

# **GAS NETWORKS IRELAND NETWORK DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018**

**Report to Inform Screening for Appropriate Assessment**



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**Report to Inform Screening**  
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) are preparing a Network Development Plan 2018 (hereafter referred to as DRAFT NDP 2018) for submission to the Commission of Regulation of Utilities (CRU) in accordance with Article 22 of EU Directive 2009/73/EC (concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas) and Article 11 of the EC (Internal Market in Natural Gas and Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations 2015. The purpose of the draft NDP 2018 is to provide a capacity statement which sets out Gas Networks Ireland's assessment of the future demand and supply position for the natural gas industry in the Republic of Ireland ROI. The document also examines system operation and consequent capital investment requirements. The draft NDP 2018 is an annual statement which looks forward on a rolling 10-year horizon.

RPS was commissioned by Gas Networks Ireland (GNI) to produce this report to inform Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the Network Development Plan 2018 (NDP 2018) in line with the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora as transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, as amended. Appropriate Assessment is a process for undertaking an assessment of a plan or project, examining its implications, on its own or in-combination with other plans and projects, on one or more European sites in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives of those sites, as referred to in Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive.

The assessment was carried out in accordance with the legal context outlined in **Section 1.2**, and the report should be read in conjunction with the draft Network Development Plan 2018.

## 1.1 Legislative Context

### 1.1.1 European Sites

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora, better known as the "Habitats Directive" provides legal protection for habitats and species of European importance. Articles 3 to 9 provide the legislative means to protect habitats and species of Community interest through the establishment and conservation of an EU-wide network of sites known as the Natura 2000 Network. These are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/ECC) as codified by Directive 2009/147/EC (the Birds Directive), collectively referred to as European sites.

Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect European Sites (Annex 1.1). Article 6(3) establishes the requirement for AA:

*Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [European] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.*

Article 6(4) states:

*If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [European] site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.*

The Habitats Directive has been transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended). In the context of the draft NDP 2018, the governing legislation is principally Article 27 of the Birds and Natural

Habitats Regulations which sets out the duties of public authorities (in this case Gas Network Ireland, GNI (formerly Bord Gais)) relating to nature conservation and Article 42 which addresses Appropriate Assessment (AA) of implications for European sites. If screening for AA determines a likelihood for significant effects on a European site, then AA must be carried out for the plan, including the compilation of a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) to inform the decision-making process.

### 1.2 Purpose of Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Regulation 42(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 establishes the purpose of AA screening. It states 'A screening for Appropriate Assessment of a plan or project for which [...] a public authority wishes to undertake [...] shall be carried out by the public authority to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the site, if that [...] project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have significant effects on the European site.

Screening is the process that addresses and records the reasoning and conclusions in relation to the first two tests of Article 6(3):

- Whether a plan or project is directly connected to or necessary for the management of the site, and
- Whether a plan or project, alone or in combination with other plans and projects, is likely to have significant effects on a European site in view of its Conservation Objectives (CO's).

It is the responsibility of the Competent Authority (CA) to carry out AA screening and record their AA screening determination.

### 1.3 Overlap with SEA Process

An SEA Screening is being carried out concurrently with the AA process. The purpose of the SEA is to evaluate at an early stage, the range of environmental consequences that may occur as a result of implementing the draft NDP 2018 and to give relevant parties an opportunity to comment upon the environmental impacts of the proposal. There is a degree of overlap between the requirements of both the SEA and AA and in accordance with best practice, an integrated process of sharing gathered data, such as that potentially affecting the integrity (threats and sensitivities) of European sites has been carried out. These processes together will inform and shape the development of the draft NDP 2018.

It is also noted that there are issues relevant to the Habitats Directive that are not strictly related to AA. These include Article 10 and 12 of the Directive. These issues have been considered under the SEA Screening as part of the wider environmental considerations informing the draft NDP 2018.

## 2 OVERVIEW OF THE NDP

### 2.1 Background

Gas Networks Ireland is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Ervia and was established in accordance with the Gas Regulation Act 2013, as amended. It owns and operates the natural gas transmission and distribution networks in Ireland. As Ireland's gas Transmission System Operator (TSO), Gas Networks Ireland is required to submit an annual statement to the CRU outlining its ten-year capacity and demand forecasts in accordance with Article 22 of EU Directive 2009/73/EC (concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas) and Article 11 of the EC (Internal Market in Natural Gas and Electricity) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.

Gas Networks Ireland is also obliged to submit a long-term development statement to the CRU in accordance with condition 11 of its Transmission System Operator (TSO) licence. The publication of the NDP also satisfies the requirements of Section 19 of the Gas (Interim) (Regulations) Act 2002, as amended by the European Communities (Security of Natural Gas Supply) Regulations 2007. This requires the CRU to monitor and publish a report outlining gas supply and demand in Ireland over seven years.

