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Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), Volume 2 – Chapter 2 – Project Need

Uisce Éireann

October 2026
0089328DG0034

BALLINA AND LOUGH TALT WATER SUPPLY UPGRADE

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This document has 11 pages including the cover.

Document history

Document title: Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), Volume 2 – Chapter 2 – Project Need

Document reference: 0089328DG0034

Revision	Purpose description	Originated	Checked	Reviewed	Authorised	Date
1.0	Draft for Comment	NV	LH	DE	DE	05/12/2025
2.0	Draft for Comment	LH	RG	AON	LH	03/07/2026
3.0	Revised Draft	LH	MM	-	DE	28/08/2026
4.0	Final	LH	AON	DE	DL	22/10/2026

Client signoff

Client	Uisce Éireann
Proposed Development	BALLINA AND LOUGH TALT WATER SUPPLY UPGRADE
Job number	100089328

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
DoHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
EU	European Union
INO	Infrastructure Objective
INP	Infrastructure Policy
IROPI	Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest
NPF	National Planning Framework
NSO	National Strategic Outcome
NWRP	National Water Resources Plan
RPO	Regional Policy Objective
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy
RWRP-NW	Regional Water Resources Plan – North West
RWSS	Regional Water Supply Scheme
SA	Study Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
SW	Southwest
THMs	Trihalomethanes
UÉ	Uisce Éireann
WFD	Water Framework Directive
WRZ	Water Resource Zone
WSI	Water Services Infrastructure
WTP	Water Treatment Plant

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Appropriate Assessment (AA)	Assessment of potential effects of a project on European Sites and their conservation objectives.
Ballina Water Resource Zone (WRZ)	Water supply area serving Ballina and surrounding communities.
Biodiversity	The variety of living organisms, habitats and ecosystems within an area.
Drinking Water Directive	EU legislation establishing standards for water intended for human consumption.
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report documenting environmental effects and mitigation measures.
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Irish environmental regulator responsible for environmental compliance and water quality oversight.
Vertigo Geyeri	Protected species referenced in ecological assessments around Lough Talt.
Habitats Directive	European legislation protecting habitats and species of conservation importance.
National Water Resources Plan (NWRP)	Long-term strategic plan for balancing drinking water supply and demand.

Term	Meaning
Natura 2000 Network	European network of protected ecological sites.
Potable Water	Water that is safe and suitable for human consumption.
River Basin	Geographical area drained by a river and its tributaries.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	Protected site designated under the Habitats Directive.
Special Protection Area (SPA)	Protected site designated under the Birds Directive.
Trihalomethanes (THMs)	Chemical by-products formed during water disinfection and regulated in drinking water.
Water Framework Directive (WFD)	European directive requiring protection and improvement of water body status.

2. Project Need

This chapter sets out the principle, need and benefits for the Ballina and Lough Talt Water Supply Upgrade (the 'Proposed Development'). The provision and operation of, and investment in, water services such as the Proposed Development is critical to the implementation of national, regional and local planning policy.

2.1 Principle

The Proposed Development is supported by policy objectives at European, National, Regional and Local level to ensure the provision of a resilient water supply by way of high-quality water infrastructure, including an upgrade of existing facilities, to support planned growth and development, while also ensuring the proper protection of relevant water bodies.

National Strategic Outcome (NSO) 9 (Sustainable Management of Environmental Resources) of the National Planning Framework (NPF) (Government of Ireland, 2025), highlights the need to bring and maintain water services to acceptable international levels. NSO 9 further seeks to devise detailed network and capacity assessments to support the provision of water services infrastructure that facilitates housing and economic development in the priority towns and urban areas identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies in order to ensure plan-led development decisions are underpinned by coordinated investment plans.

The National Development Plan 2021-2030 (Government of Ireland, 2021), as updated in 2025 confirms a commitment to continued investment in water infrastructure and services as follows:

'*Significant continued investment in water and wastewater infrastructure and services will also involve the increases delivery of new connections, co-ordinated with the planning process to support economic growth and meet the needs of priority housing developments and urban renewal areas, while at the same time supporting implementation of national strategies in relation to public health, safety and environmental compliance*.'

The Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan 2025 (Government of Ireland, 2025) also commits to increased investment in water services. This is reflected further in Strategic Objective 2 of Uisce Éireann's Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP), (Uisce Éireann, 2025),which states that the provision of water services infrastructure capacity in the right place, at the right time, is critical to enable delivery of housing and economic growth.

