

An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Inspector's Addendum Report

ABP-320946-24A

Development	Upgrade of established public lakeshore recreation and amenity facility at Long Point, Lake Road (R351).
Location	Knockanima, Loughrea, County Galway
Planning Authority	Galway County Council.
Type of Application	Application for approval made under Section 177(AE) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (local authority development requiring appropriate assessment)
Observer(s)	Francis Fahy Gerard McInerney
Inspector	Hugh O'Neill

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This report is an addendum to the inspector's report dated 29 September 2025 in respect of ABP-320946-24.
- 1.2. On 21 October 2025 An Coimisiún decided to defer this case for consideration at a further meeting.
- 1.3. An Coimisiún also decided to refer the file for the preparation of a report from one of the Commission's Ecologists. That report to consider, inter alia:
- a. Potential construction impacts of the proposed development on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA
 - b. Potential impacts of the proposed "beach extension" on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA (specifically addressing the importation of additional sand into the aquatic environment);
 - c. Potential for operational impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA as a result of potentially increased visitor numbers
 - d. The comments received from the DAU in response to the Further Information submitted by the Planning Authority and:
 - e. The adequacy of mitigation measures set out by planning authority

An Coimisiún requested that following completion of the above report, the file should be referred to the planning inspector for the preparation of an addendum report and recommendation.

- 1.4. Specialist Report: Ecology report dated 09/02/26 is appended to this report at Appendix B.
- 1.5. This addendum report considers the report of the Ecologist made on foot of the above request of An Coimisiún and incorporates that specialist reporting into the inspector's assessment and recommendation.

2.0 Ecologist report

- 2.1. The specialist report addresses each of the points requested by ACP and is provided at Appendix B to this addendum report the main points are as follows.

- 2.2. The Ecology report introduces concerns regarding the adequacy of the baseline data to support the contention that qualifying interest Habitat is of low quality in the location of the proposed direct impact. The proposal for post consent survey to establish habitat quality as proposed is considered inappropriate to the circumstances of the proposal.
- 2.3. The Ecologist report sets out concerns regarding the level of site-specific detail to support a conclusion on the effectiveness of coffer dams as proposed mitigation in this instance. The report raises concerns regarding post consent survey/monitoring to determine the presence of/potential for groundwater springs or seepages in the works area thereby introducing doubt regarding the effectiveness of this mitigation measure.
- 2.4. The Ecologist report also highlights concerns regarding potential for impacts arising from turbidity, and settlement of material on vegetation during in-lake works.
- 2.5. The Ecologist report concludes with a recommendation that where An Coimisiún are minded to approve the proposal that the following water edge elements could be excluded from any such consent and this would address the above referenced concerns:
- Repair of the existing slipway to provide safe launching point for kayaks and stand-up paddle boards.
 - Provision of a circular viewing deck to the south of the existing pier.
 - Alteration to existing beach area and provision of a deck, steps and ramp to water's edge and beach area for access for all to the water.

3.0 Assessment

- 3.1. I have considered the request by An Coimisiún and the reporting of the ecologist on each point therein.
- 3.2. The specialist opinion set out in the ecologist report is that there has not been adequate consideration of the ecological baseline to determine the quality of the QI habitat in the areas to be directly impacted. The Ecologist report also considers the assessment of impacts incomplete including the failure to consider hydrological and water quality impacts to Lough Rea SAC and SPA during the proposed in-lake works. Doubt has been introduced by the Ecology report regarding the effectiveness of the

mitigation measures proposed in the NIS and CEMP for both in lake construction work and for the handling of water during construction phase. This doubt prevents the exclusion of adverse effects on the Conservation Objective to maintain the favourable conservation condition of Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. Further detail is set out in the revised appropriate assessment stage 2 conclusion below and in the tables at appendix A of this report.

3.3. There is provision in section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended whereby An Coimisiún can either directly approve elements of the proposal whilst refusing other elements (split decision) or to seek a revised proposal from the applicant.

3.4. I consider the split decision approach advocated in the Ecologist Report would fully and effectively mitigate the identified concerns and would facilitate an AA determination that the consented development would not adversely affect the integrity of European site in view of the site's Conservation Objectives. However, I have concerns regarding the nature and extent of modification to the proposed development required in this approach.

3.5. The lake edge elements recommended for exclusion in the ecology report are integral parts of the proposed development. The purpose of the proposal is to enhance access to the lake. I consider the exclusion of these elements in the manner of a split decision would undermine the project and the delivery of policy objectives.

3.6. Splitting of the project for the purpose of avoiding adverse impacts on the Lake Habitats could contribute to a risk of uncoordinated piecemeal development in this environmentally sensitive location undermining the project and would risk setting a poor precedent.

3.7. The County Development Plan (CDP), Local Area Plan (LAP) and County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan as set out in the inspector report dated 29 September 2025 generally seek a coordinated and integrated development alongside protection of environmental assets including the application of the universal design approach. These objectives would be undermined in the case of a split decision. Policies and objectives, the achievement of which would be impacted by a split decision include but are not limited to those summarised below. These are set out in full in the inspector's report of 29 September 2025:

County Development Plan

CT 1 Protect and improve access to natural amenity tourism resources.