### 2.2 Purpose of the NDP

The draft NDP 2018 is an annual capacity statement; its purpose is to set out Gas Networks Ireland's assessment of the future demand and supply forecasts for the natural gas industry in the ROI, as well as a view of how the gas network may develop over a rolling ten year period.

The draft NDP 2018 also considers system operations and consequent capital investment requirements. It does not, however, in and of itself set the context for land use or development activities or future development consent.

### 2.3 Scope of the NDP

The draft NDP 2018 sets out the historic and current situation with respect to gas energy in Ireland, and covers the following key areas:

- Overview and future of the gas network system;
- Historic demand and supply;
- Gas demand forecasts;
- Gas supply;
- Gas growth;
- Projects of common interest;
- Commercial market arrangements; and
- Gas network capacity and capital investment.

The draft NDP 2018 recognises that gas is an important energy source in Ireland. In this context and the above areas, the draft NDP 2018 looks at the current situation, likely demands, growth areas and technologies that could affect gas supplies and the network, and it examines trend data year on year. This is to inform Gas Networks Ireland's statutory reporting requirements in order to assess adequacy and security of supply. In order to inform the demand and supply analysis, the draft NDP 2018 examines three growth scenarios (low, medium and high) which were designed to represent a broad range of likely outcomes and are informed by a range of external and internal factors. The draft NDP 2018 also considers renewable energy targets, and its aims to achieve 20% renewable gas on the gas network by 2030.

The draft NDP 2018 also looks at capital investment requirements for gas-related projects including recent builds, those in planning, and possible future requirements.

It also clarifies the environmental and planning assessment procedures associated with capital works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'Envirokit', which is supported by a guidance document known as 'Enviroplan'. Together, these form a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice, including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended, and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Networks Ireland projects.

## 3 APPROACH TO APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

### 3.1 Introduction

The AA process progresses through four stages. If at any stage in the process it is determined that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of a European site in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives, the process is effectively completed. The four stages are as follows:

- Stage 1 – Screening of the proposed plan or project for AA;
- Stage 2 – An assessment of the proposed plan or project;
- Stage 3 – Assessment of alternative solutions; and
- Stage 4 – Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI)/ Derogation.

This document addresses stage 1 screening only.

### 3.2 Relevant Legislation and Guidance Documents Used

The AA requirements of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive follow a sequential approach as outlined in the following legislation, guidance documents and Departmental Circulars, namely:

#### European and National Legislation

- Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (also known as the 'Habitats Directive');
- Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the conservation of wild birds, codified version, (also known as the 'Birds Directive');
- Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended; and

#### European and National Guidance

- Managing Natura 2000 sites: the provisions of Article 6 of the 'Habitats' Directive 92/43/EEC1. European Commission (2000a);
- Communication from the Commission on the Precautionary Principle. European Commission (2000b);
- Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2001);
- Guidance document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the concepts of: Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest, Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence, Opinion of the Commission. European Commission (2007);
- Guidance document on the strict protection of animal species of Community interest under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC' (EC, 2007);
- Guidance document on the implementation of the birds and habitats directive in estuaries and coastal zones with particular attention to port development and dredging. European Commission (EC, 2011);

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<sup>1</sup> The Commission has notified its intent to revise this guidance and a draft revised document was published in April 2015. It would appear that this has not been finalised to date, and no revised guidance document is available on the Commissions official website as of February 2017.

- EC study on evaluating and improving permitting procedures related to Natura 2000 requirements under Article 6.3 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. European Commission (2013);
- Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats. Version EUR 28. European Commission (EC, 2013).
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland: Guidance for Planning Authorities. DEHLG (2009, revised 10/02/10); and
- Marine Natura Impacts Statements in Irish Special Areas of Conservation. A working Document. DAHG (2012).

### Departmental/NPWS Circulars

- Guidance on Compliance with Regulation 23 of the Habitats Directive. Circular Letter NPWS 2/07;
- Compliance Conditions in respect of Developments requiring (1) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); or (2) having potential impacts on Natura 2000 sites. Circular Letter PD 2/07 and NPWS 1/07.
- Appropriate Assessment of Land Use Plans. Circular Letter SEA 1/08 & NPWS 1/08;
- Water Services Investment and Rural Water Programmes – Protection of Natural Heritage and National Monuments. Circular L8/08; and
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPWS 1/10 and PSSP 2/10. (DEHLG, 2010).

## 3.3 Guiding Principles and Case Law Relevant to AA

Over time legal interpretation has been sought on the practical application of the legislation concerning AA as some terminology has been found to be unclear. European and National case law has clarified a number of issues and some aspects of the published guidance documents have been superseded by case law. Case law has been considered in the preparation of the Screening for AA report for the draft NDP 2018.

## 3.4 Information Sources Consulted In Preparation of the AA Screening

The following general sources of information have been consulted for background environmental information.

