decision made. If you decide to seek a review, the review decision will be communicated to you within one month. To seek a review, you need only write to the FOI Unit, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 23 Kildare St, Dublin 2 referring to this decision. You must make your request within one month of receipt of this notification (the making of a late request for a review may be permitted in appropriate circumstances).

I can be contacted by telephone at 053-911 7376 to answer any question you may have and to assist you generally in this matter.

Yours sincerely



**Rónán Whelan**

Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht  
Newtown Road, Wexford  
e: ronan.whelan@ahg.gov.ie

Encls. Schedule of Records  
Records 1-3



Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
**Environment, Heritage and Local Government**



10<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Mr. Aidan Corcoran,  
Transmission Manager,  
EirGrid,  
The Oval,  
160 Shelbourne Road,  
Ballsbridge,  
Dublin 4.

**Our Ref: G2010/5**

**Re: Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report for “Grid 25”**

Dear Mr Corcoran,

We refer to your letter of 18<sup>th</sup> December 2009, seeking observations in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the above environmental report. Please find below the Archaeological, Architectural Heritage and Nature Conservation observations of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

### **Archaeology**

In preparing the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of impacts on the archaeological heritage regard should be made to the following:

#### *International Conventions*

The European Convention on Protection of the Archaeological Heritage known as the Valletta Convention of 1992. This was ratified by Ireland in 1997 and requires that appropriate consideration be given to archaeological issues at all stages of the planning and development process.

#### *National Policies, Plans and Programmes*

National Heritage Plan (2002) – this is accessible at [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie). The core objective is to protect our heritage. In this regard the 'polluter pays' principle and the precautionary principle are operable. Specifically in regard to archaeological heritage the 'Framework and Principles for the protection of the archaeological heritage' document (1999) sets out the archaeological policies and principles that should be applied by all bodies when undertaking or authorising development.

#### *Relevant Policies and Plans at County Level*

County Development Plans and Local Area Plans. Drafts of these documents should always be forwarded to this department for comment.

### *Archaeological Heritage*

The area's archaeological monuments can be identified from the Record of Monuments and Places for the various counties, the Urban Archaeology surveys, and the National Monuments Service monuments data on [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie). Any monuments that are National Monuments in State ownership or guardianship and monuments subject to Preservation Orders should be identified and zones of visual amenity defined for them. National Monuments in ownership or guardianship of Local Authorities should also be identified. It should be noted that any direct impacts on national monuments in State or Local Authority care or subject to a preservation order will require the consent of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government under Section 14 of the National Monuments Act 1930 as amended by Section 5 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 2004.

Areas of high archaeological potential including subsurface archaeological structures should be identified. A pointer to the potential for the occurrence of subsurface archaeology is the annual Excavations Bulletin which contains brief accounts of excavations conducted in Ireland each year; these reports are also at [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie). Information on occurrences of chance finds of archaeological objects is also a useful indicator of archaeological potential - information may be obtained from the National Museum and local museums. The archaeological potential of the coastal and inter-tidal zone should be carefully considered. Any potential impacts on archaeological heritage should be subject to full archaeological assessment.

### *Development Issues*

Increased development pressure increases the potential for impact on the archaeological resource. Impacts can be avoided or lessened by following criteria set out in 'Framework and Principles for the protection of the archaeological heritage'.

### *The Development Plan*

There should be liaison with the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the drafting of the archaeological content of the plan. The plan should address in detail the potential archaeological impacts of any proposed development.

## **Architectural Heritage**

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is intended to bring about improved decision making and have a positive effect when plans and programmes are being developed. This development, and associated decision-making, continues until a plan or programme is formally adopted.

By regulation 'architectural heritage' is a material asset which is to be taken into account in SEA.

The term "architectural heritage" is defined in the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) & Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1999, as meaning - "all

- (a) structures and buildings together with their settings and attendant grounds, fixtures and fittings,
- (b) groups of such structures and buildings, and
- (c) sites,"

which are of architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest.