PDU 1 Promote Universal Design and ensure that all recreational and amenity areas are accessible for people with disabilities.

SRA 2 Protect and promote natural amenities that have been traditionally used for outdoor recreation (water-based facilities, recreational activities, and marinas).

LWT 1 Support the development of tourism activities in lakeland areas and waterways in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and all relevant EU Directives.

IW 1 Preserve, protect and enhance Galway's inland lakes and waterways for their amenity and recreational resource amenity. Seek to provide additional accesses to lake shores.

Local Area Plan

3.8.LSST 30. Support water-based tourism subject to meeting the requirements of relevant Irish Planning and European environmental legislation including the Habitats Directive, the development of the necessary infrastructure and amenities to support water-based tourism within the plan area

3.9.Comment - Approval for the development as proposed (without modification) would undermine Policy NHB 1 of the County Development Plan which seeks to protect and, where possible, enhance the plant and animal species and their habitats that have been identified under European legislation (Habitats and Birds Directive).

3.10.Approval for the development as proposed (without modification) would also undermine objective LSST 26 of the Loughrea Local Area Plan which seeks to promote the sustainable development, recreation and amenity lands supporting the protection of habitats and species listed in the annexes would also be undermined if the proposed development was approved.

4.0 Revised Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment Conclusion: Integrity Test

In screening the need for Appropriate Assessment (Inspectors report of 29 September 2025), it was determined that the proposed development could result in significant effects on:

- Lough Rea SAC 000304
- Lough Rea SPA 004134
- Rahasane Turlough SAC 000322

In view of the conservation objectives of those sites, Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of 177AE was required.

Following receipt of the internal ecologist report dated 09/02/2026, (Appendix B to this report) and taking account of that report prepared by a specialist, on further examination, analysis and evaluation of the NIS, all associated material submitted, considering submissions received, as set out in the revised stage 2 appropriate assessment tables in Appendix A I consider that adverse direct and indirect effects cannot be excluded for the development as proposed.

Reasonable scientific doubt remains regarding the effectiveness of measures proposed to mitigate potential direct and indirect impacts of works within Lough Rea SAC 000304. Potential impacts are to Qualifying Interest 3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara species, attributes of which include hydrological regime and water quality such as transparency and turbidity. Reasonable scientific doubt remains due to:

- Inadequate consideration of the ecological baseline.
- incomplete assessment of impacts, not considering hydrological and water quality.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

- 5.1. I refer to the previous Inspector's Report dated 29 September 2025, and the subsequent Ecology report dated 09 February 2026 prepared at the direction of An Coimisiún.
- 5.2. Whereas options provided for in 177AE of the Act are available to An Coimisiún to remove elements of the proposal by decision or by request for a revised proposal, where they are minded to do so, it is considered in this instance, by virtue of those parts (all water edge development) being integral elements of the proposal, that the splitting of this project would be unsatisfactory and could run the risk of introducing lacunae to any AA determination arising.
- 5.3. In accordance with the direction of An Coimisiún dated 21 October 2025 and taking account of the additional expert opinion set out in the ecologist report I consider it necessary to amend the recommendation in the Inspector Report dated 29 September 2025.
- 5.4. On the basis of the above, I recommend An Coimisiún refuse to approve the proposed development for the reasons and considerations set out.

6.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. On the basis of the information provided with the application and the further information including the Natura Impact Statement and all submissions, having taken into account the Specialist Ecology report ref: R323606_TN, lacunae in the information provided in relation to baseline survey and efficacy of proposed mitigation measures have been identified. It cannot therefore be agreed with certainty that the proposed development individually, or in combination with other plans or projects would not adversely affect the integrity of European site No. SAC 000304 Lough Rea, in view of the site's Conservation Objectives.

The Local Authority has demonstrated that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of Lough Rea SAC in view of the site's Conservation Objective, as the proposal would entail construction and installation of permanent structures to the lake bed in an area of potential Qualifying Interest

(QI) habitat [3140] Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. There has been inadequate consideration of the ecological baseline, and the assessment of impacts is incomplete in not considering hydrological and water quality impacts to Lough Rea SAC during the proposed in-lake works. An Coimisiún is not satisfied that the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of the European Sites in view of the site's conservation objectives.

2. The development as proposed would be contrary to objective **NHB 1** of the Galway County Development Plan 2022 -2028 which seeks to protect and, where possible, enhance the plant and animal species and their habitats that have been identified under European legislation (Habitats and Birds Directive) and **LSST 26** of the Loughrea Local Area Plan 2024-2030 which seeks development of open space/recreation and amenity lands subject to the protection of habitats and species listed in the annexes to and/or covered by the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC, as amended) and would for that reason be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence me, directly or indirectly, following my professional assessment and recommendation set out in my report in an improper or inappropriate way.

Hugh O'Neill
Planning Inspector

13 April 2026

Appendix A Revised Appropriate Assessment. Stage 2

The Natura Impact Statement

The application includes a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) prepared by MKO Planning and Environmental Consultants revision date 08/07/2025. The NIS included a Screening for Appropriate Assessment in section 4 of the NIS.

The following assessment is amended from that presented in Inspector Report 29 September 2025 following receipt of the specialist ecology report dated 09/02/2026.

