



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

European Union (EU) Just Transition Fund (JTF) Programme

Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA)

2483902 – Natura Impact Statement

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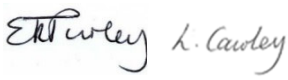

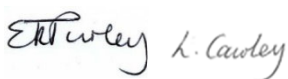
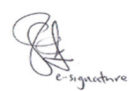
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Acronyms

AA	Appropriate Assessment
DCHG	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
DECC	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
DNSH	Do No Significant Harm
EC	European Commission
EMRA	Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
EU	European Union
GBI	Green and Blue Infrastructure
GHG	Green House Gas
IROPI	Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest
JTF	Just Transition Fund
JTFP	Just Transition Fund Plan
LECP	Local Economic and Community Plan
LSE	Likely Significant Effects
NAPCP	National Air Pollution Control Programme
NBAP	National Biodiversity Action Plan
NCPF	National Cycle Policy Framework
NEC	National Emissions Ceiling
NDP	National Development Plan
NIS	Natura Impact Statement
NPF	National Planning Framework
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OPR	Office of the Planning Regulator
QI	Qualifying Interest
RD&I	Research, Development and Innovation
RSES	Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies
RDP	Rural Development Programme
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SCI	Special Conservation Interest
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SPA	Special Protection Area
S-P-R	Source-Pathway-Receptor
SRSP	Structural Reform Support Programme
TJT	Territorial Just Transition
TJTP	Territorial Just Transition Plan

UK	United Kingdom
Zol	Zone of Influence

Executive summary

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is currently preparing the European Union (EU) Just Transition Fund (JTF) Programme. The EU JTF is a newly established fund under the framework of EU cohesion policy and is being rolled out across all Member States. The purpose of the Fund is to assist the most negatively affected territories in transitioning to a low carbon economy and society, in an effective and fair manner. The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) is the government body overseeing the Fund in Ireland (the “Member State”) and EMRA, as the managing authority, is responsible for the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the EU JTF Programme.

RSK Ireland Ltd. has been instructed by the EMRA to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and produce a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) of the EU JTF Programme. This NIS is based on the EU JTF Programme dated 26/10/2022.

The Stage 1 AA Screening looked at each of the Priorities and their associated types of actions to determine the potential for likely significant effects as a result of implementation of the EU JTF Programme. Using the source-pathway-receptor model, the screening assessment determined that the potential for likely significant effects cannot be ruled out (either alone or in combination) in relation to any of the Priorities set out within the EU JTF Programme (**JTF1**: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy; **JTF2**: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets; and **JTF3**: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition) and therefore further assessment 1. was required.

The Stage 2 assessment considered whether implementation of the EU JTF Programme has the potential to adversely affect the integrity of one or more European site(s). The following potential impacts were identified:

- Habitat degradation.
- Disturbance/ displacement to Qualifying interests (QI)/ Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where works take place near a European site(s).

The assessment has determined that none of the Priorities in the Programme would be actively directing development in such a location or manner that potential impacts arising from projects receiving funding could not be avoided or mitigated. The focus of the EU JTF Programme is to support sustainable development and to protect/restore/enhance the natural environment. In the long-term, the development and implementation of the EU JTF Programme is considered to be largely environmentally beneficial, with the potential to deliver positive benefits for European sites within the Territory.

It is not possible, at this high level, to identify all impacts associated with implementation of the EU JTF Programme; however, the AA process has determined the types of impacts which are most likely to be encountered and has identified measures for each of the Priorities which would avoid or mitigate such types of impacts. These measures (in addition to complying with EU and National policy and legislation) must be adhered to when allocating funding in order to ensure that there

would be no adverse effects on the integrity of European site(s). The EU JTF Programme would not support any projects where adverse effects on European sites cannot be avoided or mitigated.

The Appropriate Assessment therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance and/or mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented) there would be no adverse impacts (alone or in-combination) on the integrity of any European sites a result of implementation of the EU JTF Programme.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1.1 The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is currently preparing the European Union (EU) Just Transition Fund (JTF) Programme. The EU JTF is a newly established fund under the framework of EU cohesion policy and is being rolled out across all Member States. The purpose of the Fund is to assist the most negatively affected territories in transitioning to a low carbon economy and society, in an effective and fair manner. The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) is the government body overseeing the Fund in Ireland (the “Member State”) and EMRA, as the managing authority, is responsible for the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the EU JTF Programme.
- 1.1.2 RSK Ireland Ltd. has been instructed by the EMRA to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening and produce a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) of the EU JTF Programme. This document has been produced by RSK Biocensus, an RSK Group Company. This NIS is based on the EU JTF Programme dated 26/10/2022.
- 1.1.3 The purpose of the NIS is to provide evidence on the potential for the EU JTF Programme to give rise to impacts on any European site(s) within the Territory and transboundary effects. This will enable the competent authority (in this instance the EMRA) to make the Appropriate Assessment decision, in accordance with EU and National legislation, as set out in Section 2 below.