It appears from the draft SEA Scoping Report that it is not intended to take significant effect on architectural heritage into account. This could leave the SEA Environmental Report and the Grid25 Strategy open to challenge.

It should be noted consideration of 'architectural heritage' goes beyond simply taking impact on protected structures or the content of National Inventory of Architectural Heritage surveys into account.

## **Nature Conservation**

In addition to the comments below, the National Parks and Wildlife Service section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government would welcome a meeting with EirGrid and its consultants, as appropriate, to discuss the SEA and Appropriate Assessment of the Implementation Programme of Grid25, prior to completion.

1. From the papers provided by EirGrid, it is evident that SEA Environmental Report is being prepared and that a Habitats Directive appropriate assessment will be required.
2. While it is stated that the Grid25 Strategy was subject to a high level Environmental Review, the SEA and appropriate assessment should assess the environmental impacts of the strategy itself, in addition to its implementation through the proposed Implementation Programme.
3. The Implementation Programme should be informed and guided by the findings of the SEA and appropriate assessment as it is developed.
4. It is understood that the Implementation Programme will involve replacement and reinforcement of existing electricity transmission infrastructure, in addition to the planning and construction of new infrastructure to meet transmission needs, promote economic and regional development, and service and exploit renewable energy sources (particularly wind and wave power). The programme will determine or influence the location of new energy developments, particularly wind and wave energy, and of other development, and will be influenced by the location of existing, permitted and proposed energy developments, and by national, regional and local plans and strategies. As a result, the issue of in combination plans and projects and of cumulative effects will be a key consideration for the SEA and appropriate assessment and cannot be limited to "cumulative effects arising from the implementation of multiple projects in multiple GRID25 regions" as set out in the SEA scoping document.
5. An Offshore Renewable Energy Plan is in preparation by Sustainable Energy Ireland and is subject to SEA and appropriate assessment (our ref. G2009/520 – comments appended). The geographical scope of the SEA for that plan and the current Implementation Programme should ensure full integration and cohesion, particularly in the coastal zone. There should be detailed consideration of the likely environmental and ecological impacts of these two schemes at a strategic level.
6. It needs to be specifically noted that the number of wind farm developments and turbines that can be located in and adjoining Natura 2000 sites (e.g. Hen Harrier SPAs) will have to be restricted to a level that, in combination with other land use plans and projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of the site or sites concerned. The implications of this requirement will need to be addressed in the SEA and the Appropriate Assessment.
7. It should be noted that some relevant plans, including County Development Plans and Local Area Plans, and their associated wind energy strategies have not been subject to appropriate assessment, or adequate appropriate assessment, and/or their policies and/or objectives in relation to renewable energy pose risks of adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites and NHAs.

8. Owing to the ecological and hydrological sensitivities of upland and peatland sites in general and in western Ireland in particular, and the difficulties and risks of construction in such areas, and their distance from major population centres and industries, care should be taken at the strategic level to ensure a regionally balanced approach to meeting renewable energy targets.
9. As there is potential for the Grid25 strategy and its Implementation Programme, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, to have direct, indirect or cumulative effects on Natura 2000 sites, appropriate assessment is required in line with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Key guidance is listed below. See also relevant Departmental Circular Letters, particularly NPWS 1/08 – Appropriate Assessment of Land Use Plans and PD 2/07 & NPWS 1/07 – Compliance Conditions in respect of Developments requiring (1) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); or (2) having potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites (available from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)).

- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 2009. Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidelines for Local Authorities (available in draft from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie))
- European Commission, 2000. Managing Natura 2000 sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- European Commission, 2002. Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- European Commission, 2006. Nature and biodiversity cases: Ruling of the European Court of Justice. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg
- European Commission, 2007. Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the ‘Habitats Directive’ 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the concepts of: alternative solutions, imperative reasons of overriding public interest, compensatory measures, overall coherence, opinion of the Commission.
- Scott Wilson, Levett-Therivel Sustainability Consultants, Treweek Environmental Consultants and Land Use Consultants. 2006. Appropriate Assessment of plans.
- Guidelines for good practice appropriate assessment of plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive (available from [www.levett-therivel.co.uk](http://www.levett-therivel.co.uk))

The Departmental guidance document on Appropriate Assessment, which was launched by the Minister on 10<sup>th</sup> December last is now available on the NPWS web site [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie) under the section entitled ‘Wildlife Planning and the Law’. We also refer you to the EU Commission guidance entitled “Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC”. It might be useful to have a meeting with the relevant staff in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of this Department in advance of commencing the appropriate assessment screening process as there has been a wide variation in the standard of such screenings received by NPWS to date and many have been deemed deficient.