Appropriate Assessment

The requirements of Article 6(3) as related to appropriate assessment of a project under part XAB, sections 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) are considered fully in this section.

Taking account of the screening determination set out in the Inspector report of 29 September 2025 which remains unaltered, the following is an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposed development of the recreation and amenity development proposed at Longpoint Loughrea in view of the relevant conservation objectives of

- Lough Rea SAC 000304
- Lough Rea SPA 004134
- Rahasane Turlough SAC 000322

based on scientific information provided by the applicant, considering expert opinion set out in the internal ecology report dated 19 December 2025 (Appendix A) above as well as observations on nature conservation.

The information relied upon includes:

- Updated Natura Impact Statement (NIS) prepared by MKO Planning and Environmental Consultants revision dated 08/07/2025
- Landscape Soft Works Report prepared by Cooney McDowall Design Studio Ltd
- Civil Design Report prepared by S. Hanniffy and Associates
- Flood Risk Assessment prepared by Hydro Environmental Ltd
- Updated Ecological Impact Assessment prepared by MKO.
- Arboricultural Report prepared Veon Forestry.

- Habitat Management Plan prepared by MKO.
- Updated Construction and Environmental Management Plan prepared by MKO.
- Updated Civil Drawing Pack prepared by Shane Hanniffy and Associates Consulting Engineers.
- Updated Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report prepared by MKO.
- Updated Site Layout Plan prepared by Helena McElmeel Architects
- Specialist report Direction from Commission: Ecology Report 09/02/26 (Appendix A of this report)

I am satisfied that the information provided is adequate to allow for a procedural Appropriate Assessment. I am satisfied that all aspects of the project which could result in significant effects are considered and assessed in the NIS and mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce any adverse effects on site integrity are included and assessed for effectiveness.

Submissions/observations

Submission received from NPWS 12 September 2025 set out 4 conditions to be attached to any consent.

Summarised as follows:

- pre-construction cyanobacterial crust survey,
- pre-construction survey of ground water springs or seepages,
- amendment to habitat creation proposal including
- elimination of use of fertilisation of proposed grassland.

Summary of Key issues that could give rise to adverse effects (from screening stage):
See section 6 of the NIS.

Qualifying Interest features likely to be affected.	Conservation Objectives	Potential adverse effects	Proposed mitigation measures (summary)
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Lough Rea SAC 000304

3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp.	To maintain the favourable conservation condition. Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes	In lake works for construction of kayak slip, accessibility slip, deck and steps, ambulant access, viewing platform, repairs to piers	Silt Fencing. All in lake works to be under supervision of an ecological clerk of works, carried out in the dry, with use of coffer dams,
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		<p>and replacement of existing decking and expansion of the artificial beach all have potential direct impacts on the QI habitat and potential indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution and spills.</p>	<p>pumping out to ground via silt bags at locations greater than 30m from the lake, electrofishing prior to pump out. Minimum construction footprint possible. Hand tools only for use on lake bed, all concrete allowed to fully cure before rewetting, all works in line with the IFI 2016 Guidelines. All in lake works subject to strict biosecurity protocols including for crayfish plague.</p>
		<p>Edge of lake works for demolition of existing and construction of new lake edge structures, including retaining wall, boardwalk and steps, and beach could affect QI designated area. All have potential direct impacts on the QI habitat and potential indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution and spills.</p>	<p>Excavation depths will be limited to the necessity of the proposed works. Stockpiling of soil in designated areas with surface water controls. Diesel and petrol pumps in banded areas only Exposed surfaces to be revegetated ASAP. No earthworks in heavy rainfall. Perimeter swales for treatment of surface water during construction. Where ground water pumping required shall be</p>

			<p>to silt bags discharging to vegetated area. CIRIA guidance to be followed. Fuel Storage and refuelling in designated areas only by competent staff only. Bunded Fuel Tanks. No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site, precast concrete will be used wherever possible, no washing out of plant, dry days for concrete pours. Spill control, waste management wastewater disposal, good practice guidance to be followed.</p>
		<p>Construction including groundworks in the wider amenity project area have potential to result in water quality impacts arising from release of suspended solids and potential spillage of fuels.</p>	<p>Site Compound location to take account of identified risks. Exposed surfaces to be revegetated ASAP. No earthworks in heavy rainfall. Perimeter swales for treatment of surface water during construction. Where ground water pumping required shall be to silt bags discharging to vegetated area. CIRIA guidance to be followed.</p>

