



An
Bord
Pleanála

Record of Meeting ABP-319811-24 (OC)

Case Reference / Description	Proposed development of an extension to current port infrastructure at Rosslare Europort to provide assembly support for offshore wind farms. Rosslare Harbour, Ballygillane Big, County Wexford		
Case Type	Pre-application consultation		
1st / 2nd / 3rd / 4th Meeting	1 st Meeting		
Date	24 July 2024	Start Time	3:40pm
Location	MS Teams	End Time	5:10pm

Representing An Bord Pleanála

Stephen Kay (Assistant Planning Director) Chair

Una O'Neill (Senior Planning Inspector)

Maeve Flynn (Ecologist)

Conor Donnelly (Ecologist)

Ellen Moss (Executive Officer)

Representing the Prospective Applicant

Jeannie Dunne (Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions Limited)

Joey O'Connor (Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions Limited)

Aoife Kelly (Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions Limited)

Diarmuid O'Loan (Gavin & Doherty Geosolutions Limited)

Matthew Greene (Irish Rail)

Billy Hoey (Irish Rail)

Glenn Carr (Irish Rail)

Krista Farrugia (Nolan O'Dwyer)

Introduction

The Board referred to the letter received from the prospective applicant on the 17th May 2024, requesting pre-application consultations under section 287 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, and advised the prospective applicant that the instant meeting essentially constituted an information-gathering exercise for the Board; it also invited the prospective applicant to outline the nature of the proposed development and to highlight any matters that it wished to receive advice on from the Board. The Board's representatives mentioned the following general procedures in relation to the pre-application consultation process:

- The Board will keep a record of this meeting and any other meetings, if held. Such records will form part of the file which will be made available publicly at the conclusion of the process. The record of the meeting will not be amended by the Board once finalised, but the prospective applicant may submit comments on the record which will form part of the case file.
- A further meeting or meetings may be held in respect of the proposed development.
- Further information may be requested by the Board.
- The Board may hold consultations in respect of the proposed development with other bodies.
- In accordance with section 287(3) of the Act, the decision to close a consultation rests with the Board. At the conclusion of the pre-application process the case file including the record of meetings held and the report of the reporting inspector detailing the issues arising in the consultation, will be forwarded to the Board. The Board will issue a Direction/Order clarifying that the consultation has closed and that the prospective applicant may make an application for permission under section 291.

- The holding of consultations does not prejudice the Board in any way and cannot be relied upon in the formal planning process or in any legal proceedings.

Presentation made by the prospective applicant:

The prospective applicant began their presentation by briefly discussing the meeting agenda.

The prospective applicant provided an introduction and background to the proposed development. The proposed development site is ideally positioned to support offshore developments in the Irish and Celtic seas, including the five 'Phase 1' offshore windfarm projects on the East Coast.

The prospective applicant provided an overview of the proposed development, including information on dredging and land reclamation. The development will comprise a new ORE focussed purpose built quay and berth together with quayside storage and pre construction areas. A navigable channel of –10mCD will be widened from the existing 150m to 300m and this together with berth pockets at the new berths will require 1,300,000 m³ of material to be dredged. The total of 21 hectares of reclamation area proposed will require 1,500,000 m³ of infill material. The reclamation material will be a combination of dredged material and imported engineered fill.

The prospective applicant provided information on the progress of the project. The MAC application was submitted in December 2023. Geotechnical site investigation work was completed in April 2024. Public consultation events were held in December 2023 and June 2024. The prospective applicant advised that all studies and surveys are due to be completed by the end of July 2024 and that the EIAR will be completed in September, 2024. The prospective applicant advised they intend to submit the

application in September / October 2024. If the application is granted, it is intended that construction works would begin in January 2026 with an aim to complete construction works in December 2027, in line with the offshore projects looking likely to commence construction in 2028.

The prospective applicant provided a further summary of the proposed development. Rosslare is Ireland's closest port to mainland Europe. It is the second busiest port for passenger and freight traffic, after Dublin Port. The proposed project development boundary includes the reclamation area and the dredge area and lies largely within the maritime area.

The prospective applicant will apply for planning permission for 50 years, however it is envisaged that the port facilities developed by the project will be required beyond this time period. It is not considered necessary to plan for demolition and reinstatement works or closure of the ORE Hub.

The prospective applicant set out how the project is aligned with requirements set out in the Climate Action Plan 2024, National Development Plan 2021-2030, Department of Transport Policy Statement on the Facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by Commercial Ports in Ireland (2021), EU Offshore Renewable Energy Strategy (2020) and the National Marine Planning Framework (2021).