1.2 Overlap with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

- 1.2.1 An SEA of the EU JTF Programme is also being carried out concurrently with the AA process. The purpose of this assessment is to evaluate, at an early stage, the broader range of environmental consequences that may occur as a result of implementing the EU JTF Programme, and to give interested parties an opportunity to comment upon the perceived or actual environmental impacts of the proposed EU JTF Programme. 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 has been carried out.
- 1.2.2 It is also noted that there are issues relevant to the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (the ‘Habitats Directive’) that are not strictly related to AA. These include Article 10 and 12 of the Directive, which relate to the protection of species and the management of the landscape to encourage their movement and dispersal. In these cases, the issues have been brought forward to the biodiversity, flora and fauna section of the SEA, and have been addressed in that context as part of the wider environmental assessments informing development of the EU JTF Programme.

2.0 ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

2.1 Legislative context for AA

- 2.1.1 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 (also known as ‘European sites’).
- 2.1.2 Natura 2000 sites form a network of areas designated to conserve natural habitats and species that are rare, endangered, vulnerable or endemic within the European Community. This includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (designated under the Habitats Directive) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) (classified under Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds; the ‘Birds Directive’).
- 2.1.3 Article 6 of the Directive obliges member states to undertake an ‘appropriate assessment’ of any plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, that is likely to have a significant effect on any European site.
- 2.1.4 Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive establishes the general approach and key principles for AA, and states the following:
- ‘3. Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In the 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.’*
- ‘4. If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the 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 social or economic nature, the Member State 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. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.’*
- 2.1.5 The Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) are transposed into Irish legislation by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011. The legislative provisions for AA Screening for planning applications are set out in Section 177U of the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

2.2 AA Guidance

2.2.1 This NIS has been prepared in accordance with the following AA guidance:

- Assessment of plans and projects in relation to Natura 2000 sites - Methodological guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. Commission notice (European Commission, 2021)
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, 2018).
- OPR Practice Note PN01. Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021).
- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Departmental Circular guidance documents.

2.3 Stages of the Appropriate Assessment process

2.3.1 As set out in the guidance documents above, AA is split into four distinct stages:

2.3.2 **Stage 1:** Screening is the first stage of the process and identifies the likely impacts upon a European site of a plan or project (either alone or in combination). Consideration of likely significant effects should be based on the Source-Pathway-Receptor (S-P-R) risk assessment principle. Mitigation cannot be taken into consideration at this stage of the AA process. If the screening exercise concludes that likely significant effects cannot be ruled out, then Stage 2 of the process (see below) must be undertaken. It is important to note that the burden of evidence is to demonstrate, on the basis of objective information, that there will be no significant effect; if the effect may be significant, or is not known, that would trigger the need for Stage 2 of the process.

2.3.3 **Stage 2:** AA looks at the implications of the effects of the proposals for the site's conservation objectives (alone and in combination). At this stage, it needs to be determined, beyond reasonable scientific doubt, whether or not there will be adverse effects on the integrity of the site. This stage also includes the development of mitigation measures to avoid or reduce any possible impacts.

2.3.4 **Stage 3:** Should the avoidance or mitigation measures detailed at Stage 2 be insufficient to cancel out adverse effects, Stage 3 of the process must be undertaken. Assessment of alternative solutions is the process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the plan or project that would avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of a European site. EU guidance on this stage of the process states that, '*other assessment criteria, such as economic criteria, cannot be seen as overruling ecological criteria*'. If alternative solutions exist that do not have adverse impacts on European sites, they should be adopted regardless of economic considerations. This stage of the AA process should result in the identification of the least damaging options for the plan or project.

2.3.5 **Stage 4:** Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain. An assessment is made as to whether or not the development is necessary for Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest (IROPI). If it is, this stage also involves