			<p>Fuel Storage and refuelling in designated areas only by competent staff only. Bunded Fuel Tanks.</p> <p>No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site, precast concrete will be used wherever possible, no washing out of plant, dry days for concrete pours.</p> <p>Spill control, waste management wastewater disposal, good practice guidance to be followed.</p>	
		Foul water release/overflow in the event of flooding during operation.	Electrical kiosk to be raised above flood level, foul pump chamber to be full sealed preventing inundation in flood conditions. Alarm light to be fitted.	
		Surface water flows from existing and new hard surfaces to the lake during operational phase have potential to negatively impact on water quality with resultant impact on the QI.	Surface water drainage systems including SUDS measures are provided to cater for all hard surfaces.	
		Increased risk of introduction of invasives with enhanced facilities.	Information boards for invasives at key locations.	
Lough Rea SPA 004134				
A056 Shoveler Anas clypeat	To restore the favourable	Disturbance during construction works		

	conservation condition		Plant and equipment to comply with SI no. 359 of 1996, quiet plant and machinery with operation restricted to quiet works area only. Lighting to be used only when required and to be directed onto works area only.
A125 Coot Fulica atra	To maintain the favourable conservation condition		
A999 Wetlands	To maintain the favourable conservation condition	In lake works for construction of kayak slip, accessibility slip, deck and steps, ambulant access, viewing platform, repairs to piers and replacement of existing decking and expansion of the artificial beach all have potential direct impacts on wetlands and potential indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution and spills and introduction of invasive species.	Silt Fencing All in lake works to be under supervision of an ecological clerk of works, carried out in the dry, with use of coffer dams, pumping out to ground via silt bags at locations greater than 30m from the lake, electrofishing prior to pump out. Hand tools only for use on lake bed, all concrete allowed to fully cure before rewetting, all works in line with the IFI 2016 Guidelines. All in lake works subject to strict biosecurity protocols including for crayfish plague.
		Edge of lake works for demolition of existing and construction of new lake edge	Excavation depths will be limited to the necessity of the proposed works.

		<p>structures, including boardwalk and steps, and beach could affect wetlands. All have potential direct impacts on wetlands with potential indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution and spills and introduction of invasive species.</p>	<p>Stockpiling of soil in designated areas with surface water controls. Diesel and petrol pumps in bunded areas only Exposed surfaces to be revegetated ASAP. No earthworks in heavy rainfall. Perimeter swales for treatment of surface water during construction. Where ground water pumping required shall be to silt bags discharging to vegetated area. CIRIA guidance to be followed. Fuel Storage and refuelling in designated areas only by competent staff only. Bunded Fuel Tanks. No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site, precast concrete will be used wherever possible, no washing out of plant, dry days for concrete pours. Spill control, waste management wastewater disposal, good practice guidance to be followed. All in lake works subject to strict biosecurity</p>
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			protocols including for crayfish plague.
		Construction including groundworks in the wider amenity area project have potential to result in water quality impacts arising from release of suspended solids and potential spillage of fuels.	Site Compound location to take account of identified risks. Exposed surfaces to be revegetated ASAP. No earthworks in heavy rainfall. Perimeter swales for treatment of surface water during construction. Where ground water pumping required shall be to silt bags discharging to vegetated area. CIRIA guidance to be followed. Fuel Storage and refuelling in designated areas only by competent staff only. Bunded Fuel Tanks. No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site, precast concrete will be used wherever possible, no washing out of plant, dry days for concrete pours. Spill control, waste management wastewater disposal, good practice guidance to be followed.
		Foul water release/overflow in the event of failure	Electrical kiosk to be raised above flood level, foul

		and/or flooding during operation.	pump chamber to be full sealed preventing inundation in flood conditions. Fault alarm light to be fitted and inspection schedule.
		Surface water flows from existing and new hard surfaces to the lake during operational phase have potential to negatively impact on water quality with resultant impact on the QI.	Surface water drainage systems with hydrocarbon traps incorporated into SUDS measures with discharge to ground water are provided to cater for all hard surfaces.
		Increased risk of introduction of invasives with enhanced facilities.	Information boards for invasives at key locations.
Rahasane Turlough SAC 000322			
[3180] Turloughs	To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Turloughs in Rahasane Turlough SAC	Works and spills have potential for indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution to Lough Rea which is hydrologically connected.	Site Compound location to take account of identified risks. Exposed surfaces to be revegetated ASAP. No earthworks in heavy rainfall. Perimeter swales for treatment of surface water during construction. Where ground water pumping required shall be to silt bags discharging to vegetated area. CIRIA guidance to be followed.

			<p>Fuel Storage and refuelling in designated areas only by competent staff only. Bunded Fuel Tanks.</p> <p>No batching of wet-cement products will occur on site, precast concrete will be used wherever possible, no washing out of plant, dry days for concrete pours.</p> <p>Spill control, waste management wastewater disposal, good practice guidance to be followed</p>
		<p>Foul water release/overflow in the event of flooding during operation.</p>	<p>Electrical kiosk to be raised above flood level, foul pump chamber to be full sealed preventing inundation in flood conditions.</p> <p>Inspection schedule and failure alarm light to be fitted.</p>
		<p>Surface water flows from existing and new hard surfaces to the lake during operational phase have potential to negatively impact on water quality with resultant impact on the QI.</p>	<p>Surface water drainage systems incorporating hydrocarbon separators including SUDS measures are provided to cater for all hard surfaces.</p>

The above table is based on the documentation and information provided on the file and I am satisfied that the submitted NIS has identified relevant attributes and targets of the Qualifying Interests.