It is particularly important that the appropriate assessment procedure, commencing with stage 1 screening, should take place in consultation with the teams working on the draft Plan and SEA as each process can help inform the other to ensure that the objectives and policies

in the draft Plan will have no significant effects on any Natura 2000 site. The appropriate assessment should examine the effects the Plan and include cumulative impacts with other plans and projects both within and outside of the Plan area. In order to carry out the appropriate assessment you will need to collect information about the relevant Natura 2000 sites including their conservation objectives. These can be obtained by requesting them by completing the data request form on our website at <http://www.npws.ie/en/media/Media.6687.en.doc>.

10. SEA and the appropriate assessment may be combined to avoid excessive duplication but the procedural steps for both assessments must be followed separately and cannot be integrated fully. The appropriate assessment may be contained within the SEA Environmental Report, in which case it should be clearly distinguishable and identified as such, or may form a standalone report.
11. The appropriate assessment must consider and document, with the necessary supporting scientific evidence and objective criteria, whether the Grid25 strategy and its Implementation Programme, on their own or in combination with other plans and projects, will have adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site at any stage. The standards are that the appropriate assessment should be based on best scientific knowledge and that there should be confidence as to the absence of such effects (i.e. precautionary principle applies).
12. Appropriate assessment should inform all sections of the strategy and its Implementation Programme. Any necessary mitigation measures arising from appropriate assessment should be incorporated into the programme. All changes made to the programme in the course of its development should be screened for their likely significant effects on Natura 2000 sites and subjected to appropriate assessment, as well as SEA, with reports updated and amended accordingly.
13. The scope of the biodiversity or nature conservation issues for the SEA and/or appropriate assessment should include:
  - Natura 2000, or European sites (SACs and SPAs, including any proposed and candidate sites)
  - Other sites with nature conservation designations – NHAs, pNHAs, National Parks, Nature Reserves, etc. In addition to ecological impacts, landscape and visual impacts will be a concern for any National Parks
  - Any new or extended with nature conservation designations that are notified or designated in the lifetime of the Grid25 strategy and its Implementation Programme
  - Any local biodiversity areas, whether identified formally or informally through surveys and assessments at local authority level
  - Rare and protected species, including those that are legally protected under the Wildlife Acts, 1976-2000, Flora Protection Order, 1999, EU Birds Directive, EU Habitats Directive, and European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations, 1997, and other species that are rare or threatened including those listed in Red Data Books, and BoCCI Red and Amber list bird species
  - Rare and threatened habitats, including those listed on Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive and all fens and natural/semi-natural woodlands of ecological value, and the



habitats of species listed above. Available data include habitat mapping for Galway City and large parts of Co. Clare and this should be used