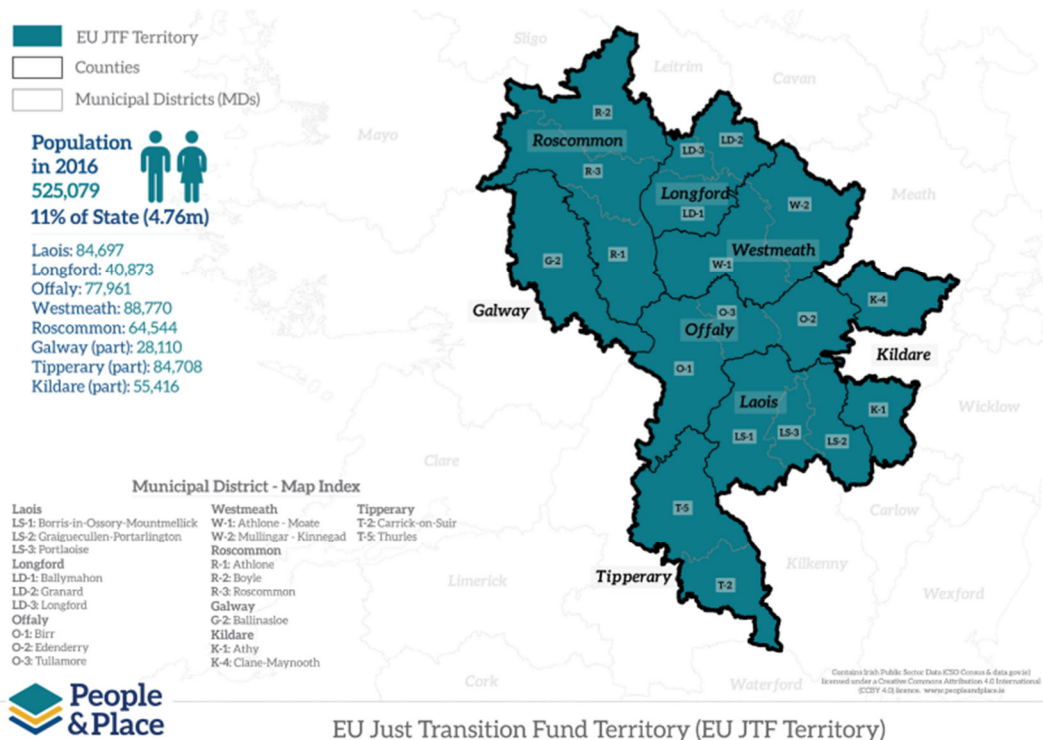
detailed assessment of the compensatory measures needed to protect and maintain the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network. Where a European site include in their qualifying features 'priority' habitats or species, as defined in Annex I and II of the Habitats Directive, the demonstration of 'over-riding public interest' is not sufficient and it must be demonstrated that the plan or project is necessary for 'human health or public safety considerations'. Where plans or projects meet these criteria, they can be allowed, provided adequate compensatory measures are proposed.

2.3.6 This NIS document includes Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Appropriate Assessment process.

3.0 THE EU JUST TRANSITION FUND PROGRAMME

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 The EU JTF Programme, one of the pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism under EU cohesion policy, aims to mitigate adverse effects of the green transition by supporting the most negatively affected territories and workers in Europe and to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. In line with the JTF's single specific objective, actions supported will directly contribute to alleviating negative impacts of the transition on employment by supporting diversification and modernisation of the local economy in the most impacted territory.
- 3.1.2 The key task for the EU JTF is to provide new employment opportunities for workers and communities that were heavily dependent on peat. This can be achieved by supporting the diversification of the economy of the target Territory to enable economic development and help impacted workers and communities adapt to a changing labour market. By providing opportunities for employment in the target Territory, the JTF can help to create an inclusive, attractive, healthy and sustainable place to live, work and visit. A focus on inter-generational sustainability, local development, regenerative tourism and building a green and circular economy will be central to achieving this vision.
- 3.1.3 As set out in the EU JTF Regulation (EU) 2021/1056, the Territorial Just Transition Plan must: present Ireland's proposed investment Priorities; identify the most negatively affected territory; assess the transition challenges faced in the territory; and set out the development needs to address these. It must also set out the types of operations envisaged and the targeted sectors and regions.
- 3.1.4 To inform the development of the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) and the EU JTF Programme, the European Commission funded analysis via the Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). To ensure that the TJTP and EU JTF Programme targeted the most negatively affected communities, the MS commissioned a complementary analysis to identify the most negatively affected territories at municipal district level, based on key socio-economic, demographic and environmental indicators.
- 3.1.5 Based on territorial analysis, the counties of Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon and municipal districts of Ballinasloe (Co. Galway), Athy, Clane-Maynooth (Co. Kildare) & Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles (Co. Tipperary) were identified as the most negatively affected by the transition. This contiguous territory – which includes one Region (Midlands) and parts of three more (Mid-East, West & Mid-West) – provided a baseline for the geographical context, to ensure an evidence-based approach was applied in the selection of EU JTF Programme operations (see below).



Map 1: EU Just Transition Fund Territory (EU JTF Territory)

3.2 Programme Priorities

3.2.1 To achieve the specific objective of the EU JTF, the Programme will address the investment needs identified above via the three complementary Priorities listed below. These are each cross-cut by the key objectives of supporting research, upskilling, and reskilling (through investments which build on regional strengths to address the socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition process in the Territory and facilitate the move towards climate-neutrality):

- **JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy** by supporting productive investments in enterprise, SMEs and community actions, focusing on sectors and activities which can address the economic challenge of the transition.
- **JTF2: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets** to enable the transition towards climate-neutrality while also facilitating the diversification and modernisation of the economy of the Territory.
- **JTF3: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition** by supporting clean, green mobility to build regional attractiveness and support economic development.