The conclusion of this assessment is reached in the context of the following extracts from the Article 17 reporting on the habitat type:

- *The marl lake or hard-water habitat has an unusual flora, vegetation and fauna, which is very restricted in Europe as a whole, and Ireland contains a large proportion of the total European habitat.*
- *Dedicated 3140 monitoring data were available for 25 lakes and three canals during the reporting cycle. 222 km² or 93% of the area of the 25 monitored lakes was assessed as in 'not-good' condition for Structure and functions.*

Assessment of issues that could give rise to adverse effects view of conservation objectives

a. Impact of 'beach'

On site inspection I observed what appear to be extensive chara beds immediately adjacent to the western pier, extending towards the eastern pier, (confirmed by FI response) the range of this zonation is apparently limited by areas of the natural lake substratum being encroached by sand. The description of the receiving environment in the amended NIS does not adequately reference the variation in substratum in this location, distribution of charophytes or the apparent impact of sand on charophytes and Krustenstein relative to that substrate. Descriptions provided in the NIS are deficient to the extent that definitive findings and conclusions by An Coimisiún regarding impact on the Annex I habitat resulting from introduction and migration sand into and over the Annex I, qualifying interest habitat is not possible.

I interpret the proposal for the extension of the artificial beach to include the importation of an increased volume of sand. I consider this element of the proposal to give rise to a potential conflict with attributes listed in the conservation objective for Lough Rea SAC including vegetation composition: characteristic zonation, and Lake substratum quality. Based on my direct observations of the baseline condition of the lake adjacent to the subject site I consider the introduction of increased volumes of sand as part of the proposed development in combination with (reasonably anticipated) future additions, will incrementally, over time migrate into the lake with the effect of further altering the substratum of the lakebed.

I consider the introduction of increased volumes of sand will negatively impact both charophytes and krustenstein. Chara species (spp) and krustenstein are typical of the QI habitat of Lough Rea SAC. The effect would be to alter/reduce substratum quality, reduce the habitat area and zonation of vegetation in the vicinity of the proposal in contravention of attributes, measures and targets set out in the Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCOs) for Lough Rea SAC.

Mitigation measures and conditions.

The issue of sand migrating in the lake and altering the substratum with is a QI has not been addressed in the NIS. No mitigation has been proposed to address this identified potential impact on the CO. I consider that where An Coimisiún were minded to it could condition the proposed development to mitigate against this specific risk as recommended in inspectors report of 29 September 2025. However, in view of the fundamental issues identified in the specialist ecologist report preventing a positive conclusion of the Integrity Test an alternative recommendation is set out below.

Conclusion:

With reference to the Specialist Ecologist report and concerns therein that the ecological baseline is inadequate, I am not satisfied that the effects of the beach have been assessed adequately in the NIS. I cannot conclude that the proposed beach area will not adversely affect the integrity of this European site.

b. Potential direct impacts arising from construction works to the lake bed.

Insufficient evidence has been provided in the NIS to determine the quality of the habitats within the footprint of the development site where it overlaps with the SAC. The assessment of the ecological baseline and the assessment of impacts in areas of potential direct loss of habitat including at the kayak slip, the accessibility slip, the deck and steps, the ambulant access, viewing platform, and in the location of repairs to piers are considered incomplete.

Notwithstanding conclusions derived from site observations as set out in the inspector's report of 29 September 2025, it has been stated that the quality of the QI habitat in those locations and therefore of the potential impact could only be confirmed through a cyanobacterial curst survey. Beyond the site

observations/survey described in the application and those of the Planning Inspector a specific cyanobacterial curst survey was not undertaken.

Mitigation measures and conditions.

Concerns are set out in the specialist ecology report regarding the request by NPWS to condition post consent surveys to determine the quality of the QI habitat and whether there are groundwater springs or seepages at the locations of the proposed works. The specialist ecology report considers post consent survey not to be appropriate mitigation to address the potential for loss of high-quality areas of the QI.

Conclusion:

The Specialist Ecologist report finds that the ecological baseline is inadequate and that the effects of works in and adjacent to the lake have been inadequately assessed in the NIS. I cannot therefore conclude beyond scientific doubt that these works will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site.

c. Potential indirect impacts arising from suspended solids, other water pollution and spills in the construction phase.

The potential for indirect impacts arising from water quality issues in the course of water management during construction works within and adjacent to the lake on the CO's are identified above. QI attributes include hydrological regime and water quality such as transparency and turbidity.

Mitigation measures and conditions.

The management of surface, ground and lake water encountered in the course of constructing the proposed development is proposed as set out in the table above. This includes pumping of water from within cofferdams to a discharge point, a minimum of 30m from any waterbody and within the main construction site. It will pass through a silt bag before discharge to ground

The specialist Ecology report is concerned that no hydrological assessment was undertaken to inform the proposed mitigation measures to treat pumped water via a silt bag prior to discharging to ground and whether this method is appropriate to manage the volumes and sediment loading.

The specialist ecology report also highlights concerns regarding the limited details provided for construction and management of cofferdams noting that

installing sandbags underwater is challenging to avoid leaks and there is potential to introduce foreign material into the lake.

Conclusion:

Taking account of the Specialist Ecologist report and the doubt therein regarding adequacy of mitigation measures for water management I cannot conclude beyond scientific doubt that these works will not adversely affect the integrity of the European site as a result of water quality impacts.

In-combination effects

I am satisfied that in-combination effects have been assessed adequately in the NIS. A schedule of plans and projects considered are set out in appendix 3 of the NIS projects considered consist of rural domestic development.

