

Appendix 10-9: Seal Survey Report



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Environmental Impact Assessment Report - Addendum
Appendix 10-9: Seal Survey Report

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1 Introduction

This report provides the results from a 12-month survey programme (October 2024 - October 2025) for grey seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) and harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) at the proposed cable landfall location for the proposed Oriel Wind Farm Project (hereafter referred to as “the Project”) at Dunany Bay Beach, Co. Louth. The surveys were conducted in response to a submission from the Development Application Unit (DAU) during the statutory consultation on the planning application (case reference 319799) for the Project. The submission stated:

“The DAU note that monitoring for pinniped species at the location where the proposed development interacts with the shore was not carried out by the applicant and therefore there is no information on whether harbour and grey seals use this site. The applicant is requested to submit further information by means of specific surveys of the site for pinnipeds and that this should also be set in the context of seasonal changes in distribution of these species.”

The DAU submission also referred to the “most up to date National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) seal data (NPWS, 2013)¹ and the Guidance on Marine Baseline Ecological Assessments & Monitoring Activities for Offshore Renewable Energy Projects Part 2, April 2018 by the Department of Communications Climate Action and Environment” (DCCAE) (DCCAE (2018) Guidance).

A Request for Further Information (RFI) from An Coimisiún Pleanála (formerly known as An Bord Pleanála) regarding the planning application for the Project noted the submission from the DAU regarding monitoring of pinniped species. Item 9.R. of the ‘Schedule-Further Information Request’ requested further information as follows:

“The DAU note that monitoring for pinniped species at the location where the proposed development interacts with the shore was not carried out by the seals use this site. The applicant is requested to submit further information by means of specific surveys of the site for pinnipeds and that this should also be set in the context of seasonal changes in distribution of these species. The applicant is requested to refer to the most up-to-date NPWS seal data and DCCAE (2018) Guidance”.

Section 2 outlines the survey method used for land-based or Vantage Point (VP) surveys for seals based on the DCCAE (2018) guidance document with reference to the NPWS seal data records.

Sections 3.1 to 3.13 provide the results of the 12-month survey programme. Section 3.14 presents records of incidental seal sightings during the same time period as part of concurrent bird surveys for the Project at the landfall and at Dunany Point. Section 3.15 summarises the results of the 12-month survey programme.

1.1 Baseline Environment

In Ireland, grey seals generally breed from late August to November/December (NPWS, 2025², DCCAE, 2018). Haul out surveys are typically carried out during this time as mothers and pups remain onshore typically until the moulting season (December to March). Lambay Island SAC supports the principal breeding colony of grey seal on the east coast of Ireland which lies 43.1 km south of the offshore wind farm area. The closest haul-out sites to the Project are at the mouth of Carlingford Lough (haul-out located 4.5 km from the offshore wind farm area and 6.5 km from the offshore cable corridor), Clogherhead (haul-out located 13.3 km from the offshore wind farm area and 4.1 km from the offshore cable corridor), and Dundalk Bay (haul-out located 15.5 km from the offshore wind farm area and 14.8 km from the offshore cable corridor) (Morris and Duck, 2019). According to the NPWS (2013) no grey seal sightings were recorded within the 500 m area of search or adjacent areas. Only one sighting was recorded in 2012 of one grey seal resting approximately 500 m north of the area of search.

Harbour seals generally breed from June to August in Ireland (DCCAE, 2018). Pups are born in June and July and then the annual moult of harbour seals in Ireland occurs from July/August to September³, during

¹ [NPWS Seal Database - Dataset - data.gov.ie](https://npws.dccae.ie/datasets/seal-database) accessed 03/11/25

² [Grey Seal | National Parks & Wildlife Service](https://npws.dccae.ie/guidance/marine-baseline-ecological-assessments-monitoring-activities-offshore-renewable-energy-projects-part-2) accessed 03/11/25

³ [Common Seal | National Parks & Wildlife Service](https://npws.dccae.ie/guidance/common-seal) accessed 03/11/25

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this time period population counts are undertaken. Harbour seals are Qualifying Interests (QI) of Lambay Island SAC which lies 43.1 km south of the offshore wind farm area and is a qualifying feature of the Murlough SAC, which lies 21.9 km north of the offshore wind farm area. The closest haul-out sites for harbour seal to the Project are at the mouth of Carlingford Lough (7.9 km from the offshore wind farm area; 10.6 km from the offshore cable corridor), Clogherhead (13.3 km from the offshore wind farm area; 4.1 km from the offshore cable corridor) and Dundalk Bay (15.5 km from the offshore wind farm area; 14.8 km from the offshore cable corridor) (Morris and Duck, 2019). No harbour seals were recorded within the 500 m area of search or adjacent areas from the NPWS (2013) seal database (NPWS, 2013).

