
Response

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Response to Section 4.3.2 – Nature Conservation

ACP-324165-26 – Maughanaclea Renewable Energy Development

I am responding to the Commission's letter of 14 August 2026.

I understand that I am only allowed to comment on Section 4.3.2 – Nature Conservation of the Applicant's Response to Observations. This is a very small section of a much larger response, so I have kept my comments strictly to what the Applicant says in that section and, importantly, what I feel it has failed to answer.

Having read it, my main concern is that a lot of the response seems to amount to saying that their original surveys were adequate and therefore their original conclusions remain correct.

But that doesn't really answer the concerns that were raised about whether those surveys gave an accurate picture in the first place.

White-tailed Sea Eagles

This is probably the clearest example.

The Applicant says that there were only two observations of White-tailed Sea Eagles during three years of surveys and uses this to support its conclusion that the birds do not regularly use the site.

4.3.2 Nature Conservation - Applicant's response to observations(1).pdf

But saying "three years of surveys" makes it sound as though the site was being watched continuously for three years. It wasn't.

The surveys were periodic snapshots. Concerns were raised in the original submissions about how often observations took place, the conditions they were carried out in and the amount of observer coverage. Local people saw survey work taking place in very poor weather on occasions, when visibility and bird activity could obviously be very different from better conditions.

There is also the simple question of distance. If observations intended to establish bird use of the proposed turbine area were being undertaken from vantage points more than a kilometre away, how confidently can occasional observations from that distance establish that White-tailed Sea Eagles are not regularly using particular parts of the site?

This matters because local residents have actually seen White-tailed Sea Eagles in and around the proposed turbine area, including close to T9, T10 and T11.

The Applicant's response doesn't really deal with that contradiction. It simply goes back to its own survey results and says, effectively, we only recorded them twice, therefore their use of the site must be low.

Surely another possibility has to be considered: they only recorded them twice because the surveys did not capture how often the birds actually use this area.

There is also potentially a much better way of finding out.

White-tailed Sea Eagles from the Irish reintroduction programme have been fitted with tracking devices. An attempt was made through Freedom of Information to obtain relevant tracking information before the original observations were submitted. This was mentioned in the original submission.

Unfortunately, observers were working to a limited submission deadline and the information could not be obtained in time.

But the Commission and the relevant authorities are not in the same position.

If tracking information is available which could establish whether tagged White-tailed Sea Eagles have actually travelled through the Maughanaclea area, surely that would be far more useful than relying solely on whether an eagle happened to appear during one of the Applicant's limited observation periods.

This seems particularly important when the Applicant accepts that White-tailed Sea Eagles are susceptible to turbine collision, and the DAU itself raised concerns about actual fatalities.

We are not saying that tracking data will necessarily show that eagles regularly use the site. We don't know what it will show. That is exactly the point.

If the information exists, it seems sensible to establish the facts before concluding that the birds rarely use the area.

The wider problem with the response

This same issue runs through much of Section 4.3.2.

Concerns were raised about the surveys missing species, about Woodcock being difficult to detect because of when they are active, about the apparent contradiction in the EIAR over whether Woodcock were recorded during the breeding season, about fixed 500 m buffers and about the difference between what local people see over many years and what was recorded during relatively short survey periods.

The response doesn't really answer those concerns. It largely tells us again that the surveys were comprehensive and that no significant effects were identified.

But repeating the conclusion doesn't answer the question about whether the information used to reach that conclusion was complete enough in the first place.