3.2.2 Table 1 shows the EU JTF Programme Priorities and associated actions.

Table 1 Priorities and actions within the EU JTF Programme

Priorities	Types of Actions
<p>Specific objective: JSO8.1. Enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement</p>	
<p>JTF1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy</p>	<p>1.1 Foster the economic diversification of the territory by supporting productive investments in micro-enterprises, SMEs and economic stakeholders in key sectors, such as sustainable tourism and the bioeconomy, and by providing support to businesses to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new/expand existing services and products, such as those which contribute to a transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy. • Develop the digital capabilities of SMEs/businesses to make the most of opportunities offered by digitalisation. • Foster entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, internationalisation, clustering and network development. • Enable SMEs and businesses to set-up, modernise, diversify and expand in the EU JTF Territory.
	<p>1.2 Support the implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies</p> <p>The EU JTF will support local authorities and local stakeholders in implementing economic and community objectives and actions of economic strategies which are developed through collaboration involving local and regional stakeholders and are adopted through democratic processes. The targeted strategies are Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Enterprise Plans. This action may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on achievements of the National Just Transition Fund and on regional strengths as identified in the Smart Specialisation Strategy for Ireland. • Encourage the development of transformative projects in association with the local authorities and local stakeholders. • Supporting the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by supporting the diversification of the economy of the Territory in line with bottom-up local and regional and economic strategies. <p>In supporting implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies, this action will support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities which are aligned with the single specific objective of the EU Just Transition Fund and which contribute to the implementation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ireland; and • activities which are limited to the types of activities listed in Article 8.2 of the EU JTF Regulation, such as but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting new and existing businesses/SMEs to create jobs, improve and diversify employment in the Territory. • Supporting job creation and providing enterprise supports in green and low carbon sectors. • Supporting digitalisation and connectivity to open-up new employment options.
	<p>1.3 Support research, development and innovation activities to contribute to the development of the green and circular economy</p> <p>The EU JTF will support investments in research, development, innovation, cooperation and demonstration activities that contribute to the development through structuring (aligning relevant partners) and mobilisation (development of multi-actor engagement to enable knowledge exchange and innovation) of the circular economy of the Territory, including the bioeconomy. This would include:</p>

Priorities	Types of Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) activities and fostering the transfer of advanced technologies, including through living labs. • Support to multi-actor cooperation for mobilising, supporting and enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling, including RD&I for sustainable higher value products for new circular, resource-efficient biobased industries. • Support the building of multi-sectoral engagement based on the principles of a circular economy and bioeconomy to consider the material flow (the territorial metabolism) as a resource which supports goals for ensuring food and nutrition security, managing natural resources sustainably, reducing dependence on non-renewable, unsustainable resources, limiting, and adapting to climate change and strengthening European competitiveness and creating jobs, welfare, and prosperity. • Support enabling communication, coordination and alignment with education, training, and skills activities to support activities and productive investments in relevant actors in the circular and bioeconomy including cooperative organisations, SMEs and industry for the development of new business models, value chains, technologies, products and services. <p>If relevant, actions in the field of clean energy could also be supported as they could be linked to actions in the field of bioeconomy.</p>
<p>JTF2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets</p>	<p>2.1 Restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including restoration/rehabilitation plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of measures to enable and monitor restoration and rehabilitation (where required) of degraded peatlands across multiple project sites. Project sites may be located within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and may not include peatlands that are subject to obligated rehabilitation or are currently subject to restoration under any other funded programme. Restoration measures will include blocking of drains (with peat or plastic dams); construction of bunds; imposition (or amendment) of grazing regimes; erection of fencing for stock control; control of scrub/invasive species; management of nutrient loadings from adjacent land, and; tree felling where appropriate. Drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017. • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the restoration measures to the wider public. <p>2.2 Research, knowledge transfer and monitoring activities on rewetting measures and overall land management improvements for farmed peat soils including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments). • Rewetting of drained organic soils under grass. Rewetting is the deliberate action of raising the water table on drained soils to re-establish water saturated conditions (i.e. by blocking drainage ditches, disabling pumping facilities or breaching obstructions). • Research on rewetted soils to identify suitable land management practices to maintain low GHG emissions and support biodiversity while farming under wet conditions. Actions on the rewetted area may include, but are not limited to, reducing the grazing period with existing livestock and use of alternative crops and grazing animals.