Both seal species are included in Annex II of the European Union's Directive 92/43/EEC, commonly known as the Habitats Directive.

2 METHODOLOGY

The seal survey methodology was developed by RPS and informed by the DCCAE (2018) guidance.

RPS conducted seal surveys at the landfall location at Dunany Bay beach using an Opticron MM4 77 Scope, Hawke endurance ED binoculars and during the breeding seasons a Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised where possible.

To ensure the surveyor did not disturb any seals if hauled out, where possible approximately 150 m distance was observed from the shoreline to minimise potential disturbance. The surveyor also ensured that there was no overlap with other surveys (i.e. intertidal bird surveys) that were being undertaken at the site.

The survey methodology is outlined below:

- To account for seasonal changes in the distribution of both grey and harbour seals, seal counts were undertaken twice a month during the breeding season (i.e. June- August for harbour seals and August- November for grey seals). One survey was undertaken in months outside of this period (i.e. December – May).
- Surveys were conducted two hours either side of low tide (i.e. four-hour survey in total).
- Where possible, subject to weather conditions and available tides, surveys were undertaken when low tide was approximately in the middle of the day or early afternoon (i.e. counting done between 10:00 – 16:00 hrs approximately).
- Five hourly counts were conducted during each survey.
- The observer counted seals within the survey area, recorded them within the identified arcs (see **Figure 2-1**) and calculated the approximate distance offshore.
- The observer identified individuals to species where possible (i.e. harbour seal or grey seal), based on physical characteristics.
- The observer also distinguished adults from pups, males from females, depending on the species and their features (where possible).
- Any behaviours such as resting, social interactions, or signs of disturbance (like fleeing back into the water) if observed were also noted.
- Environmental conditions (i.e. wind conditions, precipitation, fog, glare, sea state conditions, and tide level) were recorded every 30 minutes during the four-hour survey.
- Any disturbance was also recorded at the site (e.g. walker, dog, vehicle, fishing boat, other activity).
- Where surveys were not undertaken due to weather conditions or tidal constraints, incidental seal sightings recorded at the same location as part of concurrent bird surveys for the Project at the landfall and at Dunany Point were used to supplement the results for this survey.

2.1 Limitations

Due to equipment constraints, it was not always possible to utilise the Nikon D750 camera on every survey. An iPhone 16 camera was utilised in the interim to take photos on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

It was not always possible to conduct surveys between the hours of 10:00 - 16:00hrs due to tidal constraints and unsuitable weather conditions. However, surveys were always conducted on the most suitable day to maximise daylight hours where possible.

2.2 Survey Area

The survey area was determined as a 500 m area of search from a VP onshore. This 500 m area of search was deemed sufficient to include a large enough area to account for potential hauled out seals within the offshore cable corridor. See **Figure 2-1** below which shows the area of search.



3 RESULTS

The following sections provide the results recorded by month for each of the seal surveys undertaken at Dunany Bay Beach.

3.1 October 2024

The first survey was undertaken on 24th October 2024. Due to delays in obtaining equipment and suitable tides only one survey was undertaken in October 2024 (**Figure 3-1**).

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as dog walkers, cockle pickers and horseback riders.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog with a moderate breeze.



Figure 3-1 Image taken from Dunany beach during October seal survey to the east and west

3.2 November 2024

Two surveys were conducted on 12th and 26th of November 2024 (**Figure 3-2**).

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search. However one possible harbour porpoise (*Phocoena Phocoena*) was recorded commuting beyond B2 (c. 1.5 km offshore) and then spotted towards the end of the survey beyond Arc D2 (c. 1.5 km offshore).

Disturbance was recorded as walkers, dog walkers, cockle pickers and anglers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog with a wind type of light air increasing to light breeze toward the end of the survey.

For survey two, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as walkers, cockle pickers and anglers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog with a gentle breeze decreasing to light breeze towards the end of the survey.

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Figure 3-2 Image taken from Dunany Beach during November seal survey

3.3 December 2024

Due to weather conditions and suitable tides only one survey was undertaken on the 11th of December 2024.

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search. A maximum of two grey seals were recorded commuting beyond B2 (c. 2 km offshore) and one possible harbour porpoise was spotted commuting beyond C2 (c. 2 km offshore) and was recorded on another two scans commuting through C2 to B2 c. (c. 2 km offshore).

Disturbance was recorded as cockle pickers and horseback riders.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog with a light to gentle breeze.

3.4 January 2025

Due to extreme weather conditions (weather warnings and storm conditions) and tidal constraints (lack of daylight hours) during the month of January no seal survey was undertaken in January 2025.

3.5 February 2025

One survey was conducted on the 6th of February 2025 (**Figure 3-3**).