I have reviewed the list and conducted an up to date search of the planning register in the area for the purpose of this addendum report and I am satisfied that the applicant has demonstrated satisfactorily that no significant residual effects will remain post the application of proposed mitigation measures including by condition. I am satisfied that there is therefore no potential for in-combination effects arising for the development as consented.

Findings and conclusions

The applicant determined that it can be objectively concluded that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site.

Based on the information provided, taking account of the Specialist Ecology report I am not satisfied that adverse effects arising can be excluded for the European sites considered in the Appropriate Assessment.

Reasonable scientific doubt

I am not satisfied that no reasonable scientific doubt remains as to the absence of adverse effects.

Appropriate Assessment Conclusion: Integrity Test

In screening the need for Appropriate Assessment, it was determined that the proposed development could result in significant effects on

- Lough Rea SAC [000304]
- Lough Rea SPA 004134
- Rahasane Turlough SAC 000322

in view of the conservation objectives of those sites and that Appropriate Assessment under the provisions of 177AE was required.


Following receipt of the internal ecologist report dated 09/02/2026, (Appendix B to this report) and taking account of this report an examination, analysis and evaluation of the NIS, all associated material submitted, considering submissions received, and the, I consider that adverse direct and indirect effects cannot be excluded for the proposal.

Reasonable scientific doubt remains regarding the effectiveness of measures proposed to mitigate potential direct and indirect impacts of works within Lough Rea SAC 000304. Potential impacts are to Qualifying Interest 3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara species, attributes of which include hydrological regime and water quality such as transparency and turbidity.

Reasonable scientific doubt remains due to:

- Inadequate consideration of the ecological baseline.
- incomplete assessment of impacts, not considering hydrological and water quality.

Appendix B: Specialist Report. Ecology

 <p>An Coimisiún Pleanála</p>	Specialist Report: Ecology
	ABP-320946-24 – Specialist report Direction from Commission: R323606_TN
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Development	Knockanima, Loughrea, County Galway
Type of Application	L.A. Dev. - AA Application
Topic	Direction from Commission: Appropriate Assessment
Ecologist	Paula Kearney BSc, CEcol, MCIEEM
Planning Inspector	Hugh O'Neill

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1.0 Introduction

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Case ABP-322097-25 relates to public realm enhancement works at Long Point, Loughrea, Co. Galway. A Direction from the Planning Commissioner dated 16/07/2025 requested a report from ecologists to consider, inter alia:

- a) Potential construction impacts for the proposed development on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA.
- b) Potential impacts of the proposed 'beach extension' on Lough Rea SAC and SPA (specifically addressing the importation of sand into the aquatic environment).
- c) Potential operational impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA as a result of potentially increased visitor numbers.
- d) The comments received from the DAU in response to the further information submitted by the planning authority; and
- e) The adequacy of mitigation measures as set out by planning authority.

1.1.2. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS), including screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) was prepared by MKO which was amended by further information received on the 16th day of July 2025.

1.1.3. The proposed development is located adjacent and partially within Lough Rea SAC [000304] and Lough Rea SPA [004134].

1.1.4. In my examination of the documents on file including the Planning Inspectors report and response to Further Information Request received on the 16th July 2025.

1.1.5. Therefore, my assessment, as directed by the Commission, is focused only on the five points (a-e) set out under Section 1.1.1, specifically impacts to Lough Rea SAC and SPA.

1.2. Scope of report

1.2.1. This report to the Commission includes a review of the Further Information Request Response documents including the updated Natura Impact Statement, Updated Construction and Environmental Management Plan, Updated Ecological Impact Assessment taking account of documents on

the case file, including the Screening for Appropriate Assessment (Stage1) and Appropriate Assessment (Stage 2).

1.2.2. In my capacity of Inspectorate Ecologist, with over 25 years professional experience, I have the relevant expertise to advise on and undertake Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the proposed works.

1.2.3. I have reviewed and examined the NIS including relevant appendices and figures. The documents have been reviewed with respect to the following current best practice guidance:

- EC (2018) Managing Natura 2000 sites. The provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC
- EC (2021) Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites. Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EC
- CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.3

2.0 Implications for European Sites

2.1. Natura Impact Statement Review

2.1.1. I have reviewed the Updated NIS and Updated CEMP with regards to potential construction impacts for the proposed development on Lough Rea SAC and SPA. Below, I will address each item individually, as submitted by the Commissioner.

a) Potential construction impacts for the proposed development on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA.