Priorities	Types of Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the rewetting measures to the wider public. <p>2.3 Regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of regeneration and repurposing measures to include investments in the upgrade of existing industrial heritage assets for amenity and investments in new amenity assets such as, but not limited to, walking trails, cycle paths, signage/notice boards, seating, boardwalks and bog bridges. Any necessary 'environmental stabilisation' will, where relevant, have already taken place in accordance with the Polluter Pays Principle and/or requirements for obligated rehabilitation. <p>These actions will complement the activities under Priority 1 by providing employment for impacted workers and communities and by making the Territory a more attractive place to live, work and visit. Attracting visitors to the Territory by providing first-rate amenities and restored landscapes will support new and existing SMEs by creating a market for additional goods and services. The rewetting and restoration works will require and involve the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction. The research, education, community engagement activities and knowledge transfers possible under this priority will also increase the skills base of impacted communities, supporting the potential for further productive activities.</p>
<p>JTF3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition</p>	<p>As part of this priority, the EU JTF Programme will enhance sustainable and clean mobility in the Territory by supporting actions focusing on the decarbonisation of transport to provide clean transport solutions to the people working in, studying in and visiting the EU JTF Territory. Factors such as range anxiety, stretched resources and uncertain travel patterns following the pandemic, and rapidly changing technology, mean that the barriers to transport operators in the Territory taking advantage of zero carbon fleets are very high. By introducing relatively simple measures, the move to cleaner public transport for all can be accelerated in the EU JTF Territory. This will include the following type of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation of public local rural bus route(s) including scoping, installation of electric charging points, and purchase of electric buses. • Support to private bus operators in the territory to move to electric vehicles including consultancy support and support for specific aspect of the electrification upgrade • Installation of publicly available fast and high-powered charge point infrastructure at community centre sites, including consultancy support, support to infrastructure work (civil and electrical work) and purchase of necessary equipment and related installation measures <p>This Priority is key to ensuring the success of Priority 1. Sustainable and clean mobility in the region is essential to ensuring the Territory's population are able to access jobs and training in order to participate in the economic and community diversification activities of Priority 1. It is intended that actions supported under this Priority will build more resilient communities by allowing earlier adoption of zero-emissions mobility options, providing workers with better access to local jobs, training and education opportunities. The creation of local sustainable transport solutions will better connect towns, remote working hubs and educational institutions in the Territory, better serving employees. Enhanced local sustainable transport enables communities to embrace clean and sustainable opportunities resulting from the green transition. It is envisaged that local suppliers of works, equipment and services will benefit from the investment of JTF funding of these actions, as well as local businesses which may be considering the use of zero-emissions vehicles for commercial purposes, particularly last-mile freight services and services associated with community programmes, such as meals on wheels or youth clubs.</p>

3.3 Consultation

- 3.3.1 To assist in the development of the Territorial Just Transition Plan and Programme, a public consultation was carried out from December 2021 to March 2022. The consultation gathered views of a broad range of stakeholders in the Just Transition Territory, including individuals, communities, businesses, social enterprises, civil society and representative bodies. Overall, 240 individuals and organisations engaged with the consultation process. It consisted of written submissions (40), online survey responses from individuals and organisations (82), a series of workshops with the public and with local authority staff and elected members, as well as a workshop dedicated to gathering input from youth (16 to 24-year-olds) in the region, totaling 57 participants.
- 3.3.2 In relation to the EU JTF Programme, a four-week consultation exercise supported by a draft SEA Scoping Report and AA Screening report was carried out in September / October 2022. Responses were received from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Geological Survey Ireland. No specific changes to the AA Screening were required as a result of the consultation.
- 3.3.3 Following completion of the NIS (refer to Section 5), a public consultation exercise was carried out in October/ November 2022. Consultation responses (relevant to the NIS) were received from the following organisations:
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) including the following:
 - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Natural Environment Division (NED) (Via NIEA).
 - Water Management Unit (Via DAERA).
 - Marine Fisheries Division (Via NIEA).
- 3.3.4 A summary of the consultation responses and how these have been addressed is set out in Table B1, Appendix B.

4.0 STAGE 1 – AA SCREENING

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The purpose of AA screening is:

'to assess, in view of the best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of the sites, if that plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects is likely to have a significant effect on the site.'

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

- 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.

4.1.3 Under the first test, plans that are directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site do not require AA. For this exception to apply, management is required to be interpreted narrowly as nature conservation management in the sense of Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive. This refers to specific measures to address the ecological requirements of annexed habitats and species (and their habitats) present on a site(s). The relationship should be shown to be direct and not a by-product of the plan, even if this might result in positive or beneficial effects for a site(s).

4.1.4 Although peatland projects which come forward for funding could help contribute towards achieving the conservation objectives of European sites (in particular, SACs designated for their bog habitats), the purpose of the EU JTF Programme is not the nature conservation management of European sites; it is not therefore considered to be directly connected with, or necessary to the management of, European sites, so AA Screening is required.

4.1.5 The diagram below - taken from 'OPR Practice Note PN01: Appropriate Assessment Screening for Development Management' (Office of the Planning Regulator, 2021) - sets out the steps and matters to be considered in the AA Screening process to address the second test of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

Steps and matters to be considered:



1. Describe the proposed development and local site characteristics.



2. Identify the relevant European sites and compile information on Qualifying Interests and conservation objectives.

- (a) Identify all European sites that might be affected using the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.
- (b) Identify the Qualifying Interests of the site concerned and the conservation objectives.
- (c) Determine which of those Qualifying Interests/conservation objectives could be affected by the proposed development.



3. Assess the likely significant direct and indirect effects on the conservation objectives of the site(s) in relation to:

- (a) the project alone, *and*
- (b) In-combination with other plans and projects.



4. Screening determination: In the absence of mitigation measures, determine if the project alone or in-combination with other plans and projects could undermine the conservation objectives of the site(s) and give rise to likely significant effects.

4.2 Identification of European sites

4.2.1 As detailed in Section 2.1, European sites comprise SACs and SPAs, which together comprise the pan-European 'Natura 2000' network of protected areas.