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search. However, a maximum of three grey seals were recorded commuting beyond Arc B2, c. 1.5 km offshore.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple dog walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation and slight fog offshore at the start of the survey, with a light to gentle breeze.

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Figure 3-3 Image taken from Dunany Beach during February seal survey

3.6 March 2025

One survey was conducted on the 10th of March 2025.

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as dog walkers and wind surfers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a fresh breeze.

3.7 April 2025

One survey was conducted on the 7th of April 2025.

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple dog walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a gentle breeze.

3.8 May 2025

One survey was conducted on the 6th of May 2025 (**Figure 3-4**).

No seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search. However, one harbour porpoise was recorded commuting beyond Arc C2/D2 c. 1.5 km offshore.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers and dog walkers, and two cockle pickers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with wind conditions ranging between light air and a gentle breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised on this survey.

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Figure 3-4 Dunany Beach during seal survey 6th of May 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

3.9 June 2025

Two surveys were conducted on the 3rd (**Figure 3-5**) and 19th (**Figure 3-6**) of June 2025.

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as one walker and two dog walkers, and one cockle picker.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a fresh breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised on both surveys, images presented below.

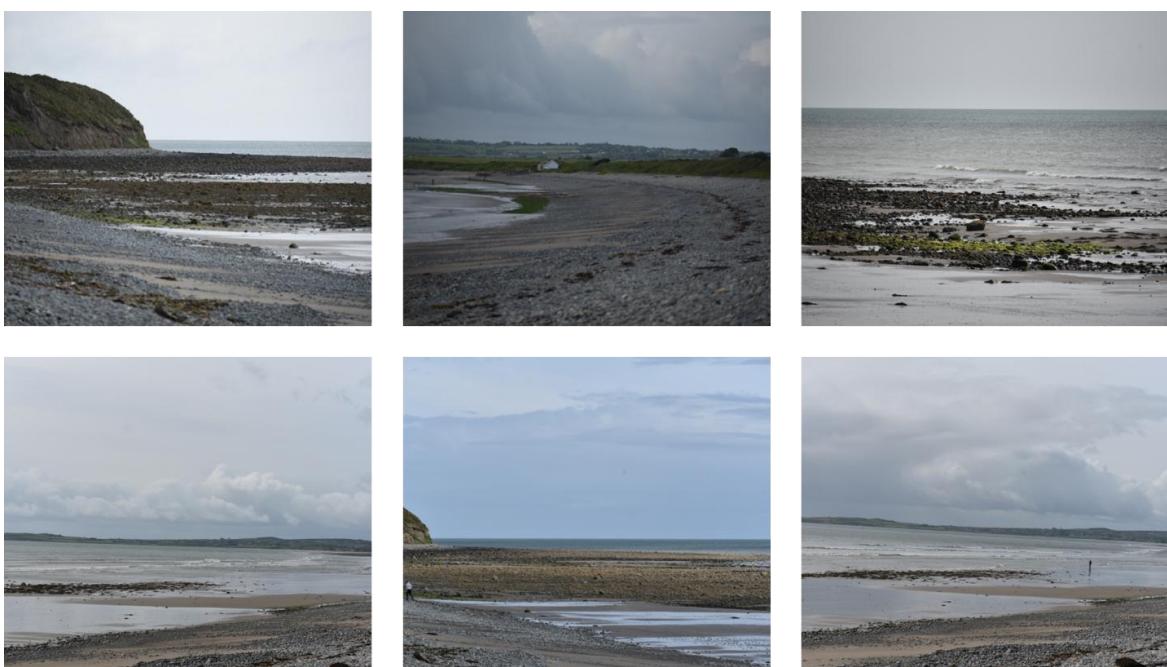


Figure 3-5 Dunany Beach during seal survey 3rd of June 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

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For survey two, no seals were out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple dog walkers and two horseback riders.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a gentle breeze.



Figure 3-6 Dunany Beach during seal survey 19th of June 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

3.10 July 2025

Two surveys were conducted on the 2nd (**Figure 3-7**) and 18th (**Figure 3-8**) of July 2025.

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search. However one grey seal was recorded commuting approximately 2 km from shore beyond Arc B2.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers and dog walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a gentle to moderate breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised, images are presented in the figure below.

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Figure 3-7 Dunany Beach during seal survey 2nd of July 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

For survey two, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a light to gentle breeze.