Goal 3 (Secure, Resilient, and Adaptable Water Services) of the Water Quality and Water Services Infrastructure – Sectoral Adaptation Plan 2025 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DoHLGH), 2025)) seeks to ensure the delivery of Water Services Infrastructure (WSI) that meets the requirements of the European Drinking Water and Urban Wastewater Directives, providing safe, reliable and resilient WSI. This involves upgrading existing infrastructure while delivering new infrastructure to cope with increased supply and demand pressures.

At a regional level, the Regional Water Resources Plan – North West (RWRP-NW) Non-Technical Summary (Irish Water, 2023a) refers to Lough Easkey and Lough Talt rationalised to Lisglennon WTP, increasing surface water abstraction at Lough Conn and upgrading Lisglennon WTP for capacity (SAC-543) as a preferred option for the Ballina/Sligo study area (Study Area C (SAC)) (Irish Water, 2023b).

In addition, RPO 8.15 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern Region 2020 seeks to support investment for water and wastewater services in the first instance where existing facilities are insufficient to meet current demands. This includes the Lough Talt Water Supply Scheme, which is identified as being necessary to deliver the growth model outlined in the RSES (Section 8.5, page 274 of the RSES).

Locally, Table 7.1 of the Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028 (Mayo County Council, 2022) identifies a number of key Water Services Projects for County Mayo of which the Ballina Regional Water Supply is one. Policy objective INO 6 seeks to support and facilitate upgrades to the water schemes listed in Table 7.1. Furthermore, policy objective INP 1 obliges the Planning Authority to liaise and work in conjunction with Uisce Éireann in the delivery of an adequate level of water services infrastructure, to ensure that a sufficient water supply is available for the settlements set out in the County Settlement Hierarchy.

The Ballina Local Area Plan 2024-2030 (Mayo County Council, 2024) also states as follows under Section 10.5.1 Drinking Water:

"In co-operation with Uisce Éireann, the Council will contribute towards compliance with the EU Drinking Water Regulations 2014 (as amended) and seek to undertake any remedial action as required. Ballina's drinking water is supplied by the Ballina Water Resource Zone. It is envisaged that there is adequate capacity to cater for the projected population increase over the Plan period. However, an upgrade to provide additional capacity is likely to be required beyond the lifetime of the Plan."

The Ballina Water Resource Zone currently serves a population of approx. 22,631 persons (2026) from two WTPs and is forecast to have shortfall in potable water supply capacity in future due to factors including growth in population growth, non-domestic/industrial users and tourism. Potable water storage (reservoir) capacity in the Ballina WRSS network is currently below optimal volumes to ensure security and resilience of supply to the area. The existing trunk main network between Lisglennon WTP and Ballina town will not have sufficient capacity to transfer the necessary flows to meet the increased demand. Upgrades to the existing network are therefore required between the Lisglennon WTP and Ballina town, with extension of the network to connect the existing Lough Talt RWSS.

In addition, there is currently no potable water storage serving a large area downstream of the current Lough Talt WTP. Approx. 3,000 customers in this area have poor security of water supply and are at elevated risk of experiencing an outage.

Furthermore, the National Water Resources Plan (NWRP) forecast for the Easkey RWSS shows a potential deficit by 2044. Rationalisation of the Easkey RWSS network will be required in future, to allow for partial or full supply to be provided from the Ballina Water Resource Zone.

In addition, Section 30.1.2 (and Table 30.1) of the Sligo County Development Plan 2024-2030 (Sligo County Council, 2024) states that Water supply for other settlements Ballymote and Tobercurry are supplied from Lough Talt RWSS, where an "interim" Water Treatment Plant was commissioned in 2020 to meet short/medium-term needs.

In addition, policy objective P-WS-1of the Sligo County Development Plan 2024 seeks to co-operate with Uisce Éireann to maximise the potential of existing capacity and to identify and facilitate the timely delivery of new water services infrastructure required to realise the development objectives and support population and economic growth as set out in the Core Strategy of this Plan.

In this respect, the Proposed Development is clearly supported by the applicable policy context, and is therefore acceptable in principle.

2.2 Need and Justification

Sligo County Council granted permission on 4th June, 2019 (reg. ref. 18/210) for an upgrade to the existing Lough Talt Water Treatment Plant In the application for the planning permission, Uisce Éireann stated its

intention to operate this upgraded WTP for a period of 10 years, providing an interim solution while a new public drinking water supply source is developed, constructed, and commissioned.