2.1.2. I am not satisfied that there has been adequate consideration of construction stage impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA, particularly to the SAC Qualifying Interest (QI) habitat [3140] Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. during the construction and installation of permanent structures within Lough Rea as indicated in the Proposed Site Layout Plan (Drawing No. P(01)03) and NIS Figure 3-2 and 3-4, including the following:

- Proposed Access Ramp
- Proposed Board Walk
- Proposed Crannog Viewing Platform
- Proposed Kayak Ramp

- 2.1.3. The assessment of potential effects and mitigation is set out in the NIS Section 6. It is stated in the NIS Section 6.1.1.1 that “*Lough Rea has a total surface area of approximately 301 ha, and the proposed works within the lake have a combined total area of approximately 0.024 ha, representing approximately 0.008% of the surface area of the lake. In addition, the proposed Crannóg viewing platform will be supported above the lake habitat, therefore, reducing this loss further*”.
- 2.1.4. Mitigation measures for the ‘in-lake’ works within Lough Rea are discussed in the NIS Section 6.1.2.1 and in the CEMP Section 2.4.10.
- 2.1.5. For each location it is proposed that the works will be carried out in the dry to avoid siltation of the Lough Rea and downstream watercourses. The works areas will be temporarily dammed (cofferdam) with sandbags and will completely surround the work area. A submersible pump will be used to pump water out of the works area, creating a dry working area, and will be pumped to a discharge point, a minimum of 30m from any waterbody and within the main construction site. It will pass through a silt bag before discharge to ground.
- 2.1.6. Other than for the construction of the Proposed Crannog Viewing Platform, no machinery will enter the works area(s).
- 2.1.7. Lough Rea 3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. is characterised as having an extensive cyanobacterial crust zone, three or four charophyte zones and low total cover for vascular plant species.
- 2.1.8. The Conservation Objective (CO) Lough Rea SAC (NPWS, Version 1, July 2019) of Lough Rea SAC is to maintain the favourable conservation condition of Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. in Lough Rea SAC. Lough Rea SPA (NPWS, Version 1, October 2022)

includes a CO to maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the wetland habitat at Lough Rea SPA as a resource for the regularly occurring migratory waterbirds that utilise it.

- 2.1.9. The COs are defined by the list of attributes and targets. Under the Lough Rea SAC, the 3140 habitat CO attribute for Habitat Area the target is “*Area stable or increasing subject to natural process*”. As stated in the NIS Section 6.1.1.1 areas proposed for the proposed access ramp, board walk, crannog viewing platform and kayak ramp are located within 0.024 ha of 3140 habitat.
- 2.1.10. It is argued in the NIS that “... *whilst the entire lake habitat is mapped as Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. within the SSCOs of the SAC, following the field surveys, it was noted that Chara spp. within the footprint of the Proposed Development were sparse and did not represent high quality areas of this QI. Furthermore, fringing habitat associated with this QI, such as reed beds, wet grassland, and marsh were absent from the Proposed Development site, further demonstrating that these habitats do not represent high quality examples of this QI.*”
- 2.1.11. However, the Development Applications Unit (DAU) submission dated 12 September 2025, disputes the statement the sparse charophyte cover “...*does not represent high quality areas of this QI*” and argue that this habitat could represent the typical vegetation of the species zone, however this can only be confirmed through a cyanobacterial curst survey which has not been conducted to date. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence provided in the NIS to determine the quality of the habitats within the footprint of the development site.
- 2.1.12. In addition, given the proximity and sensitivity of adjacent European Sites, the mitigation measures proposed for protection of water quality and silt management are very general and not specific to the protection of the European sites.
- 2.1.13. I consider that assessment of potential impacts from the construction of the in-lake works have been underestimated given that Lough Rea is fed by springs and by a stream (Lough Rea SAC Site Code: 000304 Site Synopsis)

and QI attributes include hydrological regime and water quality such as transparency and turbidity. There is no information in the documents provided whether there are groundwater springs or seepages at the proposed infrastructure locations. In addition, there is no hydrological assessment to inform the proposed mitigation measures to treat pumped water via a silt bag prior to discharging to ground and whether this method is appropriate to manage the volumes and sediment loading in the abstracted water.

- 2.1.14. A programme of works is not provided, other than that the timing for all in-lake works to be carried out during the period of July 1st to September 30th to minimise potential adverse impacts to fisheries, in line with Inland Fisheries Ireland (2016) Guidelines on Protection of Fisheries During Construction Works in and Adjacent to Waters.
- 2.1.15. It is unclear if all in-lake works will be carried out at the same time or the duration of works for each location. There is no assessment on the potential for temporary impacts to the hydrological regime of the lake and whether this could be exacerbated during potential drought conditions.
- 2.1.16. Details are not provided regarding the installation of sandbags to create a cofferdam at the multiple works' areas. Installing sandbags underwater is challenging to ensure correct configuration to avoid leaks and there is also potential to introduce foreign material into lake if the sandbags are damaged during installation, construction works and removal.
- 2.1.17. Pumping of the works areas will likely result in the intake of lake sediment. Unless appropriately managed, there is a risk of silt laden water being returned to the lake. Increases in turbidity can significantly affect the quantity and quality of light reaching vegetation and settlement of higher loads of inorganic or organic material on lake vegetation communities may also have impacts on lake habitats and delicate species.
- 2.1.18. As the lake is groundwater fed, drying out the works areas will be exceptionally difficult, and information contained in the mitigation measures in the NIS or CEMP do not sufficiently address issues relating to continuous

pumping and treatment of abstracted water to ensure satisfactory water quality of returning waters to the lake.

b) Potential impacts of the proposed 'beach extension' on Lough Rea SAC and SPA (specifically addressing the importation of sand into the aquatic environment).