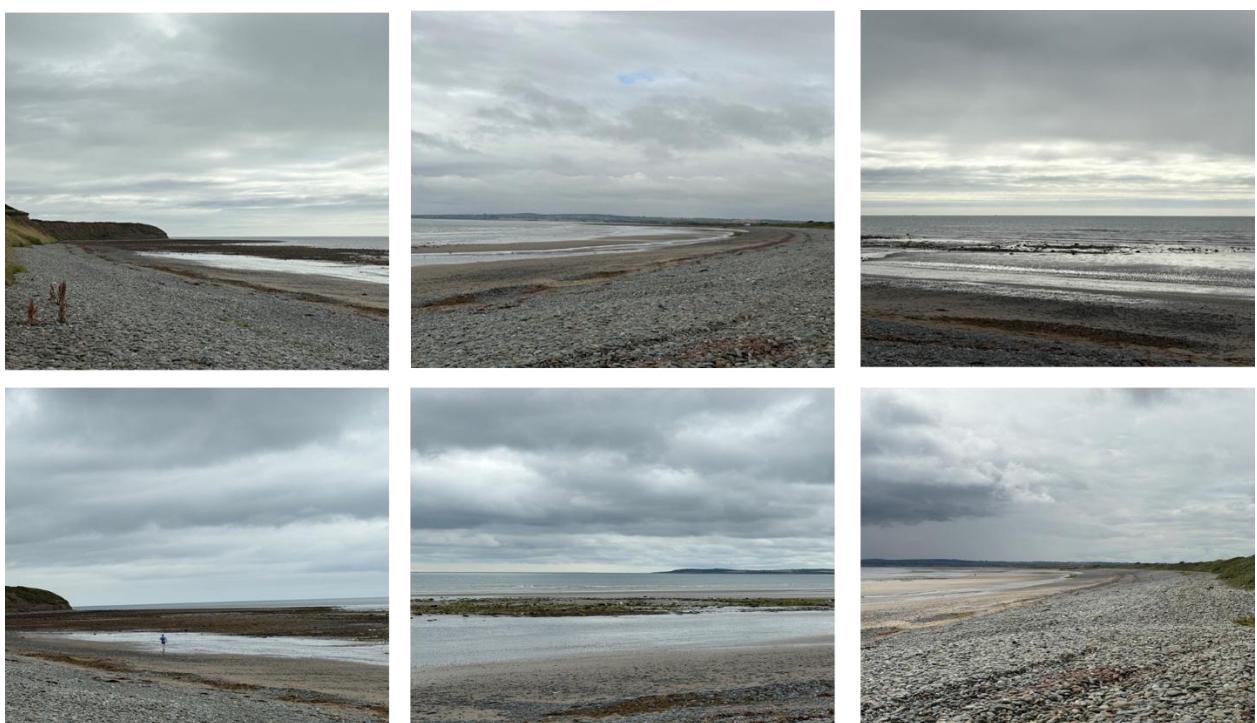


Figure 3-8 Dunany Beach during seal survey 18th of July 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

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3.11 August 2025

Two surveys were conducted on the 15th (Figure 3-9) and 28th (Figure 3-10) of August 2025.

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers and dog walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a light air to light breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised, images are presented in the figure below.

