



An
Coimisiún
Pleanála

Specialist Report:

Ecology

ABP-323427-25 – Specialist report

Direction from Commission:

R323427_TN

Development	Solar Farm, Straboe, Carlow, Co. Carlow
Type of Application	Appeal
Topic	Direction from Commission: Appropriate Assessment
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Planning Inspector	Ronan O'Connor

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1.0 Introduction

1.1. Background

Case ABP-322097-25 relates to Solar PV Energy Development with associated Battery Energy Storage System on Straboe Co. Carlow. A Direction from the Planning Commissioner dated 16/07/2025 requested a report from ecologists to consider, inter alia:

- 1) ACP's Inspectorate Ecologist determines whether the future SID application for a 110kV substation and grid connection should be considered in conjunction with the proposed development for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment.
- 2) Should the Inspectorate Ecologist confirm that the substation and grid connection should be considered as per Item 1 above, the Commission requests that the Inspectorate Ecologist reviews the submitted Natura Impact Statement and associated appendices prepared by NEO Environmental in relation to the adequateness of scientific information regarding the likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development both individually or in combination with other plans or projects that may affect the integrity of the Slaney River SAC (007781) or River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives.

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS), which included the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening was prepared by NEO Environmental (2024).

The solar farm development site overlaps two Water Framework Directive (WFD) sub-catchments, namely the River Slaney sub catchment (Slaney_SC_020) and the River Barrow sub catchment (Barrow_SC_090). Tributaries of the Slaney River include the Downings Stream to the north and an unnamed stream to the south-east. The Slaney River is a designated European site the under Slaney River Valley SAC (Site code: 000781). Tributaries of the River Barrow include the Aghalona and Knockshannagh streams run along the northern boundary of the eastern portion of the Proposed Development Site. The River Barrow is designated under the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (Site code: 002162).

My assessment, as directed by the Commission, is focused only on points 1 and 2, set out under Section 1.1.1, specifically relating to the assessment of the 110kV substation and grid connection.

1.2. Scope of report

This report to the Commission includes a review of the application documentation including the Natura Impact Statement (incl. AA Screening Assessment), Ecological Impact Assessment, Further Information Request Response documents including the Updated Construction and Environmental Management Plan, drawings and design details on file.

In my capacity of Inspectorate Ecologist, with over 25 years professional experience, I have the relevant expertise to advise on the Appropriate Assessment (AA) for the proposed the 110kV substation and grid connection.

2.0 Implications for European Sites

2.1. Appropriate Assessment

With respect to the proposed 110kV substation and grid connection, I will address each item individually, as submitted by the Commissioner.

1) ACP's Inspectorate Ecologist determines whether the future SID application for a 110kV substation and grid connection should be considered in conjunction with the proposed development for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment.

It is noted that Figure 5 of Volume 2 of the documentation submitted outlines an indicative cable route from the site to the existing Carlow 110kV substation to the southwest of the site along the R726 regional road. Neither the cable route nor the substation is included in this application and have not been specifically addressed in the NIS.

It is noted that the indicative cable route is located entirely in the public road and traverses a bridging of a watercourse. The watercourse is located within the River Barrow sub catchment (Barrow_SC_090) and is hydrologically connected to the River Barrow and River Nore SAC (007781), located approximately 17km downstream of the site. Therefore, had this cable route formed part of the application, along the indicative route outlined, it would not have been likely to

give rise to the potential for significant effects on the SAC given the minor nature of the works, dilution factors and distance from European sites. In conclusion, I do not consider that this indicative route should be considered in conjunction with the proposed development for the purposes of Appropriate Assessment.

2) Should the Inspectorate Ecologist confirm that the substation and grid connection should be considered as per Item 1 above, the Commission requests that the Inspectorate Ecologist reviews the submitted Natura Impact Statement and associated appendices prepared by NEO Environmental in relation to the adequateness of scientific information regarding the likely direct and indirect impacts arising from the proposed development both individually or in combination with other plans or projects that may affect the integrity of the Slaney River SAC (007781) or River Barrow and River Nore SAC (002162) in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives.

Having regard to the response to Item 1 above it has not been confirmed that the substation and cable route should be considered and therefore the above-mentioned review of the NIS in the context of same is not required.

Signed

Paula Kearney

Senior Ecologist (Inspectorate)

09/03/2026