The Proposed Development responds to the requirement to develop a new public drinking water source

Furthermore, the Ballina Water Resource Zone (WRZ) currently serves approx. 22,631 people (as of June 2026) from two WTPs and is forecast to have shortfall in potable water supply capacity in future due to factors including growth in population growth, non-domestic/industrial users and tourism (Uisce Éireann, 2023). For instance, as per Uisce Éireann's NWRP (Irish Water, 2021), Ballina town is anticipated to see an increase in population of approx. 38%, with smaller towns anticipated to grow by approx. 15% (towns under 1,500 people in 2016) and approx. 21% (towns with 1,500 to 10,000 people in 2016).

Potable water storage (reservoir) capacity in the Ballina Regional Water Supply Scheme (RWSS) network is also currently below optimal volumes to ensure security and resilience of supply to the area. In addition, the existing trunk main network between Lisglennon WTP and Ballina town will not have sufficient capacity to transfer the necessary flows to meet the increased demand. Upgrades to the existing network including replacement of the pipeline are therefore required between the Lisglennon WTP and Ballina town.

In addition, large parts of Ballina Town are currently served by a critical ageing trunk main, which will be replaced to improve the reliability of the water supply. Other rural areas near Bonniconlon currently have no connection to the public water service network. Facilities to enable connection to the public network will also be provided as part of the scheme.

In relation to the Lough Talt RWSS, an "interim" Water Treatment Plant at Lough Talt was commissioned in 2020 to meet short/medium-term needs, and an alternative long-term water supply for the area would be required by 2029.

The Regional Water Resources Plan – North West identifies the preferred solution as being to rationalise Lough Talt WRZ to Lisglennon WTP and upgrade the Lisglennon WTP to meet the deficit. An expansion/upgrade of supply from Lough Conn emerged as the preferred strategic level solution as a replacement supply to Lough Talt WRZ, when considered as part of overall future supply requirements for the area.

The Proposed Development is therefore needed:

- To provide a safe and reliable water supply to Ballina and surrounding areas, while also supporting future growth and development in the area. The Proposed Development will benefit approx. 36,400 people, ensuring a reliable and sustainable water supply for Ballina, Bonniconlon, and surrounding areas as well as allowing for future social economic growth in the region.
- To upgrade Ballina town's existing critical aging trunk main, which will be replaced to improve the reliability of water supply.
- To provide for treatment capacity, storage and pumping between Lisglennon and Lough Talt and provision of supply network that will enable the existing Lough Talt RWSS to be supplied from the Ballina WRZ.
- To provide a long-term safe supply of drinking water for the existing Lough Talt RWSS.
- To cease abstraction from Lough Talt currently supplying Lough Talt RWSS in order to protect Lough Talt and associated dependent habitat and species.
- To provide for treatment capacity, provision of storage and upgraded treated water conveyance to the existing water network in Ballina, Co. Mayo in accordance with future demand to 2044 projections.
- To upgrade water storage facilities with the construction of new water storage tanks, enabling 24 hour water storage capacity.

- To prepare for future increases in water supply demand that exceed the capacity of the Easkey RWSS from Lough Easkey.
- To invest in water services infrastructure to support sustainable management of water resources.

The Proposed Development will ensure a continual safe water supply that is compliant with EU Drinking Water Standards, and that will facilitate the sustainable development of the population that it supports.

Failure to implement the Proposed Development could have detrimental effects on water quality and/or the security of potable water in the Ballina Lough Talt Water Supply network.

2.3 Benefits

The Proposed Development will enhance the security and resilience of the water supply in Ballina and surrounding areas in Co. Mayo, as well as Lough Talt and surrounding areas in Co. Sligo.

It will directly benefit 36,400 people, ensuring a reliable and sustainable water supply for Ballina, Bonniconlon, Tobercurry, and surrounding areas as well as allowing for future social economic growth and development in the region.

Specifically, the Proposed Development will result in:

- Upgrades to the ageing water network infrastructure. Large parts of Ballina Town are currently served by a critical asbestos cement trunk main, which will be replaced to improve the reliability of the water supply;
- Increased capacity to provide for future growth and development;
- Increased resilience in the network by increasing the treated water storage for Ballina;
- Increased resilience in the network with the addition of treated water storage in Lough Talt, Co. Sligo; and.
- Upgrade to the Lisglennon water treatment facilities which will improve the robustness of the treatment processes.

The Proposed Development will increase capacity in the supply network, allowing Uisce Éireann to extend the Ballina network to areas currently served by the Lough Talt RWSS. Additional storage at Lisglennon will enhance the security of supply for Ballina and new storage facilities will also be provided at Lough Talt to ensure a stable water supply for south Co. Sligo.

In addition, the cessation of water abstraction from Lough Talt will restore natural lake levels and provide significant ecological benefits to local habitats and wildlife.

2.4 References

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