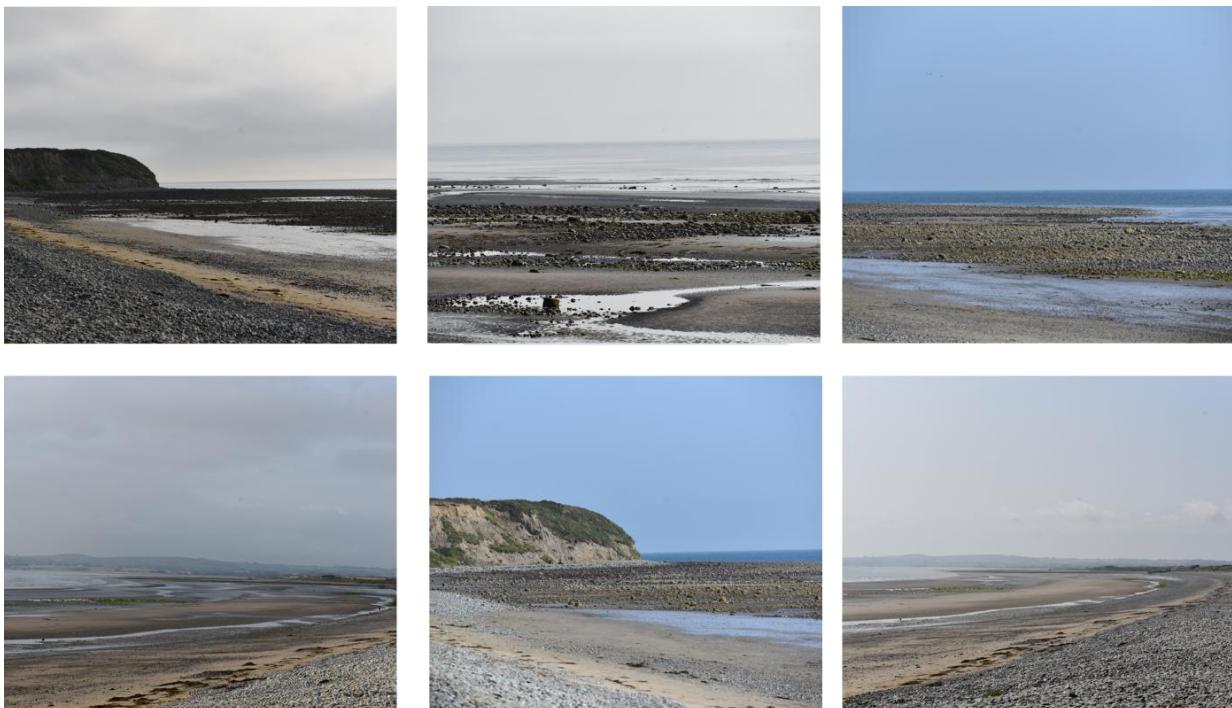


Figure 3-9 Dunany Beach during seal survey 15th of August 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

For survey two, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a moderate breeze.

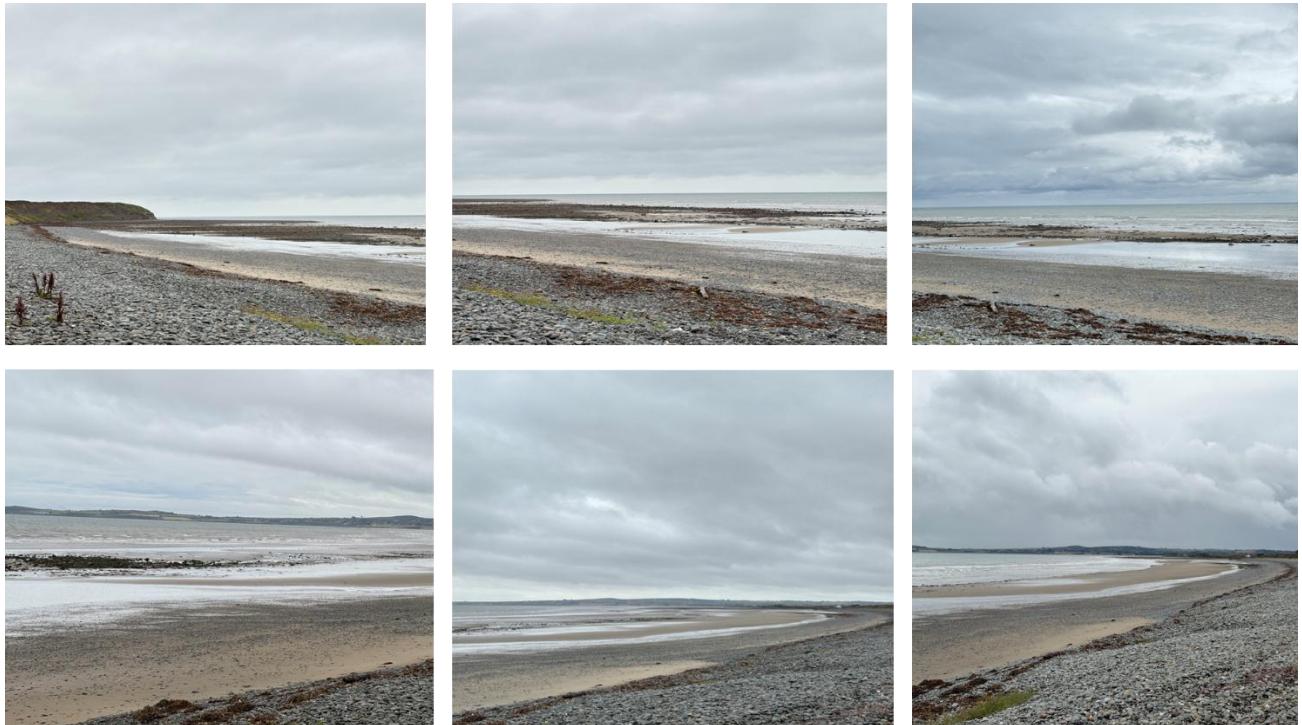
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Figure 3-10 Dunany Beach during seal survey 28th of August 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

3.12 September 2025

Two surveys were conducted on the 16th (**Figure 3-11**) and 30th (**Figure 3-12**) of September 2025.

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers, dog walkers and cockle pickers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a gentle breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised, images are presented in the figure below.