- Biodiversity in general – to reflect obligations and commitments of the National and County Biodiversity plans; the overriding aims of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives (i.e. to ensure biodiversity through the conservation of natural habitats and of wild flora and fauna) and the Convention on Biological Diversity, including Countdown 2010 (i.e. target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010); Article 10 of the Habitats Directive which places a particular onus on spatial or land-use plans to recognise and safeguard stepping stones and ecological corridors and networks; and the Environmental Liability Directive
14. Information on nature conservation designations is available from the NPWS website. This includes site boundary data for use in GIS, and site synopses, or summary descriptions of the key conservation interests of sites. As changes to site boundaries occur on an ongoing basis, EirGrid is advised to ensure that the most up-to-date digital boundaries available from NPWS are included in the final draft of the SEA and appropriate assessment. A statement should be included to the effect that any new or modified sites notified or designated in the lifetime of the Grid25 strategy and its Implementation Programme will be recognised and protected. NPWS data can be requested using the data request form on <http://www.npws.ie/en/media/Media,6687,en.doc>.
  15. Potential cumulative impacts of powerlines and wind energy developments on birds and their habitats, flight paths and migration routes, and on existing and potential new SPAs is a key concern that will need to be addressed in the SEA and appropriate assessment; the 'comments specific to birds' in the Department's submission of 01/11/09 on the Offshore Renewable Energy Plan (our ref. G2009/520; see appended) should be followed in this regard.
  16. Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) in the SEA should be included to cover habitats and species both within and outside sites with nature conservation designations. Many species of flora and fauna are protected in the wider countryside by the Wildlife Acts of 1976 and 2000 and under the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 and amendments. In particular Bats and Otters are strictly protected by being listed on annex IV of the Habitats Directive. It is important that Natura 2000 sites, article 10 of the Habitats Directive and the National Biodiversity Plan are taken into consideration when drafting the Plan and scoping for SEA. Article 10 of the Habitats Directive outlines the need to include linear features and stepping stones for biodiversity in land use plans. Such linear features, or corridors, include hedges, rivers, canals and roadside verges. Examples of stepping stones include marshes and woodlands. While we welcome the SEO's B1 – B3 as being suitable for the purpose of protecting habitats and species within SACs, SPAs and NHAs, and for the purposes of article 10 of the Habitats Directive, it is our opinion that the issue of protected species in the wider countryside, outside of designated sites, has not been addressed in the proposed SEOs.
  17. It is important that the needs of protected species such as Salmon, Lamprey species and Freshwater Pearl Mussel, all of which are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive, are reflected in SEOs for water. Copies of the draft sub-basin plans and Programmes of Measures for Freshwater Pearl Mussels can be downloaded from [http://www.wfdireland.ie/docs/5\\_FreshwaterPearlMusselPlans/](http://www.wfdireland.ie/docs/5_FreshwaterPearlMusselPlans/) or through [www.environ.ie](http://www.environ.ie). It is also important that water SEOs are compatible with the relevant River Basin Management Plans. Regarding flood risk, flood plains should be left undeveloped to allow

for the protection of these valuable habitats along the river corridors and provide areas for floodwater retention. We note that no draft SEOs for water have been provided in the draft scoping report.

18. We also advise checking with the GIS section of the National Parks and Wildlife Service prior to publishing the final version of the maps of designated sites to ensure they are up to date at the time of adopting the Plan. It is also important that the Plan should take cognisance of boundary changes to sites made during the lifetime of the Plan to ensure that such sites are afforded protection in the event of any boundary change.
19. While we appreciate that the purpose of the Plan is to upgrade and develop the grid for future needs, if the Plan contains any indicative maps for wind energy then it is important that issues such as flight paths of birds are considered.

If you require any further information with regard to any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the contact details below.

Please also acknowledge receipt of this letter to the following address:

Development Applications Unit,  
Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government,  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
Dun Sceine,  
Harcourt Lane,  
Dublin 2

Is mise le meas,



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David Tuohy  
Development Applications Unit  
01 8883183  
David.tuohy@environ.ie

**From:** Julie Fossitt - (DAHG)  
**Sent:** 20 December 2010 15:35  
**To:** 'Maeve.Flynn@Eirgrid.com'  
**Subject:** SEA and Grid 25

Maeve

I came across a paper on SEA that included a case study on the Portugese electricty transmission network that I thought might of some relevance to you - see attached. I haven't had a chance to read it yet.

Also, you had sought comments informally on the SEA and AA for Grid 25 and its IP. My comments are set out below, in case these haven't made their way to you.

#### COMMENTS

Grid 25 sets out the framework for future development of grid infrastructure. A significant element of new infrastructure is being driven by the locations of renewable energy developments but, importantly, the availability of the grid is highly influential in determining the general locations of such developments, whether onshore or offshore. It is one of the key criteria used in selecting preferred or target areas for wind energy developments in County Development Plans.