Source-Pathway-Receptor

4.2.2 Likely significant effects on a European site will only exist where there is a source-pathway-receptor link. Therefore, identifying potential impact pathways to sensitive habitats and species associated with European sites is a vital component of the screening process. If there is no ecological pathway or functional link between the actions likely to result from the Priorities within the EU JTF Programme and any European sites, there is no potential for impact and the Priorities can be 'screened out'.

4.2.3 Given the high-level and strategic nature of the EU JTF Programme, determining the source-pathway-receptor links, and therefore the potential for likely significant effects, can be difficult. No allocations, nor any other specific spatial elements, have been included in the EU JTF Programme, and therefore the precautionary principle has been applied when identifying potential source-pathway-receptors.

4.2.4 The following potential impact pathways (to qualifying habitats and/or species associated with the European sites) have been identified:

- Habitat degradation.
- Disturbance/ displacement to Qualifying interests (QI) and Special Conservation Interests (SCIs) species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where works take place near a European site(s).

Zone of Influence (Zoi)

4.2.5 The Zoi of a proposed development or programme is the geographical area over which it could affect the receiving environment in a way that could have significant effects on the Qualifying Interests of a European site. Whilst for projects this can more easily be established on a case-by-case basis, for high-level plans, such as the EU JTF Programme, a broader precautionary approach is more appropriate.

4.2.6 Based on the potential impact pathways outlined above, a Zoi of 15km from the boundary of the region has been identified. However, the Zoi for the majority of the projects which come forward as a result of the actions under the Priorities set out in the EU JTF Programme will be more localised.

4.2.7 While there is the potential for peatland restoration/ rehabilitation occurring along the boundary of the EU JTF Territory to extend into adjacent areas; the 15km Zoi is precautionary and would encompass any potential impacts that could arise from the types of projects coming forward for funding through the EU JTF Programme.

4.2.8 In accordance with current guidance, the AA Screening should also take account of transboundary effects. Although sites within Northern Ireland (north of the EU JTF Programme boundary) fall outside of the 15km Zoi, there are designated sites within the Zoi which also span into Northern Ireland, therefore taking a precautionary approach as

there is no spatial element to the EU JTF Programme, potential for transboundary effects have been considered in the assessment.

European sites within the zone of influence

4.2.9 Table 2 shows the number of European sites within or partially within the EU JTF Programme Territory boundary, including the 15km Zol. A list of the sites is presented in Appendix A and are shown on Figure 1.

Table 2 Number of European sites within the Territory boundary of the EU JTF Programme (including 15km Zol)

European site	Number of sites	
SAC	Within the boundary of the EU JTF Programme	93
	Additional sites within the 15km Zol	44
SPA	Within the boundary of the EU JTF Programme	24
	Additional sites within the 15km Zol	8

Conservation Objectives

4.2.10 Site-specific conservation objectives are prepared for all European sites. They aim to define the favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site. The maintenance of habitats and species within European sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

4.2.11 Site-specific conservation objectives specify whether the objective is to maintain or to restore favourable conservation condition of the habitat or species, and they set out attributes and targets that define the objectives. For example, favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- *its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing; and*
- *the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future; and*
- *the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.*

4.2.12 The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- *population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats; and*
- *the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future; and*
- *there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.*

4.2.13 QI and SCIs are annexed habitats and species of community interest for which an SAC or SPA has been designated. The site-specific conservation objectives are set out to ensure

that the QIs/SCIs of that site are maintained or restored to a favourable conservation condition/conservation status.

- 4.2.14 A full listing of the conservation objectives and QIs/SCIs that each European site is designated for, as well as the attributes and targets to maintain or restore the QIs/SCIs to a favourable conservation condition, are available from the NPWS website.

4.3 Assessment of likely significant effects

- 4.3.1 The key test in AA Screening is to establish whether any likelihood of significant effects on European sites can be ruled out.
- 4.3.2 The first sections of the EU JTF Programme include introductory text and provide contextual information regarding the development of the document. These initial parts of the Programme are factual and do not in themselves lead to change or development. These sections cannot conceivably have any effects on European sites and have therefore been scoped out of the AA screening assessment. The remainder of the EU JTF Programme document sets out the Priorities and associated types of actions. These have been assessed (alone) in Table 3 below and in-combination with other plans and projects within Section 4.4.