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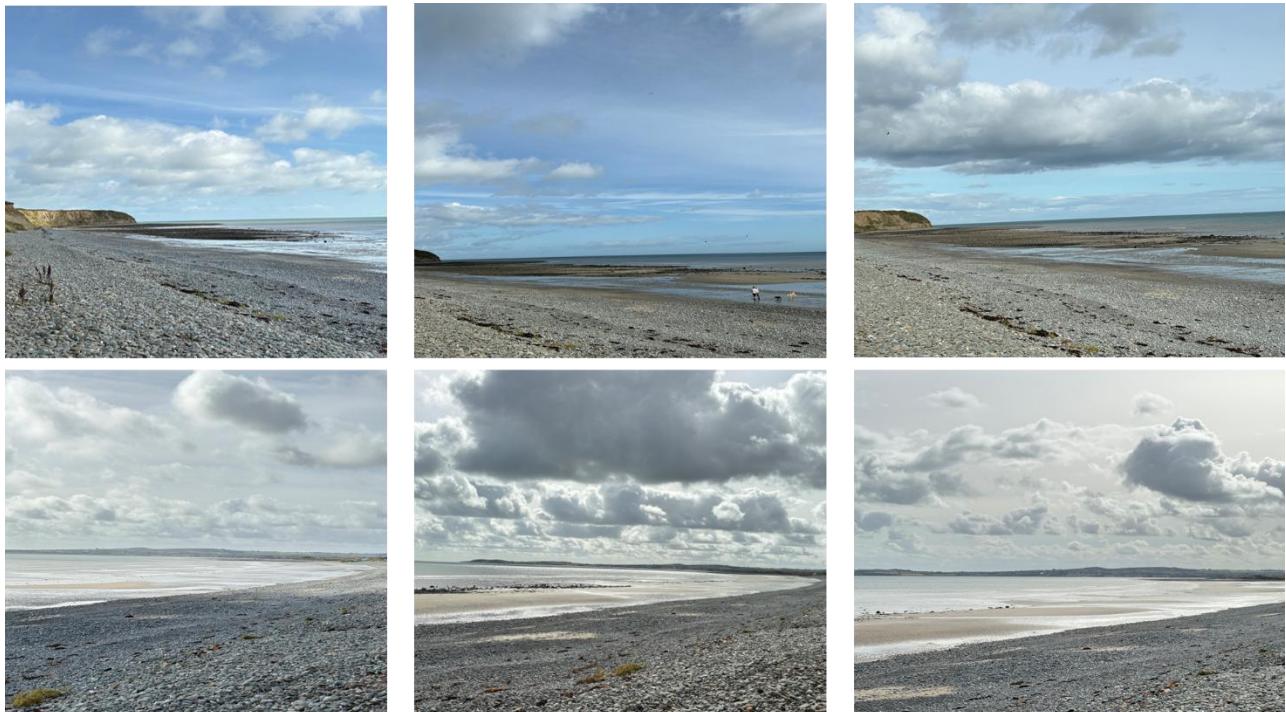


Figure 3-11 Dunany Beach during seal survey 16th of September 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

For survey two, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers, dog walkers and cockle pickers.

Weather conditions were recorded as drizzle at the start of the survey but then cleared with no precipitation or fog, with a gentle breeze.

