

Dublin Airport North Runway Relevant Action - Addendum to Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (September 2021)

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daa

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Introduction

AECOM, on behalf of daa, prepared an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report to accompany the application for a proposed development comprising the taking of a relevant action (the 'proposed Relevant Action') within the meaning of Section 34C of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

The AA Screening Report accompanied the application for a proposed development comprising the taking of a 'relevant action' only within the meaning of Section 34C of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the "PDA") submitted to Fingal County Council (FCC) in December 2020 (F20A/0668).

By letter dated 19th February 2021, Fingal County Council (FCC) requested further information in respect of the proposed Relevant Action (the "Request for Further Information"). The Request for Further Information sought the provision of various clarifications and additional information, and an updated AA Screening Report was subsequently submitted in September 2021 and to which this document is an Addendum.

This Addendum to the updated AA Screening Report describes changes to circumstances relevant to the proposed Relevant Action, including the recent designation of the North-West Irish Sea Candidate Special Protection Area (cSPA). It considers whether these changes affect the conclusion of the updated AA Screening Report, namely that the proposed Relevant Action will not result in likely significant effects on any European site, either alone or in-combination with any other plans or projects.

This Addendum should be read in conjunction with the updated AA Screening Report and is not designed to act as a standalone document. As described in the updated AA Screening Report, the Competent Authority is required to draw its own conclusion as to whether the changes described in this document affect the conclusions reached by FCC in September 2021. However, this document provides AECOM's opinion, and presents information which may be useful to the Competent Authority in reaching their decision as to whether the proposed Relevant Action will give rise to likely significant effects on any European sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.

Changes to the Context of the Assessment

There are a number of changes that have taken place at Dublin Airport since September 2021 that could affect the findings of the conclusion of the updated AA Screening Report of September 2021. These changes are:

- actual flightpaths from North Runway upon commencement differ from assumed flightpaths used for modelling / assessment purposes;
- updated air traffic forecast data;
- earlier fleet modernisation.

These changes are described further in the following sections.

Change to modelled flightpaths

On commencement of North Runway operations in August 2022, an issue regarding departure flightpaths was identified which resulted in some local communities being unexpectedly overflown. daa immediately started a review with the aim of satisfactorily resolving the issue as soon as possible. The review process involved engagement and coordination with the relevant stakeholders, and it identified that some of the Instrument Flight Procedures (IFPs)¹ were not aligned to modelling assumptions included in daa's planning submissions. The outcome of the review, in consultation with the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA), proposed updates to the affected IFP, specifically the current Standard Instrument Departures (SIDs)² which will result in flightpaths aligning more closely with the information previously communicated by daa. The revised SIDs were required to go through regulatory review and consent processes before they could be implemented. They were subsequently approved and became operational on 23 February 2023, in line with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's Aeronautical Information Publication cycle.

The changes to modelled flightpaths do not result in any European sites which were not assessed in the updated AA Screening Report being over-flown at heights at which disturbance of Qualifying Interest (QI) / Special Conservation Interest (SCI) species could occur.

Air traffic forecasts

In September 2021, it was forecast that a passenger throughput of 32 million passengers per annum (mppa) would be reached in 2025 in the Proposed Scenario and in 2027 in the Permitted Scenario. Due to a faster recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic than predicted, latest forecasts show that a passenger throughput of 32mppa is now likely to be achieved in 2024 in the Proposed Scenario and 2026 in the Permitted Scenario. The 32mppa Cap on permitted annual passenger capacity of the Terminals at Dublin Airport arises as a result condition no. 3 of the Terminal 2 Planning Permission and condition no. 2 of the Terminal 1 Extension Planning Permission. These conditions provide that the combined capacity of Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 together shall not exceed 32 million passengers per annum.

Table 1-1 shows the updated forecasts for the two Assessment Years in the Permitted and Proposed Scenarios.

Table 1. Air Traffic Forecasts in Assessment Years

	2025		2035	
	mppa	ATM	mppa	ATM
Permitted Scenario	31.8	227	32.0	228
Proposed Scenario	32.0	240	32.0	240

As set out in the updated AA Screening Report, targeted field surveys carried out at Baldoye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) and Rogerstown Estuary SPA between June 2016 and December 2017, and in April and May 2018, were completed pre-Covid-19, at a time when Dublin Airport was operating at around 32mppa. At this time, no evidence was found of any disturbance of birds within these sites being caused by over-flying aircraft. Moreover, aircraft disturbance has not been identified by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) as a threat or pressure to any European site considered by the updated AA Screening Report or this Addendum. the updated air traffic forecasts do not alter the conclusion in the updated AA Screening Report (September 2021) that likely significant effects on any European site from the Proposed Relevant Action, both individually and in-combination with other plans and projects, can be excluded because evidence gathered through literature review of published scientific studies and targeted ornithological field survey conducted at Baldoye Bay and Rogerstown Estuary suggests that there will be no impacts on the SCI species of any of the relevant designated sites. The same conclusion is drawn in respect of the North-West Irish Sea cSPA.

¹ Instrument Flight Procedures (IFPs) are published procedure used by aircraft flying in accordance with instrument flight rules which is designed to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of safety in operations.