- Information provided by Gas Network Ireland on the draft Network Development Plan 2018;
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government – online land use mapping [www.myplan.ie/en/index.html](http://www.myplan.ie/en/index.html);
- GeoHive online mapping <http://map.geohive.ie/mapviewer.html>;
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland – online mapping and aerial photography [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie);
- National Parks and Wildlife Service – online European Site information [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie);
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency – online European Site information [www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk);
- Ireland's Article 17 Reports 2019, National Parks and Wildlife Service;
- Ireland's Article 12 submission to the EU Commission on the *Status and Trends of Bird Species (2008-2012)*;
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – ENVision maps [www.epa.ie](http://www.epa.ie);
- Information on River Basin Districts – [www.wfdireland.ie](http://www.wfdireland.ie);
- Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) – geology, soils and hydrogeology [www.gsi.ie](http://www.gsi.ie);
- *Format for a Prioritised Action Framework (PAF) for Natura 2000* [www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/PAF-IE-2014.pdf](http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/PAF-IE-2014.pdf); and



- *Ireland's National Biodiversity Plan 2017-2021* (DCHG, 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

### **3.5 Approach to Screening for AA for the DRAFT NDP 2018**

In line with best practice guidance, the Screening for AA report involves the following:

1. Description of the plan [see Chapter 2];
2. Identification of relevant European sites [see Chapter 4];
3. Assessment of likely significant effects [see Chapter 4];
4. Screening statement with conclusions [see Chapter 5].

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<sup>2</sup> Available online at: <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/National%20Biodiversity%20Action%20Plan%20English.pdf>. Accessed October 2019.

## 4 AA SCREENING

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of screening is to assess firstly if the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of European site(s); or in view of best scientific knowledge, if the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a European site. This is done by examining the proposed plan or project and the Conservation Objectives of any European sites that might potentially be affected. If screening determines that there is a likelihood of significant effects or there is uncertainty regarding the significance of effects, then it will be recommended that the plan is brought forward to Stage 2 and full assessment.

### 4.2 Description of the Plan

A description of the plan is presented in Chapter 2 of this document.

### 4.3 Identification of European Sites and Zone of Influence

The objectives of the draft NDP 2018 are to assess the future demand and supply position for the natural gas industry in the Republic of Ireland. It also examines the system operation and the potential capital investment requirements that may be required to provide flexibility in ensuring unhindered supply. Notwithstanding this fact, the AA process must address the potential of the draft NDP 2018 to give rise to likely significant effects which could adversely affect any European site, with regard to their qualifying interests, associated conservation status and the overall site integrity.

The draft NDP 2018 references elements of the network extending to ROI, Northern Ireland (NI), Scotland and Isle of Man (See **Figure 4.1**), therefore, in the first instance, the zone of influence (ZoI) has considered all European sites within the Republic of Ireland (including off-shore islands) out to the extent of the extended continental shelf and European sites from the other Member States referenced.

**Table 4.1** provides a summary breakdown of European sites for the Republic of Ireland. **Table 4.2** details the total number of European sites returned from an interrogation of Joint Nature Conservancy Council dataset<sup>3</sup> in relation to Northern Ireland (NI), Scotland and Isle of Man<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 4.1: Number of European Sites in Ireland**

Designation Type	Description	Number
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are designated under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Special Protection Areas are designated under the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC). Together these sites form the backbone of the Natura 2000 network.	433* + 6 offshore SACs
Special Protection Area (SPA)		165*

<sup>3</sup> <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/a3d9da1e-dedc-4539-a574-84287636c898>

<sup>4</sup> The Isle of Man, as a Crown dependency of the United Kingdom, is not part of the European Union except as part of the customs area.

Table 4.2: Number of European Sites in Northern Ireland, Isle of Man and Scotland<sup>5,6</sup>

Designation Type	Northern Ireland*	Scotland*
Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)	58 Terrestrial/ Inshore	241
Special Protection Area (SPA)	16	152

\*Total numbers of European sites.



Figure 4.1: Overview of Gas Networks Ireland Transmission System [source: GNI]

<sup>5</sup> <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/a3d9da1e-dedc-4539-a574-84287636c898> Details submitted to EU commission in March 2019

<sup>6</sup> Although the draft NDP 2018 does not reference Wales, it is recognised that by virtue of the proximity of Interconnector 1 to European sites off the Welsh coast e.g. SiteCode: UK9020328)- North Anglesey Marine / Gogledd Môn Forol (SiteCode: UK0030398) - Croker Carbonate Slabs (SiteCode: UK0030381), would need to be considered in terms of transboundary impacts.

## 4.4 Management of European Sites

Screening for AA is not required where the plan or proposed development is connected with, or necessary to the management of any European site. In the case of the draft NDP 2018, the proposed plan is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site(s).