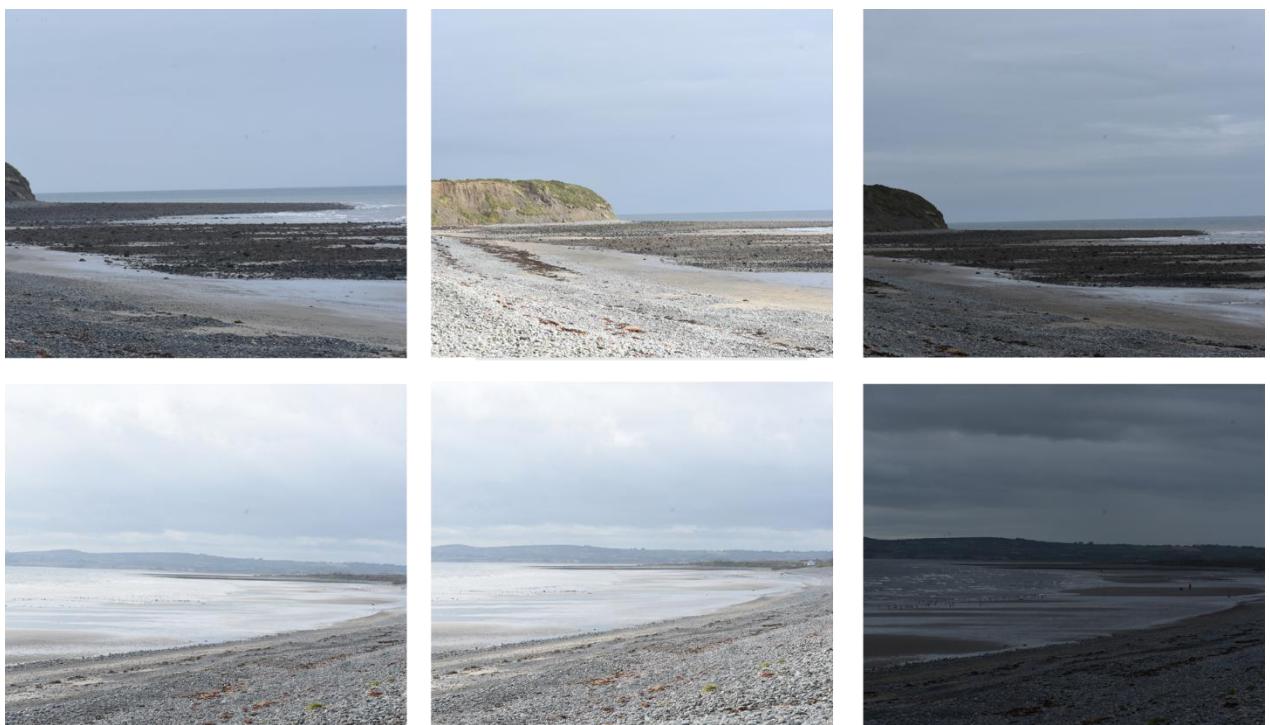


Figure 3-12 Dunany Beach during seal survey 30th of September 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

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3.13 October 2025

Two surveys were conducted on the 15th (Figure 3-13) and 31st (Figure 3-14) of October 2025.

For survey one, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers and dog walkers.

Weather conditions were recorded as no precipitation or fog, with a light breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised on both surveys, images are presented in the figures below.

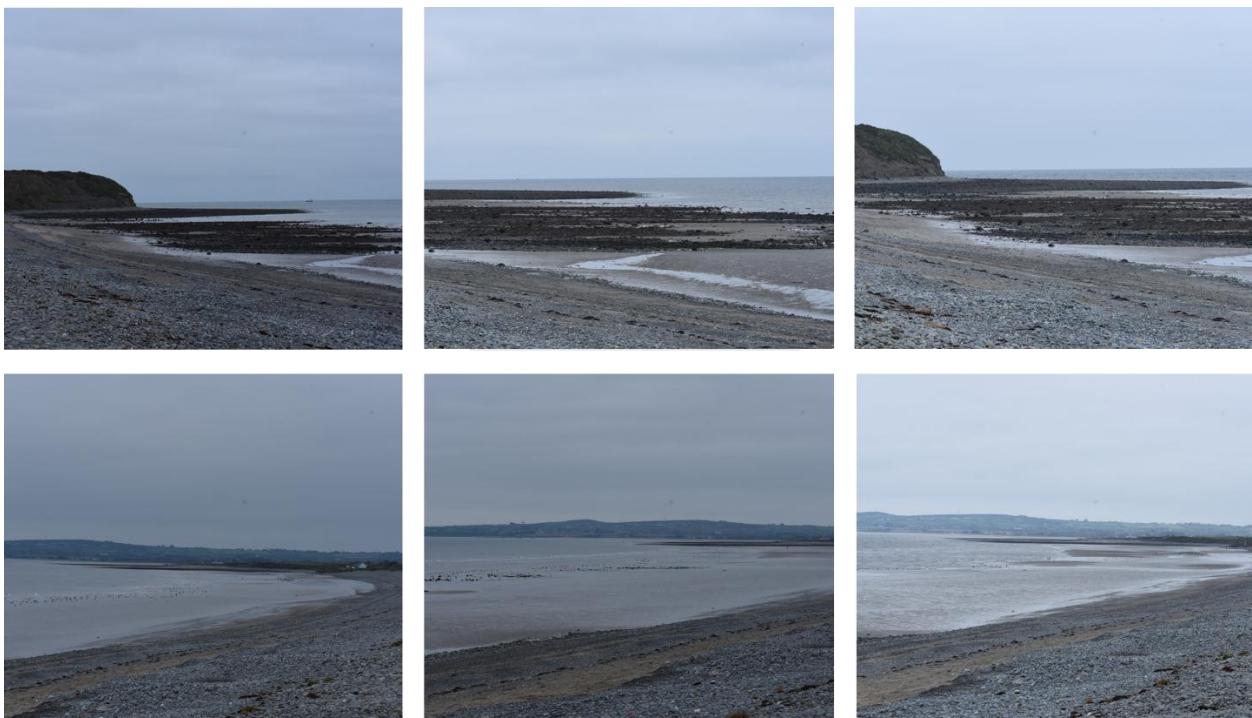


Figure 3-13 Dunany Beach during seal survey 15th of October 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

For survey two, no seals were hauled out at the site or identified within the 500 m area of search.