² Standard Instrument Departure (SIDs) are published instrument flight procedures to be followed by an aircraft on a flight plan immediately after take-off, which ensure the safe and efficient operation of aircraft *en route* to their destination.

Earlier Fleet Modernisation

During the period since September 2021 there has been an earlier modernisation of aircraft fleet than initially anticipated. The future forecasts now allow for the earlier fleet modernisation that has occurred and have been used in the updated assessments.

North-West Irish Sea cSPA

A Candidate Special Protection Area (cSPA) means a site in relation to which the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has given notice pursuant to regulations under the European Communities Act 1972 that he or she considers that the site may be eligible for classification as a Special Protection Area pursuant to Article 4 of the Birds Directive.

According to the Site Synopsis document³, the North-west Irish Sea cSPA constitutes an important resource for marine birds. The estuaries and bays that open into it, along with connecting coastal stretches of intertidal and shallow subtidal habitats, provide safe feeding and roosting habitats for waterbirds throughout the winter and migration periods. These areas, along with more pelagic marine waters further offshore, provide additional supporting habitats (for foraging and other maintenance behaviours) for those seabirds that breed at colonies on the north-west Irish Sea's islands and coastal headlands. These marine areas are also important for seabirds outside the breeding period. This cSPA extends offshore along the coasts of counties Louth, Meath and Dublin, and is approximately 2,333 km² in area. It is ecologically connected to several existing SPAs in this area.

The proposed SCI species of the site are given in Table 2. Although information on the populations of some of the SCI species of North-West Irish Sea cSPA is available from the NPWS website, no assessment of their conservation status is given. No pressures or threats to the species within the cSPA are identified in supporting documentation available from the NPWS website.

³ Available from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) website: <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004236>.

Table 2. SCI species of North-West Irish Sea cSPA

Species (common name)	Species (scientific name)	SPA population	Latest assessed conservation condition
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	14,567 individuals	No information available
Red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	538 individuals	No information available
Great northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	478 individuals	No information available
Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	506 individuals	No information available
Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	13,010 individuals	No information available
Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	No information available	No information available
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	No information available	No information available
Little gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	391 individuals	No information available
Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	944 individuals	No information available
Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	508 individuals	No information available
Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	2,866 individuals	No information available
Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	No information available	No information available
Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	6,893 individuals	No information available
Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	2,096 individuals	No information available
Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	No information available	No information available
Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	No information available	No information available
Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	No information available	No information available
Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	No information available	No information available
Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	No information available	No information available
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	4,638 individuals	No information available
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	13,914 individuals	No information available

The North-West Irish Sea cSPA is located approximately 8 km east of Dublin Airport. It is directly over-flown by aircraft using North Runway.

Many of the proposed SCI species of North-West Irish Sea cSPA are existing SCI of SPAs included in the assessment presented in the updated AA Screening Report. Those that are not, are still waterbirds with similar ecologies to those which were specifically considered by the literature review, targeted field survey and assessment presented in the updated AA Screening Report. The possible impacts of the proposed Relevant Action which could affect the proposed SCI of the North-West Irish Sea cSPA are consistent with those described in the updated AA Screening Report – there are no new or different impacts which could arise to affect these species. The impacts considered by the updated AA Screening Report are:

- disturbance caused by over-flying aircraft;
- collision with aircraft; and,
- emergency fuel dumping.

For the reasons described in detail in the updated AA Screening Report, and because the proposed SCI species of North-West Irish Sea cSPA are identical or very similar in ecology to those of SPAs included in the updated AA Screening Report, it is possible to conclude that the assessment presented in the AA Screening Report is applicable to North-West Irish Sea cSPA. Thus:

- noise events below 60 dB(A) are unlikely to disturb non-breeding waterbirds, while noises above 72 db(A) have been shown to cause disturbance of non-breeding waterbirds];
- due to the continuing implementation of the Wildlife Management Plan at Dublin Airport it is very unlikely that SCI species will be involved in aircraft strike. There will consequently be no impact to SCI species of European sites from the proposed Relevant Action as conditions will remain as they currently exist under the Wildlife Management Plan; and,

- fuel dumping is carried out rarely and only in emergency situations (according to the Applicant, one recorded incident in seven years at Dublin Airport), while much or all of the dumped fuel vaporises before reaching the sea, so does not cause any pollution of the marine environment, and fuel which did reach the sea would be dispersed over a wide area.

Conclusion

The changes at Dublin Airport which have occurred since the submission of the updated Appropriate Assessment Screening Report in September 2021 do not materially change the relevant baseline conditions with respect to European sites. With regard to these changes, therefore, the conclusion of the updated AA Screening Report remains the same, and likely significant effects from the proposed Relevant Action can be excluded.

Furthermore, as for all other European sites assessed by the updated AA Screening Report, it is possible, on the basis of objective scientific evidence, to exclude the possibility of likely significant effects on the proposed SCI species of North-West Irish Sea cSPA from the proposed Relevant Action, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects.

There is no requirement to proceed to the next step of Appropriate Assessment and, subject to other requirements, the proposed Relevant Action can be authorised.