2.1.19. On review of the Flood Risk Assessment prepared by Hydro Environmental Ltd (2024) surface wind waves can produce significant wave height in excess 0.5m. The concern is that due to surface wave action, imported beach material could be mobilised and deposited elsewhere on the lake shore submerging sensitive lake vegetation communities.

c) Potential operational impacts on the Lough Rea SAC and SPA as a result of potentially increased visitor numbers.

2.1.20. Lough Rea is an important breeding and wintering site for the two Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species of the SPA; coot and shoveler. Operational stage effects are discussed in the NIS Section 6.1.3.2 where it is acknowledged that the site is already a popular attraction and development intends on improving public amenities which may result in more human activity within the site. I agree with the findings of the NIS, that the Proposed Development site, does not provide significant supporting habitat for these species. These habitats are found on the sheltered western and south-eastern shores of the lake, at least 500m from the development site.

d) The comments received from the DAU in response to the further information submitted by the planning authority

2.1.21. Comments raised by the DAU relating to quality and condition of habitat 3140 are discussed under Section 2.1.11 of this report. I have concerns regarding the proposed conditions to be applied should the Commission grant permission, specifically post consent surveys to determine the quality of the QI habitat and whether there are groundwater springs or seepages at the proposed infrastructure locations. As discussed earlier in this report, I consider that there are gaps in the scientific information submitted and in the efficacy of the mitigation measures proposed. It is not possible to condition measures that have not been assessed.

e) The adequacy of mitigation measures as set out by planning authority.

2.1.22. As discussed above the mitigation measures for the in-lake works are inadequate and do not address potential issues relating to groundwater and provide general and nonspecific mitigation measures related to prevention of water pollution. It is expected that the mitigation measures should be appropriate to the sensitivity of the receptor and include a detailed method statement for each in-lake works location, to include but not limited to the following elements:

- Turbidity can significantly affect the quantity and quality of light reaching rooted and attached vegetation and can, therefore, impact on lake habitats. Therefore, pre-construction monitoring during various weather conditions and surface wave action is required to set a baseline for water quality such as water transparency and turbidity. Secchi disk can be used for assessing water clarity, affected by suspended particles like sediment or algae.
- Best available options for temporary cofferdam arrangements that will facilitate minimal disturbance to the lakebed and risk of pollution during deployment and removal.
- Hydrological assessment is required to inform the most appropriate sediment control for the pumped water and land requirements to cater for infiltration. Depending on volumes, pumped water may need to be discharged through a series of sediment control structures before it can enter any surface water or the ground. This might include settlement tanks/ temporary lagoons, silt fences/geotextile bags and dispersing treated water over natural vegetation to promote recharge and encourage percolation where sufficient area is available, not saturated, can provide infiltration and does not cause erosion.
- Turbidity monitoring will be carried out during in-lake works out to ensure that the water exiting the sediment control measures and entering the lake is not silted. The Ecological Clerk of Works will have the authority to stop works until the mitigation measures have been assessed and any issues resolved.

3.0 Findings and conclusions

- 3.1.1. The applicant determined that following the implementation of mitigation measures the construction and operation of the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site.
- 3.1.2. Despite the relatively modest scale of the proposed development, I am not satisfied that there has been adequate consideration of the ecological baseline and the assessment of impacts is incomplete in not considering hydrological and water quality impacts to Lough Rea SAC and SPA during the proposed in-lake works.
- 3.1.3. Should the Commission be minded to grant consent, I would recommend that the in-lake works are excluded from the permission. The mitigation measures proposed are satisfactory for mitigating the effects of the proposed terrestrial elements of the development, including the following:
1. Repair works comprising:
 - a. Repair of the existing pier surfaces.
 2. Demolition of an existing changing shelter to facilitate passive surveillance and views of Lough Rea.
 3. Alteration to existing toilet and shower building to provide storage, plant, and a changing places toilet (accessible toilet, shower and changing facility) (93 sqm).
 4. Provision of new changing, toilet and shower facilities in a single storey building (86 sqm) including sheltered outdoor shower changing area.
 5. Provision of a lifeguard station building (16 sqm).
 6. Provision of a totem sign extending to c. 4 metres in height.
 7. Provision of a shared active travel route along the sites eastern boundary adjacent to the Lake Road (R351) and the provision of designated bicycle parking spaces.
 8. Removal of 2 no. existing vehicular access points and alterations and junction upgrade works to the existing central access point, and provision of internal pedestrian crossings.

9. Reconfiguration of and upgrades to the existing car parking areas to provide increased parking provision and to accommodate age friendly and set down spaces and trading bays, and the provision of 1 no. new car parking area which includes EV charging and accessible parking spaces.

10. Provision of hard and soft site landscaping works, SuDS measures, pumping and water stations all connections, public lighting, and site services.

11. All ancillary services and associated site development works.

The following in-lake works are recommended to be excluded from the consent, as follows:

- Repair of the existing slipway to provide safe launching point for kayaks and stand-up paddle boards.
- Provision of a circular viewing deck to the south of the existing pier.
- Alteration to the lake edge (manmade and naturalised) including existing beach area and provision of a deck, steps and ramp to water's edge and beach area for access for all to the water.

Signed

Paula Kearney

Senior Ecologist (Inspectorate)

09/02/2026