The prospective applicant provided information on stakeholder engagement consultations undertaken to date. This includes Wexford County Council, the Commissioner for Irish Lights (April 2023), Department for Transport (April 2023), NMS (April 2023) and the National Parks and Wildlife Services (informal phone call in September 2023). Engagement with users of the existing small boat harbour is ongoing. Town Hall events for the public were held in Rosslare Europort in December 2023 and May 2024. In person project briefings were held for local stakeholders, including political representatives, in December 2023 and online in

May and June 2024. In February 2024 a workshop was held for the fishing community. A dedicated project website was launched in May 2024. Further engagement with the NPWS was initiated in July 2024.

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be prepared to consider the impact of the project on the Seas off Wexford candidate Special Protection Area (cSPA) site. The project team consider the need to invoke the IROPI provisions of the directive to be highly unlikely. This is due to the absence of priority habitat, the fact that no Annex I habitats will be impacted, low usage by birds for foraging during the two years of site bird surveys undertaken and low biodiversity value and sufficient mitigation measures proposed in the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment in the NIS.

The proposed development's primary purpose would be to support offshore renewable energy projects for the East Coast of Ireland and the Celtic Sea, as well as the provision of operations and maintenance facilities for the duration of the projects. Given high development cost (currently estimate €220M) and uncertainty over timelines for construction of Phase 1 and South Coast DMAP offshore wind projects, the proposed development may support traditional port operations (e.g. RORO freight operations) in periods where there is no offshore renewable energy project demand in order to generate required revenue streams. Inclusion of the traditional port operations uses in the application is on the basis that the ORE Hub will need to be used from when it is constructed right throughout its lifetime to ensure value for money is achieved.

Discussion:

The Boards representatives began the discussion by mentioning that they noticed that the presentation shown was slightly different from that provided prior to the meeting. The project design life on slide 13 had changed from 30 years to 50 years. The prospective applicant advised that the design life was in relation to the

infrastructure and not necessarily the duration of which the EIA assessment will be undertaken and that 50 years would be the typical operational life of the port before upgrades and repairs would be required. The Boards representatives advised the prospective applicant to submit clear documentation as to the primary purpose of the port, outlining (as discussed) that the intention isn't that the port use would end and that there isn't a ceasing of the validity of the permission at the end of the 50 years.

The prospective applicant advised that the port would require the ability to use the facility for existing operations and that it is essential that the port continue to use the facility for port uses after the construction of the ORE Hub. The Boards representatives reminded the prospective applicant to be clear with their intentions in this regard when preparing the application documents and to tie in the Ports Policy. The Boards representatives noted that the Ports Policy is currently being updated. The prospective applicant advised the revised ports policy will not be ready until next year, but at this stage, it is expected that the regional development of ports is going to be a core part of the policy and the proximity of Rosslare to Dublin Port would reduce the capacity challenges Dublin Port could face in the mid 2030's.

The Boards representatives noted that the prospective applicant had submitted a MAC application in December 2023 and queried if there was any update. The prospective applicant advised that the MAC is currently under assessment by MARA.

The Boards representatives noted that a total of 21 hectares of reclaimed area would be required and queried the area of dredging that would be required. The prospective applicant advised in total 40 hectares would be dredged to facilitate the new berth and widened navigation channel.

The Board representatives advised the prospective applicant that any future application will be assessed against the National Maritime Planning Framework (NMPF) as it is a requirement under the Act to comply with NMPF. Application

documentation should demonstrate compliance with the range of policies within the NMPF, using best available scientific data, including demonstration of application of an ecosystem-based approach to planning.

The Boards representatives queried if any issues other than noise and dust were raised by Wexford County Council. The prospective applicant advised that they had specifically engaged with noise and dust issues highlighted by the local authority and that Wexford County Council had guided them on where they wanted monitoring equipment to be based. The prospective applicant advised Wexford County Council made a submission to them on the 21st June 2024 and they have received good feedback from them. The Boards representative noted that the application documents should address policies and objectives of the Wexford County Development Plan, particularly issues arising in relation to coastal zone management and marine spatial planning.

The Boards representatives queried if there had been engagement with the NPWS. The prospective applicant advised they have engaged with the NPWS in terms of their scoping report and, so far, they have not identified any issues or concerns. Following a digital response, the prospective applicant had a conversation with a representative from the NPWS. They discussed methodology, marine mammal ecology surveys and what was issued in the scoping report.

The Boards representatives discussed the bird surveys undertaken and queried the extent of the survey area and need for operational noise assessment, as well as construction noise impact. The prospective applicant highlighted that the two vantage point areas cover the entire proposed development area. The prospective applicant also highlighted that extensive bird surveys have been undertaken for a period of two years. Sufficient coverage of the area was available for land-based sea bird surveys. The Boards representatives advised that the applicant should ensure that the most up-to-date data is utilised in survey work and that all assessments

must be robust to avoid any time delays in the process. Documentation should be clear in terms of methodologies adopted, modelling assumptions, and if there are gaps, highlight where and why, and how they have been addressed.