## 4.5 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

The threshold for a Likely Significant Effect (LSE) is treated in the screening exercise as being above a *de minimis* level<sup>7</sup>. The opinion of the Advocate General in CJEU case C-258/11 outlines:

*“the requirement that the effect in question be ‘significant’ exists in order to lay down a de minimis threshold. Plans or projects that have no appreciable effect on a European site are thereby excluded. If all plans or projects capable of having any effect whatsoever on the site were to be caught by Article 6(3), activities on or near the site would risk being impossible by reason of legislative overkill.”*

The likely effects of the proposed draft NDP 2018 on any European site has been assessed using a source-pathway-receptor model, where:

- A ‘source’ is defined as the individual element of the proposed NDP that has the potential to impact on a European site, its qualifying features and its conservation objectives;
- A ‘pathway’ is defined as the means or route by which a source can affect the ecological receptor; and
- A ‘receptor’ is defined as the Special Conservation Interests (SCI) of SPAs or Qualifying Interests (QI) of SACs for which conservation objectives have been set for the European sites being screened.

A source-pathway-receptor model is a standard tool used in environmental assessment. In order for an effect to be likely, all three elements of this mechanism must be in place. The absence or removal of one of the elements of the mechanism results in no likelihood for the effect to occur. The source-pathway-receptor model was used to identify a list of European sites, and their QIs/SCIs, with potentially links to European site. These are termed as ‘relevant’ European sites/QIs/SCIs throughout this report.

Potential sources of impact as a result of implementation of the draft NDP 2018 could include:

- Construction/upgrade to the gas network; and
- Development of future gas technologies.

Potential pathways for effects include the following:

- Habitat loss or destruction;
- Loss of key supporting habitats and ecosystem complexes;
- Habitat fragmentation or degradation;
- Disturbance to habitats/species;
- Species mortality;
- Alterations to water quality and/or water movement;
- Alterations to air quality; and

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<sup>7</sup>*Sweetman v. An Bord Pleanála* (Court of Justice of the EU, case C-285/11). A *de minimis* effect is a level of risk that is too small to be concerned with when considering ecological requirements of an Annex I habitat or a population of Annex II species present on a European site necessary to ensure their favourable conservation condition. If low level effects on habitats or individuals of species are judged to be in this order of magnitude and that judgment has been made in the absence of reasonable scientific doubt, then those effects are not considered to be likely significant effects

- Alternations due to climate change.

The principal characteristics of the draft NDP 2018 is that it is primarily a supply/demand analysis and capacity statement, which identifies historic trends in gas supply and demand and considers scenarios for future gas supply and demand. It does not identify specific projects or include detailed geographic or project specificity and as such does not in and of itself give rise to Likely Significant Effects (LSE) to European sites.

Notwithstanding this, the following table and sections consider the source – pathway - receptor model for the various elements presented in the draft Plan in more detailed to firmly establish their potential for LSE.

**Table 4.3: Assessment of the draft NDP 2018 Chapters**

Chapter Ref	Description of Plan Element	Assessment of LSE to European sites
1 and 2	<b>Foreword and Executive Summary</b> Summary information of the chapters 3-10	See consideration of elements within each chapter for detail.
3	<b>Overview of Gas Network</b> Presents an overview of the current gas network in Ireland and hypothesises on the future network in the context of decarbonisation. Introduces possible future gas technologies and establishes their current status in terms of R&D. Also presents historic supply and demand data analysis.	This element of the plan presents baseline data to inform network and demand/supply considerations. No potential for LSE.  It is noted that it references new technologies which may be developed in the future to supply the gas network. These projects are subject to the appropriate consenting and planning regimes as set out under the Gas Act 1976 as amended, the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended and other relevant National and European law. In order to assist with its obligations in this regard, Gas Networks Ireland implements an environmental and planning assessment procedure for works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This procedure includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'envirokit' supported by a guidance document known as 'envioplan'. Together they are a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice, including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Network Ireland projects. No potential for LSE.
4	<b>Gas Demand</b> This section presents an overview of the gas demand outlook for the period 2017/18 to 2026/27. The NDP 2018 forecasts future gas demands by examining the development of individual Power, Industrial & Commercial, Residential and Transport sector gas demands <sup>8</sup> . In order to provide a comprehensive analysis Gas Networks Ireland has developed three gas demand scenarios. These scenarios are designed to represent a broad range of likely outcomes and are informed by a range of external and internal factors. Gas demand is dependent on a number of external	This element of the plan presents modelling forecasts in relation to gas demand and presents relevant assumptions made for the Power, Industrial & Commercial, Residential and Transport sector gas demands. No potential for LSE.

