



18<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Mr. Vincent O'Malley,  
Transport Infrastructure Ireland,

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via email to: [REDACTED]

**Re: Submission of Natura Impact Statement to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media pursuant to the requirements of Regulation 42(9)(c) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended).**

*TO270 – Munster Term Maintenance Contract No 3 – Munster Bridges Year 3*

Dear Mr. O'Malley,

The Department is in receipt of your email dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021 in respect of the project referred to above and has reviewed the Natura Impact Statement (NIS) referred to the Minister in this regard.

Matters relating to Appropriate Assessment

In section 2.1.2 of the NIS the Department suggests the addition of measures to prevent the potential spread of water borne biosecurity risks such as crayfish plague spores that may be present in water residues inside certain types of machinery such as water pumps or other equipment that may not be obvious and are difficult to examine. Such measures should include flushing with approved disinfectant.

The Department notes that the works proposed are largely on manmade artificial structures. Nevertheless there is potential for otter breeding sites or resting places to be present within or adjoining such structures. Otters are a qualifying interest of a number of the European sites relevant to the project and where this arises this matter must be addressed in the appropriate assessment. Where survey work indicates the presence of otter, mitigation measures should be in place to ensure no damage or



disturbance of otter breeding sites or resting places occurs. Such assessment and any necessary mitigation measures should be set out in the NIS or in an addendum to it.

### Strictly Protected Species

Regulation 51 of the 2011 Birds and Habitats Regulations prohibits the damaging or destruction of a breeding site or resting place of species referred to in Part 1 of the First Schedule, otherwise known as strictly protected species (species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive). Of particular relevance to this project are strictly protected species such as otter and all bat species. A number of bat species use bridges as roosting sites and many of the proposed works such as the filling of cracks and crevices have potential to disturb these species and to damage or destroy breeding or resting places of such animals. TII should ensure that in advance of any works that an appropriate initial assessment is carried out by a person competent to identify where a risk of damage or disturbance to an Annex IV species may exist. This assessment should be recorded and kept with the records associated with the project. Projects where a risk is identified should be subject to an appropriate scientific assessment and it will be necessary to identify alternatives or modifications that will avoid that risk. Where it is not possible to identify a means of avoiding the risk completely, the question of seeking a derogation licence from the Minister must be considered. The Minister may only grant such a licence where no other satisfactory alternative exists and in accordance with the strict conditions set out in Regulation 54 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended).

### Nature Conservation

Masonry bridges are a valuable habitat for a myriad of saxicolous vascular, bryophyte and lichen species. Many species have as their preferred habitat such structures whilst a smaller, restricted number of rarer species are dependant solely on such structures (usually on the mortar between the masonry). The recommendations below are made in the interests of maintaining this aspect of Ireland's biodiversity (recently highlighted in the publication of 'The Rare and Threatened Bryophytes of Ireland').

Only lime mortar should be used for repointing, grouting etc. (as per TII guidelines as stated). The "Removal of vegetation from the bridge surface, parapets and embankments", should be carried out judiciously so as to avoid the wholesale removal of small vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens – their removal should be deemed necessary only for imperative reasons of engineering integrity.



Bridges and the vegetation on bridges also attract a number of nesting bird species including the Birds of Conservation Concern Red Listed species Grey Wagtail. The Department recommends procedures be put in place to avoid impacting on such species.

Yours sincerely,

Gerry Clabby  
Head of Ecological Assessment