Table 3 Priorities screening assessment

Priorities	Types of Actions	Screening Assessment
<p>Specific objective: JSO8.1. Enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union’s 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement</p>		
<p>JTF1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy</p>	<p>1.1 Foster the economic diversification of the territory by supporting productive investments in micro-enterprises, SMEs and economic stakeholders in key sectors, such as sustainable tourism and the bioeconomy, and by providing support to businesses to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new/expand existing services and products, such as those which contribute to a transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy. • Develop the digital capabilities of SMEs/businesses to make the most of opportunities offered by digitalisation. • Foster entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, internationalisation, clustering and network development. • Enable SMEs and businesses to set-up, modernise, diversify and expand in the EU JTF Territory. <p>1.2 Support the implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies</p> <p>The EU JTF will support local authorities and local stakeholders in implementing economic and community objectives and actions of economic strategies which are developed through collaboration involving local and regional stakeholders and are adopted through democratic processes. The targeted strategies are Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Enterprise Plans. This action may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on achievements of the National Just Transition Fund and on regional strengths as identified in the Smart Specialisation Strategy for Ireland. • Encourage the development of transformative projects in association with the local authorities and local stakeholders. • Supporting the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by supporting the diversification of the economy of the Territory in line with bottom-up local and regional and economic strategies. <p>In supporting implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies, this action will support:</p>	<p>Projects/ development which could be funded through JTF1 have the potential to lead to development or activities which could impact on designated sites.</p> <p>In particular, in relation to projects near to sensitive peatland habitats and projects which could result in an increase in people to an area (e.g., tourism) have the potential to damage/ degrade/ disturb habitats and species associated with designated site which are sensitive to such impacts.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment and therefore further Appropriate Assessment of JTF1 will be required.</p>

Priorities	Types of Actions	Screening Assessment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities which are aligned with the single specific objective of the EU Just Transition Fund and which contribute to the implementation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ireland; and • activities which are limited to the types of activities listed in Article 8.2 of the EU JTF Regulation, such as but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting new and existing businesses/SMEs to create jobs, improve and diversify employment in the Territory. • Supporting job creation and providing enterprise supports in green and low carbon sectors. • Supporting digitalisation and connectivity to open up new employment options. <p>1.3 Support research, development and innovation activities to contribute to the development of the green and circular economy</p> <p>The EU JTF will support investments in research, development, innovation, cooperation and demonstration activities that contribute to the development through structuring (aligning relevant partners) and mobilisation (development of multi-actor engagement to enable knowledge exchange and innovation) of the circular economy of the Territory, including the bioeconomy. This would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) activities and fostering the transfer of advanced technologies, including through living labs. • Support to multi-actor cooperation for mobilising, supporting and enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling, including RD&I for sustainable higher value products for new circular, resource-efficient biobased industries. • Support the building of multi-sectoral engagement based on the principles of a circular economy and bioeconomy to consider the material flow (the territorial metabolism) as a resource which supports goals for ensuring food and nutrition security, managing natural resources sustainably, reducing dependence on non-renewable, unsustainable resources, limiting, and adapting to climate change and strengthening European competitiveness and creating jobs, welfare, and prosperity. • Support enabling communication, coordination and alignment with education, training, and skills activities to support activities and productive investments in relevant actors in the circular and bioeconomy including cooperative organisations, SMEs and industry for the development of new business models, value chains, technologies, products and services. 	

Priorities	Types of Actions	Screening Assessment
	If relevant, actions in the field of clean energy could also be supported as they could be linked to actions in the field of bioeconomy.	
JTF2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets	<p>2.1 Restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including restoration/rehabilitation plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of measures to enable and monitor restoration and rehabilitation (where required) of degraded peatlands across multiple project sites. Project sites may be located within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and may not include peatlands that are subject to obligated rehabilitation or are currently subject to restoration under any other funded programme. Restoration measures will include blocking of drains (with peat or plastic dams); construction of bunds; imposition (or amendment) of grazing regimes; erection of fencing for stock control; control of scrub/invasive species; management of nutrient loadings from adjacent land, and; tree felling where appropriate. Drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017. • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the restoration measures to the wider public. <p>2.2 Research, knowledge transfer and monitoring activities on rewetting measures and overall land management improvements for farmed peat soils including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments). • Rewetting of drained organic soils under grass. Rewetting is the deliberate action of raising the water table on drained soils to re-establish water saturated conditions (i.e. by blocking drainage ditches, disabling pumping facilities or breaching obstructions). • Research on rewetted soils to identify suitable land management practices to maintain low GHG emissions and support biodiversity while farming under wet conditions. Actions on the rewetted area may include, but are not limited to, 	<p>Projects funded through JTF2 are likely to be environmentally beneficial in the long-term. However, activities related to peatland restoration/rehabilitation and regeneration/repurposing of industrial heritage assets (such as new tourist trails/ attractions) still have the potential to damage/ degrade/ disturb habitats and species associated with designated site which are sensitive to such impacts.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment and therefore further Appropriate Assessment of JTF2 will be required.</p>

Priorities	Types of Actions	Screening Assessment
	<p>reducing the grazing period with existing livestock and use of alternative crops and grazing animals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the rewetting measures to the wider public. <p>2.3 Regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of regeneration and repurposing measures to include investments in the upgrade of existing industrial heritage assets for amenity and investments in new amenity assets such as, but not limited to, walking trails, cycle paths, signage/notice boards, seating, boardwalks and bog bridges. Any necessary 'environmental stabilisation' will, where relevant, have already taken place in accordance with the Polluter Pays Principle and/or requirements for obligated rehabilitation. <p>These actions will complement the activities under Priority 1 by providing employment for impacted workers and communities and by making the Territory a more attractive place to live, work and visit. Attracting visitors to the Territory by providing first-rate amenities and restored landscapes will support new and existing SMEs by creating a market for additional goods and services. The rewetting and restoration works will require and involve the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction. The research, education, community engagement activities and knowledge transfers possible under this priority will also increase the skills base of impacted communities, supporting the potential for further productive activities.</p>	