<sup>8</sup> Gas Networks Ireland have developed a document outlining the Methodology for forecasting gas demand. This document is available for download via the following link, <http://www.gasnetworks.ie/networkdevelopmentplan>

Chapter Ref	Description of Plan Element	Assessment of LSE to European sites
	<p>factors, including economic growth, electricity demand growth and other power generation sector developments. The median scenario is designed to take the middle of the road view in terms of how these factors will develop over time. This is updated annually to ensure it is reflective of the most up to date emerging factors.</p>	
5	<p><b>Gas Supply</b></p> <p>This section presents an overview of the current gas supply including the Corrib gas field, the Inch and Moffat entry points. Potential future supply is also identified and discussed including specifically the Celtic sea gas storage and Shannon LNG as well as upcoming supply technologies.</p> <p>A number of the supply pathways identified have already been the subject of EIA and AA as part of the planning and consenting regimes.</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the source of gas can have potential for significant environmental effects depending on the source and supply method applied. The draft NDP 2018 considers existing consented sources such as Corrib gas field and possible future sources for gas. GNI do not develop the gas supply and as such these supply projects will be developed in the main by third parties and must pass through the appropriate consenting and planning regimes which will include application of the AA process at project level. If consented, GNI network upgrades and or improvements will follow the Gas Networks Ireland environmental and planning assessment procedure for works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This procedure includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'envirokit' supported by a guidance document known as 'enviroplan'. Together they are a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice, including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Network Ireland projects. No potential for LSE.</p>
6	<p><b>Gas Growth</b></p> <p>This section outlines the main potential drivers for gas growth over the next 10 years. This includes the residential sector [refit for exiting housing stock, connections to new housing, connection of new towns and suburbs], Industrial and commercial sector [data centres, combined heat and power, dairy] and Transport sector [CNG]</p>	<p>Connection of existing and new properties in the residential, industrial and commercial sectors are anticipated to fuel much of the gas growth and need for upgrading, expansion or construction of the gas network. Projects associated with this predicted growth in the residential, industrial and commercial sectors are generally outside the remit of GNI. For example, although data centres are referenced in the draft NDP 2018 as a possible gas growth area, GNI is not involved in their development or consenting, but can connect them to the gas network if required. Data centres and similar such projects are subject to the appropriate consenting and planning regimes as set out under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and other relevant environmental protection legislation which includes the requirement to meet the obligations of the Habitats Directive.</p> <p>Where new or upgrades to the gas network are required, Gas Networks Ireland implements an environmental and planning assessment procedure for works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This procedure includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'envirokit' supported by a guidance document known as 'enviroplan'. Together they are a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice,</p>

Chapter Ref	Description of Plan Element	Assessment of LSE to European sites
		including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Network Ireland projects. No potential for LSE.
7	<p><b>Projects of Common Interest</b></p> <p>This section includes identification of PCI and risk factors in relation to security of supply.</p> <p>PCI identified construction of the twinning of the South West Scotland Onshore system (PCI 5.2) which was completed in Q4 2018; a feasibility study for physical reverse flow at Moffat which was completed in November 2018; and most recently Shannon LNG (PCI 5.3).</p> <p>Technical support to the CRU has also been provided in terms of the development of national security of supply risk assessments as required by Regulation (EU) 2017/1938.</p>	This element of the plan presents information on the status of PCI. No potential for LSE.
8	<p><b>Commercial Market Arrangements</b></p> <p>This section presents information on the Capacity Allocation Mechanism (CAM) which enables further development of European cross-border competition and market integration; the Balancing Network Code (Regulation EU 312/2014) which introduces market mechanisms into the balancing regime; Network Code on harmonised transmission tariff structures for gas and transparency requirements which have ensued for transmission system operators in relation to the publication of data items, such as capacities, flows and tariffs</p>	This element of the plan presents financial and market considerations. No potential for LSE.
9	<p><b>Gas Network Capacity</b></p> <p>This element of the plan recognises that the current transmission network has capacity to accommodate estimated increase in gas demand without the need the significant changes in infrastructure.</p> <p>Key capital investments in the short to medium term are outlined for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pipelines</li> <li>• Pressure Regulating Stations</li> <li>• Distribution Networks</li> <li>• Communications and Instrumentation</li> <li>• Meters</li> <li>• Compressors</li> </ul> <p>Key capital investments in the medium to long term are outlined for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforcements in the southern region</li> <li>• Compressor station upgrades [Ballough and Beattock]</li> </ul>	Gas Networks Ireland implements an environmental and planning assessment procedure for works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This procedure includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'envirokit' supported by a guidance document known as 'enviroplan'. Together they are a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice, including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Network Ireland projects. As such there is no potential for LSE arising from consented or future developments.
10	CRU Commentary	CRU feedback on capacity analysis. No potential for LSE.
<b>Appendices</b>	Historic demand and forecast data	Factual data, assumptions and modelling used in capacity calculations. No potential for LSE.