#### General

The six major procedures identified in the IP as 'environmental mitigation measures' to assist in identifying and avoiding environmental effects are welcomed, as are the initial general mitigation measures (particularly for biodiversity, flora and fauna) in Section 5.1 of the IP. Of these, it is felt that the preparation of a National Terrestrial Renewable Energy Generation Strategy is particularly important in identifying in combination plans and projects, and in assessing potential cumulative effects on Natura 2000 sites. However, it is unclear who will be preparing this strategy (EirGrid?) and over what timeframe. These points should be clarified, and it should be stated that this strategy will itself require AA and SEA.

The strategy for offshore renewables (in prep. by SEAI) will also be particularly important in relation to cumulative effects. What is not said, however, is that (draft) Transmission Development Plans (TDPs) and future iterations of the IP will require AA and SEA, as will the high level plan for high level transmission requirements.

EirGrid should note that, contrary to what is said in Section 4.7 of the IP, management plans and conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites will not include "criteria and methods to accomodate grid developments".

Some more detailed consideration should be given to infrastructural requirements/project elements and associated impacts where offshore energy comes onshore.

It is felt that the 'strategic transmission potential for Ireland' map (Fig. 2.1.), including current infrastructure and 'areas requiring future network development', should be overlain on the map of Natura 2000 sites, and the map of all sites with nature conservation designations.

Of the lists of projects within the current TDP 2010-2015, there should be some consideration of which projects or project elements are captured by what regulating mechanism(s) (e.g. planning permission, foreshore licensing, etc) and, hence, where there is/was the requirement for project-level AA, and whether these requirements have been met. All aspects of each project at all relevant stages should be taken into account, including access and construction elements, and maintenance, replacement or decommissioning. In some cases, this could elucidate the requirements for other consents including the consent of the Minister in relation to activities requiring consent.

#### Appropriate Assessment

On a general point, based on experience with AA of plans to date, it is recommended that AA (whether screening or full AA) be completed for the draft plan, i.e. AA should not be presented as a draft assessment. After that, any plan amendments can be assessed and treated as addenda to the main AA.

The conclusions of the AA are as follows (Section 3.6): "*Due to the strategic nature of the Grid25 IP, it cannot be conclusively stated at this stage that the plan will not adversely affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network. Therefore, mitigation measures have been proposed to ensure that significant impacts are avoided.*"

The various mitigation measures in the IP are repeated, and include the six major procedures and general mitigation measures. After this, however, it is not shown how these mitigation measures will avoid adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites arising from the strategy on its own or in combination with other plans and projects, nor is it shown how the measures will be implemented with respect to the current IP, or any new or annual TDPs, or individual projects. As presented, the current AA is incomplete and inconclusive regarding the potential for adverse effects on Natura 2000 sites and their conservation objectives.

#### SEA

The SEA should include specific reference in the baseline information section to proposed NHAs (sites of ecological value but with no direct legal protection) in the text, and should also include sites or areas of ecological importance, e.g. BirdWatch Ireland's 'Important Bird Areas' (Crowe et al., 2009).

Regards,  
Julie

Dr Julie Fossitt  
Divisional Ecologist, Western Division  
National Parks and Wildlife Service



**Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil**  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



29<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Grid 25 SEA Consultation,  
EirGrid,  
The Oval,  
160 Shelbourne Road,  
Ballsbridge,  
Dublin 4

**Our Ref: G2011/142**  
**Re: Grid 25 Implementation Programme - Environmental Assessments**

A Chara,

I refer to the Draft Grid25 Implementation Programme and its environmental assessments. Outlined below are the nature conservation and archaeological recommendations of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

### **Archaeology**

The Environmental report includes satisfactory objectives and mitigation proposals for protection of archaeological heritage. However it should be made clear when referring to the underground cabling option that this would have significantly greater impacts on archaeological heritage than overhead lines.

