

30TH OF NOVEMBER 2023

**APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC WORKS (REACTIVE MAINTENANCE WORKS AT N72 LEADER'S BRIDGE
IN COUNTY CORK) ASSOCIATED WITH
'Munster Bridges Term Maintenance Contract No. 3'**

LETTER OF DETERMINATION

Regulation 42(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (the 'Habitats Regulations') states, *inter alia*, 'A screening for Appropriate Assessment of a [...] project [...] 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.'¹ Regulation 42(2) of the Habitats Regulations states 'A public authority shall carry out a screening for Appropriate Assessment under paragraph (1) before [...] a decision to undertake [...] a project is taken.'²

Having taken the view that the works required under 'Munster Bridges Term Maintenance Contract No. 3' might constitute 'projects'³ within the meaning of the Habitats Regulations, Transport Infrastructure Ireland⁴ (TII) decided that the works required under the contract should be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment pursuant to, *inter alia*, Regulation 42 of the Habitats Regulations and Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.⁵

Mr. Peter Walsh (the Chief Executive of Transport Infrastructure Ireland) delegated the following function to me by memorandum dated the 21st of March 2023: "*Preparation and signing of written*

¹ Regulation 42(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011).

² Regulation 42(2) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011).

³ Regulation 2(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011) defines 'project' to include 'land use or infrastructural developments, including any development of land or on land.' Given the breadth of the term 'project' under the Habitats Regulations, Transport Infrastructure Ireland is uncertain as to whether or not works required under 'Munster Bridges Term Maintenance Contract No. 3' constitute 'projects'. It notes, however, that Section 3(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, defines 'development' to include '[...] the carrying out of any works on, in, over, or under land [...]' and that Section 2(1) of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 defines 'works' to include '[...] any act or operation of construction, excavation, demolition, extension, alteration, repair or renewal [...]' As such, Transport Infrastructure Ireland acknowledges that works required under 'Munster Bridges Term Maintenance Contract No. 3' might constitute 'projects' within the meaning of the Habitats Regulations.

⁴ Article 2 of the Roads Act 2015 (Operational Name of National Roads Authority) Order, 2015 (S.I. No. 297 of 2015) provides that the National Roads Authority may describe itself as Transport Infrastructure Ireland for operational purposes.

⁵ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora [1992] OJ L 206.

decision on completion of screening process for appropriate assessment in the context of environmental impact.”

I completed screening for Appropriate Assessment in respect of the proposed reactive maintenance works at Leader’s Bridge on the N72 in the townlands of Ballymaquirk and Dromcummer Beg in County Cork required under ‘Munster Bridges Term Maintenance Contract No. 3.’

It was *not possible* to exclude, on the basis of objective scientific information following the screening done, that the said proposed reactive maintenance works at N72 Leader’s Bridge in County Cork, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on any European site.

Accordingly, under and in accordance with Regulation 42(6) of the Habitats Regulations I determine that an Appropriate Assessment is required for the said works.

Mr. Peter Walsh (the Chief Executive of Transport Infrastructure Ireland) delegated the following function to me by memorandum dated the 21st of March 2023: *“Where applicable, sign-off on the subsequent appropriate assessment stage.”*

Regulation 42(9) of the Habitats Regulations states *‘Where a public authority is required to conduct an Appropriate Assessment [...] it shall- (a) prepare a Natura Impact Statement, (b) compile any other evidence including, but not limited to, scientific evidence that is required for the purposes of the Appropriate Assessment, and (c) submit a Natura Impact Statement together with evidence compiled under subparagraph (b) to the [Minister] not later than six weeks before it proposes to adopt or undertake the plan or project to which the Natura Impact Statement and evidence relates.’*

I instructed Atkins Limited to prepare a Natura Impact Statement (to include all evidence including, but not limited to, scientific evidence that is required for the purposes of the Appropriate Assessment) in respect of the proposed reactive maintenance works at N72 Leader’s Bridge in County Cork. That Natura Impact Statement has the title *Leader’s Bridge Reactive Maintenance – Natura Impact Statement (NIS)* (Rev. 2.0, Atkins, 5th of October 2023).

On the 17th of October 2023 I submitted that Natura Impact Statement to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Regulation 42(10) of the Habitats Regulations states, *inter alia*, *‘A public authority [...] shall not, without the agreement of the Minister, conclude an Appropriate Assessment [...] earlier than six weeks after the date on which it submitted the Natura Impact Statement to the Minister’.*

I confirm that the period of six weeks mentioned in Regulation 42(10) *has passed*.

Regulation 42(10) of the Habitats Regulation states, *inter alia*, 'A public authority [...] shall take account of any submissions made to it by the Minister.'

I confirm that no submission was made by the Minister.

Regulation 42(13) of the Habitats Regulations states 'Where a public authority has determined [...], that an Appropriate Assessment is required in respect of a proposed plan or project, [...], the public authority shall carry out a public consultation and publish a notice of the proposed plan or project in a manner to be determined by the public authority.'

For this purpose, the Natura Impact Statement was made available for review by, and submissions or observations sought from, the general public between the dates of the 18th of October 2023 and the 17th of November 2023. No submissions were received from the general public.

Regulation 42(11) of the Habitats Regulations states 'An Appropriate Assessment [...] shall include a determination by the public authority [...] pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive as to whether or not a plan or project would adversely affect the integrity of a European site and the assessment shall be carried out by the public authority before a decision is taken to approve, undertake or adopt a plan or project, as the case may be.'

Under and in accordance with Regulation 42(12) of the Habitats Regulations, in carrying out this Appropriate Assessment, I have taken into account:

- (a) the Natura Impact Statement, including the recommendation contained therein that the proposed works will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site;
- (b) the other plans or projects that may, in combination with the proposed works, adversely affect the integrity of a European Site, which are included within the Natura Impact Statement; and,
- (c) the information or advice obtained, namely, from various members of staff both from TII (e.g., from the legal, structures and environmental sections) and the consultant engaged by TII to prepare and administer the contract (including the consultant's ecological expert).

Regulation 42(17)(b) of the Habitats Regulations states, *inter alia*, 'A public authority shall not [...] undertake [...] a [...] project containing any conditions, restrictions or requirements purporting to (i) permit the deferral of the collection of information required for a screening for Appropriate Assessment or for an Appropriate Assessment or the completion of a screening for Appropriate Assessment or an Appropriate Assessment until after the consent has been given, (ii) accept an incomplete Natura Impact Statement, or (iii) permit or facilitate the avoidance of compliance with the conditions set out in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive.'


I confirm that the proposed works and this determination do not contain any such conditions, restrictions or requirements.

I accept the recommendations of Atkins Limited that the proposed reactive maintenance works at N72 Leader's Bridge in County Cork will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site.

Pursuant to Regulation 42(11) of the Habitats Regulations and Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, I determine, in view of the best scientific knowledge and the site's conservation objectives, that the proposed works, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, would not adversely affect the integrity of any European site.

I confirm that this determination has been made before any decision has been taken to approve, undertake or adopt the proposed works.

I am satisfied that TII is not prohibited, by Regulation 42(16) of the Habitats Regulations, from undertaking the proposed works.



Dr. Vincent O'Malley

Head of the Environmental Policy and Compliance Section

Transport Infrastructure Ireland