



**Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement for aquaculture activities at
Site T09/524A in The West Connacht Coast Special Area of Conservation
(SAC) (Site Code: 002998)**

6 February 2024

This conclusion statement relates to the application for an Aquaculture Licence at Site T09/524A on the foreshore in Cleggan Bay, Co. Galway. The proposed project in the Application for an Aquaculture Licence was considered in accordance with the requirements of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 and the Habitats and Birds Directives (2009/147/EC and 92/43/EEC). The Site is within the bounds of the West Connacht Coast Special Area of Conservation (“**SAC**”). The Appropriate Assessment Screening report (Marine Institute, November 2021), the Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement (DAFM, July 2022) and the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report produced by ALAB’s technical advisor on 26 September 2023 and updated on 22 January 2024 (“ALAB AA Screening Report”) were considered when compiling this conclusion statement.

Aquaculture Activity

The application is for the cultivation of blue mussels, *Mytilus edulis*, using longlines on Site T09/524A, totalling 6.58 hectares, on the foreshore in Cleggan Bay, Co. Galway.

The other aquaculture activities in the SAC are:

1. T10/058A – finfish - licensed
2. T09/143A – finfish - licensed
3. T09/132A – finfish - licensed
4. T09/434A – longline seaweed- licensed
5. T09/492A – longline mussels – licensed

There are no other pending aquaculture or foreshore licence applications in the West Connacht Coast SAC.

West Connacht Coast SAC

The West Connacht Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (Site code: 002998) consists of two large bodies of marine waters off the coasts of Mayo and Galway. The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the Annex II species, the Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) [1349].

Conservation Objectives for this species (within the West Connacht Coast SAC) were identified by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and relate to maintaining various attributes of the population including population size, cohort structure and the distribution of the species in the SAC (NPWS, 2015).

An assessment was carried out in the Marine Institute AA Screening Report (2021) on the potential interactions between certain aquaculture operations and the Annex II species the Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*).

A screening assessment was also carried out in the ALAB AA Screening report, and a number of Natura 2000 sites were further considered at screening stage for potential source-pathway-receptor linkages to the proposed aquaculture activity.

For SACs, the sites further assessed in the ALAB AA screening report were:

- Slyne Head Peninsula SAC [002074], which is also listed for *Tursiops truncatus* (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349]
- Slyne Head Islands SAC [00328], listed for *Tursiops truncatus* (Common Bottlenose Dolphin) [1349] and *Halichoerus grypus* (Grey Seal) [1364]
- Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC [000278] listed for *Halichoerus grypus* (Grey Seal) [1364]
- The Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex SAC [002031] listed for *Salmo salar* (Salmon) [1106] *Lutra lutra* (Otter) [1355]

For Special Protected Areas (**SPA**), the sites further assessed in the ALAB AA Screening Report were:

- High Island, Inishshark and Davillaun SPA [004144]
- Clare Island SPA [004136]
- Lough Carra SPA [004051]
- Lough Mask SPA [004062]
- Connemara Bog Complex [004181]

These sites are all listed for various bird species as outlined in the ALAB AA Screening Report.

Appropriate Assessment Screening of SACs and SPAs in relation to Site T09/524

The ALAB AA Screening Report found that the proposed activities, at the proposed site and frequency of activity, are consistent with the Conservation Objectives of the above Natura 2000 sites.

The current levels of licensed aquaculture (existing) are considered non-disturbing to bottlenose dolphin conservation features in all areas of the West Connacht Coast SAC. Potential in-combination impacts relating to the proposed development relate to the neighbouring seaweed farm, fishing and other aquaculture activities in the SAC. However, as the proposed development itself has been determined not to be of risk to the QI species, for the reasons set out in the ALAB AA Screening report, it follows that it will not act in combination with other activities considered here to either result in a risk to the QI species due to the proposed development or to increase any risk to the QI species from the other activities and no pathways which indicate same have been identified.

Having regard to the above, and the assessment and conclusions of the ALAB AA Screening Report, it is concluded that the proposed activity, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant negative impact on the Conservation Objectives of the West Connacht Coast, Slyne Head Peninsula or Slyne Head Islands SACs in relation to Bottlenose dolphins.

In addition, for the reasons set out in the ALAB AA screening report: the proposed activity, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant negative impact on the favourable conservation condition of:

- Grey Seal in the Inishbofin and Inishshark SAC and from Slyne Head Peninsula and Slyne Head Islands SACs.
- Atlantic Salmon in the Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex SAC.
- Otter in the Twelve Bens/ Garraun Complex SAC.
- SCI species in the SPAs identified.

Consequently, it is concluded that the culture of mussels using longlines at Site T09/524A proposed for Cleggan Bay does not pose a risk to any of the Annex II or the SCI species considered from any of the Natura 2000 sites listed above either alone or in combination with any other activities.

Overall Conclusion

The finding of this Appropriate Assessment Conclusion Statement is that the proposed activity is consistent with the Conservation Objectives for these Natura sites and is not likely to have significant effects on any European Site either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

Having regard to all of the foregoing, a full appropriate assessment is not required as it can be concluded on the basis of objective scientific information following screening, that the proposed activity, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any of the European sites listed above and in Section 1.5 of the ALAB AA Screening Report.