### **Nature Conservation**

In terms of development, the two main elements of the Implementation Programme are the upgrading of existing circuits and the creation of new circuits. Both are required to transport power across a meshed network between generator locations and demand centres, and both are responding to, and will determine the locations of renewable energy projects, particularly, at present, wind energy projects in onshore locations. In this regard, the Natura Impact Statement and SEA Environmental Report both fail to address and assess the wider likely significant effects at a strategic level.

While there is no national onshore renewable energy or wind energy strategy at present, there are many county-level strategies which have been adopted or are close to adoption. Prior to the finalisation or adoption of the Implementation Programme, there should be further integration of the Implementation Programme with these strategies, together with further consideration of cumulative or in combination effects, particularly for birds and their habitats and flightlines, bats, peatlands, and sensitive surface waters.

Two main maps are included in the Implementation Programme. One shows planned upgrades to the electricity transmission network and, in a broad-brush approach (i.e. the wide green arrows), indicates the '*areas of principal future network development requirements*' (as of 2009). The other map (Fig. 4.1) shows the '*potential areas for land/sea connections*' for offshore renewables.

At a minimum, it is recommended that these maps, or their key components, are superimposed on maps of Natura 2000 sites and Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchments/sub-basins (where Freshwater Pearl Mussel is a qualifying interest of the SAC), in the case of appropriate assessment, and maps of all nature conservation sites (Natura 2000 sites, NHAs, proposed NHAs, National Parks, Nature Reserves, Wildfowl Sanctuaries), in the case of SEA, to highlight areas of potential conflict that require further attention at a strategic level.

The above will highlight areas of concern in relation to the potential land/sea connections and major ecological constraints. The potential for significant effects on Natura 2000 sites with coastal qualifying features is noted and this requires further attention in the current Grid25 strategy and Implementation Programme, or as part of the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan, and their environmental assessments.

### **Draft Implementation Programme**

Pages 73 - 76 contain a list of mitigation measures for the implementation programme (IP) which, it is stated, will be extended and augmented by the output from the Environmental Benchmarking Studies and Evidence-Based Guidelines as described in the Plan. While the mitigation measures are welcome they have omitted some important species. Our recommendations are as below.

**It is recommended that the mitigation measures be extended to include mitigation for bat species, otters, lamprey species and kingfishers.**

Hedgerows are important biodiversity corridors as envisaged under Article 10 of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and can also act as pathways for bat species to navigate along from roost sites to feeding areas. It is recommended therefore that it should be stated in the IP that the preferred option is that pylons should not be sited in hedgerows.

Point 4.9 of the Implementation Programme states that, "EirGrid will continue to work pro-actively with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) to ensure that management plans and conservation objectives for Natura 2000 Sites include criteria and methods to accommodate grid developments." It is not appropriate, in general terms, for management plans and conservation objectives for Natura 2000 Sites to include criteria and methods to accommodate grid developments. This sentence should be omitted.

### **Appropriate Assessment**

The comments re the need for mitigation measures mentioned above also apply to the AA.

The issue of cumulative impact has been mentioned in section 3.3 but has only considered some other plans and has not considered projects.

## **SEA**

Species are protected under the Wildlife Acts of 1976 and 2000 and also under annex IV of the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC). SEO B3 appears to be trying to avoid significant impacts on such species and also of relevant habitats. However this SEO needs to be clarified as such species and habitats can occur anywhere. SEO B3 contains the term "wildlife sites" so it is not clear if the species and habitats are being protected by this SEO in the wider countryside or only in a "wildlife site".

Kindly forward any further information to the following address as soon as it issues:

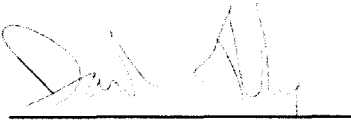
The Manager,  
Development Applications Unit,  
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government,  
Newtown Road,  
Wexford

Alternatively, documentation associated with the above can be referred electronically to the DAU at the following address:

[manager.dau@environ.ie](mailto:manager.dau@environ.ie)

In addition, please acknowledge receipt of these observations by return.

Is mise le meas,



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