Chapter Ref	Description of Plan Element	Assessment of LSE to European sites

The characteristics of the draft NDP 2018 are such that they would not in and of themselves give rise to Likely Significant Effects on European sites. The draft NDP 2018 presents demand/capacity statement based on industry knowledge, and forecasts on the current and future requirements and status of the transmission network. The draft NDP 2018 will not in and of itself set the context for land use or development activities or future development consent. Indeed Chapter 3 of the plan is explicit in stating that the purpose of the draft NDP 2018 is to assess the gas networks capacity based on existing and forecast supply and demand in order to guarantee the adequacy of the network supply and security of supply. The draft NDP 2018 outlines a number of capital projects which will be delivered over the coming years - future proposed large capital projects and proposed new technologies. There is typically little geographical specificity associated with some of the proposed plan items. Other projects are namechecked to provide context to the supply/demand analysis and potential future capacity based on the various low, medium and high demand/supply scenarios presented. These projects would be subject to the appropriate consenting and planning regimes as set out under the Gas Acts 1976 as amended, the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and other relevant National and European law.

In support of this, Gas Networks Ireland already implements an environmental and planning assessment procedure for works designed and planned for Gas Networks Ireland. This procedure includes an environmental assessment tool known as 'envirokit' supported by a guidance document known as 'enviroplan'. Together they are a bespoke environmental planning and assessment tool modelled on environmental legal and regulatory requirements and best environmental practice, including requirements pursuant to the EIA Directive (85/337/EEC), as amended and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). This procedure ensures that environmental and planning matters and appropriate mitigation measures are considered and communicated during the design and project planning stages of all Gas Network Ireland projects.

#### 4.5.1 In-Combination Effects

It is a requirement of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive that the in-combination effects with other plans or projects are considered. Consideration has been given, at this stage of the NDP to other relevant plans on a similarly strategic level that have potential to have a cumulative impact upon European sites. These are identified and considered in **Error! Reference source not found.** Many of these plans are considered positive as they aim to protect and indeed enhance environmental status.

When assessing projects for in-combination impacts, the approach has been to identify strategic plans that may influence the draft NDP 2018. Plans relevant to the area were searched in order to identify any elements that may act cumulatively or in-combination with the proposed development. Areas searched for plans include: the Republic of Ireland in the main but consideration has also been given to Isle of Man, Scotland and Northern Ireland.



**Table 4.4: Plans Relevant to the draft NDP 2018\***

Level	Key Relevant Plans and Programmes	Comment	In combination Assessment – LSE to European sites
<b>Biodiversity</b>	The EU Biodiversity Strategy	Sets out six targets and their actions to focus on halting the loss of biodiversity in the EU by 2020. Full implementation of EU nature legislation is required for these targets making undertaking SEA and EIA necessary for actions likely to have significant impacts on biodiversity. No risk of likely significant in-combination effects will result as the primary purpose of the Strategy is to halt the loss of habitat and species.	No
	Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021	Ireland's third iteration of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), for conserving and restoring Ireland's biodiversity covering the period 2017 to 2021. The aims are to achieve Ireland's Vision for Biodiversity through addressing issues ranging from improving the management of protected areas to increasing awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. As the BAP is aimed at environmental protection, in-combination effects are not predicted.	No
<b>Land Use Planning</b>	Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework (NPF)	Designates a number of strategic policies and outcomes to guide development over the next 20+ years. Strategic priorities for public capital investment for all sectors are identified including residential, industrial and commercial and energy. Supply and demand forecasts presented within the draft NDP 2018 have had regard to the Ireland 2040 proposals. Specifically sets biodiversity as a priority (i.e. Enhanced Amenity and Heritage – National Strategic outcome 7) and apportions €1.4 billion to, amongst other compliance with the EU's Habitats Directive. Linkage to wider environmental policies such as Water Framework Directive is recognised and the need to set high level planning policies in protecting and making responsible use of our natural environment. The NPF has been subject to AA and includes clear policy on avoidance of impacts to European sites. No potential for in combination effects.	No
	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies	A framework to shape future planning and economic development in each of the three regions. Assets, opportunities and pressures are identified and regional policy objectives formed to support the NPF. As with NPF, there is a clear link in demand /supply relevant to regional priorities in residential, industrial/commercial, energy, sectors. The RSES include clear policy and supporting actions to avoid and minimise impacts on European sites. This includes commitments to only implement the policy base within the carrying capacity of the receiving environment as greater detail is known through the planning hierarchy. Subject to SEA and AA, environmental issues have been integrated into the draft [NW and S regions] and final [E region] RSES dealing with potential in-combination impacts such as residential and infrastructural developments, road and natural network development and additional environmental disturbances.	No
<b>Climate</b>	National Climate Mitigation Plan	This plan outlines a pathway to achieve decarbonisation and enables the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The draft NDP 2018 recognises need for decarbonisation priorities by reducing dependency on more carbon intensive fossil fuels in the short to medium term as Ireland	No