Disturbance was recorded as multiple walkers, dog walkers and a horseback rider.

Weather conditions were recorded as light showers at the start of the survey which cleared, with a moderate to fresh breeze.

A Nikon D750 camera with a 70-300 mm lens was utilised on both surveys, images are presented in the figure below.

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Figure 3-14 Dunany Beach during seal survey 31st of October 2025, pictures from left to right were taken on commencement of the survey, during low tide and at the end of the survey.

3.14 Incidental survey records

During the 12-month survey period, incidental cetacean and seal records were recorded at the same location as part of ongoing bird surveys for the Project at the landfall and at Dunany Point. These surveys routinely recorded cetacean or seal activity if present. These incidental survey records are available for the months of October and December 2024 and January 2025.

On the 8th October 2024 at Dunany Point the non-dedicated survey recorded no seals hauled out at the site or within 2 km of the area of search, however one harbour porpoise was recorded swimming north-west beyond Arc D2. On the 3rd of December 2024 the survey recorded no seals hauled out at the site, however two grey seals were recorded swimming c. 2 km east of Arc A2. One harbour porpoise was also recorded swimming beyond the headland of Dunany point c. 5 km east of Arc B1. On the 22nd of January 2025 the survey recorded no seals hauled out at the site or within the 500 m area of search, however one grey seal was recorded commuting beyond Arc A2 c. 1.5 km to the north of our area of search.

3.15 Summary of results

Table 3-1 presents a summary of the results from the VP seal survey undertaken each month during the period of October 2024 to October 2025 at the cable landfall location at Dunany Bay Beach. Incidental sightings from the concurrent bird surveys are also reported in Table 3-1 to supplement seal sightings where seal survey outings were unable to take place.

Table 3-1 Summary of results of 12-month VP seal survey of 500 m of the cable landfall location at Dunany Bay Beach (October 2024 to October 2025) including incidental sightings.

Month	Year	Survey 1	Survey 2	Incidental sightings
October	2024	Survey not carried out due to equipment delays.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. One harbour porpoise recorded swimming beyond Arc D2 c. 1.5 km offshore.
November	2024	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search.	N/A

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Month	Year	Survey 1	Survey 2	Incidental sightings
		One possible harbour porpoise commuting.		
December	2024	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. Maximum of two seals commuting offshore (c. 2km). One possible harbour porpoise commuting.	Survey not carried out due to weather and tide conditions.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. Two grey seals recorded swimming c. 2 km east of Arc A2.
January	2025	Survey not carried out due to weather and tide conditions.	Survey not carried out due to weather and tide conditions.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. One seal recorded commuting beyond Arc A2 c. 1.5 km to the north of our area of search.
February	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. Maximum of three seals commuting offshore (c. 1.5km).	Outside of breeding season for grey and harbour seals, therefore only one survey required.	N/A
March	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search.	Outside of breeding season for grey and harbour seals, therefore only one survey required.	N/A
April	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search.	Outside of breeding season for grey and harbour seals, therefore only one survey required.	N/A
May	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500m area of search. One possible harbour porpoise commuting.	Outside of breeding season for grey and harbour seals, therefore only one survey required.	N/A
June	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	N/A
July	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search. One seal commuting offshore (~2 km).	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	N/A
August	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	N/A
September	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	N/A
October	2025	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	No seals hauled out / identified within 500 m area of search.	N/A

4 DISCUSSION

Seal surveys were conducted at Dunany Beach in Co. Louth from October 2024 until October 2025 to monitor pinniped species at the cable landfall location for the Project. During this time period no seals were recorded as hauled out or within the 500 m area of search.

Beyond the 500 m area of search (approximately 1.5 to 2 km offshore) there was minimal seal or cetacean activity noted with a maximum of three harbour porpoise and six grey seals recorded between October 2024 and October 2025.

It should be noted that the beach is regularly used and disturbance of the search area was common and included walkers, dog walkers, horseback riders and cockle pickers.

References

DCCAE (2018). Guidance on Marine Baseline Ecological Assessments & Monitoring Activities for Offshore Renewable Energy Projects Part 2. [f957f02d-guidance-on-marine-baseline-ecological-assessments-monitoring-activities-for-.pdf](https://www.dccae.ie/documents/957f02d-guidance-on-marine-baseline-ecological-assessments-monitoring-activities-for-.pdf)

NPWS (2013). NPWS Seal Database. Available: [NPWS Seal Database - Dataset - data.gov.ie](https://data.gov.ie/dataset/npws-seal-database) Accessed: 03/11/2025.