The Boards representative queried if the prospective applicant had thought about applying a nature positive or biodiversity type net gain to the proposal. The prospective applicant responded that this is something that would have to be discussed with the application team. The Boards representative stated that it is not a requirement but is something that is beneficial.

The Boards representative advised that clear tables in the NIS, including the attributes and targets of the project can provide a clear overview of any issues and can help with the assessment.

The Boards representatives queried whether the prospective applicant could provide an overview of their findings to date concerning marine mammals. The prospective applicant advised that they are working with the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and have completed two 24-month vantage point surveys for marine mammals. They have also deployed some F pods in December, so there will be 6 months of F Pod data for porpoise surveys. They have 3 months of noise surveys from which they hope to extract seal vocalisation data as they are close to harbour seals. The NPWS have informally advised the prospective applicant that they are most interested in the seal population. The prospective applicant advised that they don't have information on acoustic surveys as they are still processing the information. They have issued the marine mammal survey to the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG), and they have found that there are a number of harbour porpoises in the general area. The IWDG have records of common dolphins. Regarding the vantage point surveys, some harbour porpoises are a bit further out but not within the proposed site location. Similarly, with harbour seals, there is no record of harbour seals in the proposed site location, but there have been grey seals.

The Boards representatives queried potential erosion, deposition, and pattern changes as a result of dredging and land reclamation works, and potential impacts on seabed habitat loss and disturbance to benthic communities. The prospective applicant advised that settlement modelling surveys are still being conducted and that work has been undertaken by UCC looking at this issue. The wave and currents modelling has been completed; the application team had two buoys deployed until April. The prospective applicant anticipates that the port would experience sediment coming from the southeast instead of erosion, and maintenance dredging would be required every 2 to 3 years. The prospective applicant advised that a licence from MARA will be required for the dredging and accompanying dumping at sea licence from the EPA. There is current maintenance dredging at the port and the prospective applicant's target is not to affect the current regime. The Boards representatives asked if contamination issues arise with the dredged material. The prospective applicant advised that they have surveyed boreholes, and there has been no evidence of contamination above the levels permitted for dumping at sea in any of the samples collected.

The Boards representatives noted the extent of surveys/considerations listed in relation to fisheries, shipping and navigation; cultural heritage; air quality and noise, landscape and visual; cumulative impacts. The Boards representatives reiterated the importance of how survey results are presented, with the methodology used and assumptions clearly set out, and any data gaps identified.

The Boards representatives queried extent of terrestrial surveys and whether bat surveys have been undertaken. The prospective applicant advised that approximately 12 months of surveys have been undertaken, and bats have not been present.

The Boards representatives noted that they were aware of permission granted under section 177AE for the M25 access road (ABP Ref ABP-314015-22) and queried if there would be any overlap between the construction of the road and the proposed development. The prospective applicant advised that the construction of the road is expected to begin next year, and it is unlikely but possible that, if permission is granted for this development, that the construction of the two developments would overlap. The Boards representatives queried if this development's access route depends on the road being constructed. The prospective applicant advised that the access to the development site is not dependent on the new road, however it is the preferred route. The Boards representatives reminded the prospective applicant to highlight these options in the traffic management and other relevant sections of the EIAR.

The Boards representatives queried whether construction noise would be an issue in residential areas. The prospective applicant advised that there would not be an issue due to the separation distance to the nearest residential area. They are currently working at the port and have received positive feedback from the community on how the work is being managed and no complaints received.

The prospective applicant queried the next steps of the pre-application consultation stage and noted that they hope to submit the application in October. The Boards representatives advised the prospective applicant that following this meeting, the Board would prepare and issue the record of the meeting for them to review and issue a response to the Board with any comments that would go on the file. The Boards representatives reminded the prospective applicant that the process differs slightly from sections 37 and 182 in that the Board has the discretion to close the consultation stage. Regarding the timeline, the Boards representative advised that depending on whether further meetings are required and when the valid MAC is received, the timeline for submitting the application in late September/ October may

be feasible and reiterated that if the prospective applicant requires a further meeting, this can be facilitated.

The Boards representatives issued the procedures documentation to the prospective applicant prior to the meeting. The Board's representatives reiterated that the Board's administrative team is available to check dates in site notices and newspaper notices and queried if the prospective applicant had any questions based on the documentation issued. The prospective applicant queried if an updated list of prescribed bodies is available. The Boards representatives advised that the list of prescribed bodies would accompany the Board Direction at the conclusion of the pre application consultation process.

The Boards representatives requested that the updated presentation be issued to the Board for the case file.

Conclusion:

The Board's representatives advised that the record of the instant meeting will be issued in due course and the prospective applicant can submit any comments it may have in writing or alternatively bring any comments for discussion at the time of any further meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 5:10pm.



Stephen Kay

Assistant Director of Planning