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Level	Key Relevant Plans and Programmes	Comment	In combination Assessment – LSE to European sites
		transitions more fully to renewables. The plan was subject to SEA and AA and mitigation measures from AA were developed to ensure no adverse effects from the plan. No risk of likely significant in-combination effects.	
	National Climate Change Adaptation Framework	A national adaptation strategy aiming to reduce the vulnerability of Ireland to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts. An examination of the framework did not require a SEA and AA, as it does not identify specific locations or proposed adaptation measures but may be subject to both via local government sectors and lower level adaptation plans and strategies.	No
	Climate Action Plan	Outlines the current state of climate breakdown across different sectors identifying the nature and scale of the challenges. It sets out new governance structures necessary to implement changes and includes a course towards achieving ambitious decarbonisation targets. As it supports the long term resilience to climate change its central aim is positive and there is no potential for in-combination effects.	No
	National Climate and Energy Plan (in preparation)	The plan, currently in preparation, brings together energy and climate planning and will detail how Ireland will achieve the EU's main climate targets. The plan must cover the key areas of (i) energy security; (ii) internal energy market; (iii) energy efficiency; (iv) decarbonisation; and (v) research, innovation and competitiveness. Its main focus is to support decarbonisation. The draft NDP 2018 recognises the need for decarbonisation priorities by reducing dependency on more carbon intensive fossil fuels in the short to medium term as Ireland transitions more fully to renewables. The plan will be subject to SEA and AA screening.	No
Energy	Energy Roadmap 2050	The roadmap does not set specific energy targets at this point, but does identify an aim to achieve an 80% to 95% reduction in greenhouse gases compared to 1990 levels by 2050. The key aim of the Roadmap is a guide to a low carbon Europe. This plan will be complimentary to the GNI draft NDP 2018 and as such no significant in-combination impacts are envisaged.	No
	The National Renewable Energy Action Plan (NREAP)	This plan has been produced as a requirement of the Renewable Energy Directive and sets out Ireland's "national targets for the share of energy from renewable sources consumed in transport, electricity and heating and cooling in 2020". This plan was not subject to AA, but some actions arising out of it have since been subject to AA owing to judicial review. The plan is positive in that its aims are to accelerate the uptake on renewable energy, thereby reducing the dependence on fossil fuels. This plan will be complimentary to the GNI draft NDP 2018 and as such no significant in-combination impacts are envisaged.	No
	The EU Policy Framework for Climate and Energy in the period from 2020 to 2030	<p>Sets targets for the period 2020 to 2030:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target of 27% renewable energy in the EU;</li> <li>• Increase energy efficiency by 27% by 2020; and</li> <li>• Reaching electricity interconnection target of 15% between EU countries by 2030.</li> </ul> <p>This policy framework underwent impact assessment before publishing. The overall drive is to increase the use of renewable energy and increase energy efficiency. The plan compliments GNI in that within the draft NDP 2018, it aims</p>	No

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Level	Key Relevant Plans and Programmes	Comment	In combination Assessment – LSE to European sites
		to achieve 20% renewable gas on the gas network by 2030 and as such the main thrust of the EU policy framework is positive. Hence, in-combination effects are not predicted.	
	Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (OREDPA)	A framework for the sustainable development of Irelands offshore renewable energy resources and identifies opportunities for development. The OREDPA sets out key principles, policy actions and enablers for delivery of Ireland’s significant potential in this area. SEA, AA, NIS carried out on energy potential and OREDPA committed to an SEA review in 2020. Findings of both the SEA and AA are fully embedded in the OREDPA and will underpin its implementation. Based on the implementation of mitigation measures and where in-combination is likely relevant, environment reports at lower level are required, there is no risk of likely significant in-combination effects.	No
<b>Water</b>	River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021	<p>Outlines the new approach that Ireland will take to protect our waters over the period to 2021. It builds on lessons learned from the first planning cycle. The second River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) outlines the new approach that Ireland will take as it works to protect its rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters. Was subject to both SEA and AA.</p> <p>Purpose is to achieve objectives of WFD. No potential for incombination effects.</p>	No
	Water Services Strategic Plan	<p>Integrated plan for the delivery of water services addressing six themes. Aims to ensure the availability of safe drinking water and that water is protected from wastewater discharges. The plan was subject to SEA and AA.</p> <p>Network development of the water network would have similar pathways for impact as upgrades to the gas network. In many cases pipelines for both are within the road bed for example and new / upgrades will require excavation.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this, the plan is strategic in nature and does not identify geographic or project specific information. As such, at this level there is no potential for in combination effects. The AA also noted the need for assessment of other plans/strategies/projects arising from the strategic plan at lower level. Irish Water also operate a system similar to the Envirokit operated by GNI which protects against impacts to European sites at project level. As such no potential for in combination effects.</p>	No
	National Water Resources Plan	<p>To identify how to provide a sustainable, secure and reliable water supply at present and for the future. It sets out how to balance supply and demand for drinking water over short, medium and long term.</p> <p>Network development of the water network would have similar pathways for impact as upgrades to the gas network. In many cases pipelines for both are within the road bed for example and new / upgrades will require excavation.</p> <p>Notwithstanding this, the plan is strategic in nature and does not identify geographic or project specific information. As such, at this level there is no potential for in combination effects. The AA also noted the need for assessment of other plans/strategies/projects arising from the strategic plan at lower level. Irish Water also operate a system similar to the Envirokit operated by GNI which protects</p>	No

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Level	Key Relevant Plans and Programmes	Comment	In combination Assessment – LSE to European sites
		against impacts to European sites at project level. As such no potential for in combination effects.	
Other	The National Broadband Plan	Sets out the strategy to deliver high speed broadband throughout Ireland. It aims to deliver targeted acceleration and provides ambition for the European Commission's Digital Agenda for Europe. Was subject to SEA and AA.  While the high level plan is not strictly applicable in the context of the draft NDP 2018, Aurora, as a company within Ervia is mentioned and the possibility of piggybacking other potential infrastructure on future gas infrastructure was noted. Network development of the broadband network could have similar pathways for impact if broadband cable is undergrounded on existing gas infrastructure. In such circumstances gas pipelines are likely to be within the road bed.  Notwithstanding this, the plan is strategic in nature and does not identify geographic or project specific information. As such, at this level there is no potential for in combination effects.	No
	Foodwise 2025	Sets out a ten year plan for the agri-food sector. The strategy underlines the sectors potential to further grow. Within the draft NDP 2018 Dairy is identified as a one significant area where gas usage is anticipated to increase in the coming years in response to global demand for milk and milk products.  The draft NDP 2018 recognises a role for gas to play in contributing to decarbonisation of the agri-sector which is positive. Notwithstanding this, the plan is strategic in nature and does not identify geographic or project specific information. As such, at this level there is no potential for in combination effects.	No
Transboundary	Scottish Energy Strategy	The strategy document sets out the Scottish Government's vision for the future energy system in Scotland. The document is aimed at guiding decisions for the right path to a low carbon future. Environmental considerations, sustainability and balance highlighted throughout. Any arising opportunities and developments would be assessed on a case by case basis of their effects and impacts. As infrastructure such as the Moffat Entry Point is a transboundary asset for GNI these requirements, in addition to GNIs own Envirokit would be applicable to any such proposals. As such there is no potential for in combination effects.	No
	Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Action Plan 2012-2015 and beyond	Arising as part of the commitment set out in the Strategic Energy Framework, the aim of this plan is to form one document to promote sustainability and to bring together the other various actions of plans and strategies in addition to providing few additional actions. These actions look to set NI on a pathway to decarbonisation and a more sustainable energy future. The responsibility toward policies are outlined such as the compliance with EU EIA and Habitats Directives. Subject to these when a project arises there are no risks of likely significant in-combination effects.	No

\*Relates to plans and programmes. Policy statements and legislation not listed unless necessary.

### 4.5.2 In-Combination Conclusion

The draft NDP 2018 is a supply/demand analysis and capacity statement. It identifies possible sources of demand on the network e.g. data centres, residential developments and commercial upgrades. However, it has no remit in the planning or permitting of future redevelopments. The cumulative nature of the effects from these potential developments, and the requirements of plans listed above is addressed through land use planning and zoning, which is outside the remit of GNI. Thus, no in-combination impacts are predicted in respect of the draft NDP 2018.

## 5 SCREENING CONCLUSION

RPS has prepared this report to inform screening for Appropriate Assessment to assess whether the draft NDP 2018, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, and in view of best scientific knowledge, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site(s).

The screening exercise was completed in compliance with the relevant European Commission guidance, national guidance, and current case law. The potential impacts of the proposed plan have been considered in the context of the European sites potentially affected, their qualifying interests and/or special conservation interests, and their conservation objectives.

Through an assessment of the source-pathway-receptor model, which considered the zone of influence of effects from the proposed plan and the potential in-combination effects with other plans or projects, the following findings were reported:

- The proposed draft NDP 2018 is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of any European site;
- By virtue that the plan is a supply and demand analysis and capacity statement, it will not give rise to likely significant effects on the qualifying interests of any Special Areas of Conservation, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the sites concerned; and
- By virtue that the plan is a supply and demand analysis and capacity statement, it will not give rise to likely significant effects on the special conservation interests (including supporting wetland habitat) of any Special Protection Areas, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the sites concerned

On the basis of objective scientific information, it is the considered opinion of RPS that, in completing its report to inform screening for Appropriate Assessment in respect of the draft NDP 2018, the plan either individually or in combination with other projects and plans, is not likely to have a significant effect on any European site.

### 5.1.1 Consultation

The merits of acquiring information and/or data to inform the determination of the AA are widely recognised. Therefore, aligning with the statutory SEA process and the requirements for consultation on the draft NDP 2018, GNI will provide the draft NDP 2018 and associated environmental documents including the Screening for AA to the departments and agencies listed below:

- Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU);
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG);
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG);
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM);
- Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCA); and
- Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).