Priorities	Types of Actions	Screening Assessment
<p>JTF3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition</p>	<p>As part of this priority, the EU JTF Programme will enhance sustainable and clean mobility in the Territory by supporting actions focusing on the decarbonisation of transport to provide clean transport solutions to the people working, studying and visiting the EU JTF Territory. This will include the following type of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation of public local rural bus route(s) including scoping, installation of electric charging points, and purchase of electric buses. • Support to private bus operators in the territory to move to electric vehicles including consultancy support and support for specific aspect of the electrification upgrade • Installation of publicly available fast and high-powered charge point infrastructure at community centre sites, including consultancy support, support to infrastructure work (civil and electrical work) and purchase of necessary equipment and related installation measures <p>This Priority is key to ensuring the success of Priority 1. Sustainable and clean mobility in the region is essential to ensuring the Territory's population are able to access jobs and training in order to participate in the economic and community diversification activities of Priority 1. It is intended that actions supported under this Priority will build more resilient communities by allowing earlier adoption of zero-emissions mobility options, providing workers with better access to local jobs, training and education opportunities. The creation of local sustainable transport solutions will better connect towns, remote working hubs and educational institutions in the Territory, better serving employees. Enhanced local sustainable transport enables communities to embrace clean and sustainable opportunities resulting from the green transition. It is envisaged that local suppliers of works, equipment and services will benefit from the investment of JTF funding of these actions, as well as local businesses which may be considering the use of zero-emissions vehicles for commercial purposes, particularly last-mile freight services and services associated with community programmes, such as meals on wheels or youth clubs.</p>	<p>Projects which could be funded through JTF3 are considered to be largely beneficial to the environment, moving towards more sustainable transport solutions. However, as the exact details of the projects arising from these types of actions are not currently known, there is still the potential for likely significant effects.</p> <p>The potential for likely significant effects (alone) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment and therefore further Appropriate Assessment of JTF3 will be required.</p>

4.4 In-combination effects

- 4.4.1 It is a requirement of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive that the potential for in-combination effects with other plans or projects are considered. Given the high-level nature of the EU JTF Programme, and the lack of allocations or specific spatial elements, only similarly high-level and strategic plans/policies have been included in the in-combination assessment. The polices/ plans/ programmes/ strategies considered to date are listed in Table 4.

Table 4 Polices/ plans/ programmes/ strategies considered in the in-combination assessment

Relevant polices/ plans/ programmes/ strategies	
EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010)
EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020	Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011
EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges	EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) 2021
EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2009)	EU (2019) European Green Deal
EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European Strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern competitive and climate neutral economy	EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020-2030
DECC (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030	DECC (2021) National Climate Action Plan
DECC (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland	DECC (2017) National Mitigation Plan
National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012)	Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030
National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021
DCHG (2015) National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025)	National Smart Specialisation Plan
National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027	The National Recovery and Resilience Plan
Future Jobs Ireland (2019)	Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018–2020
Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020'	National Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025
Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan	Transport for Ireland Local Link Rural Transport Programme (Local Links Strategic Plan

Relevant policies/ plans/ programmes/ strategies	
National Disability Inclusion Strategy	National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020
Get Ireland Active! A National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2022
National Air Pollution Control Programme	Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy
Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland	Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) 2020-2032	EDRF Regional Programmes (2021-2027)
Regional Enterprise Plans	Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)
Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022	Rural Development Policy: Our Rural Future 2021-2025
People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 – Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026	National Countryside Recreation Strategy
Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways	Realising our Rural Potential Action Plan for Rural Development
Peatlands and Climate Change Action Plan 2030	Peatlands Finance Ireland
Connecting Communities with Peatlands	Peatlands and People Project
National Peatlands Strategy 2015	National Peatland Strategy Progress Report 2017
Food Wise 2025	National Broadband Plan 2022
Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector (2014)	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021
Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services)	National Water Resources Plan
EPA National Waste Prevention Programme	Regional Waste Management Plans
National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan	Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy (2020)
National Retrofit Plan	

4.4.2 Taking into consideration the types of actions and the Priorities set out within the EU JTF Programme (as detailed in Table 3), and the potential impact pathways identified in Section 4.2, all of the Priorities have been screened in for further in combination assessment:

- **JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy.**
- **JTF2: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets.**
- **JTF3: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition.**

4.4.3 As detailed in Table 3, JTF1, JTF2 and JTF3 have the potential to lead to redevelopment/development, and, as such, the potential for likely significant effects (in combination) resulting from source-pathway-receptor links (identified in Section 4.2) cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment. Further AA (in relation to in combination effects) of JTF1, JTF2 and JTF3 will therefore be required.

4.5 Screening determination

Screening Summary

4.5.1 This AA Screening has been undertaken to help identify any potential impacts on European sites. Given the strategic nature of the EU JTF Programme, it has not been possible to rule out the potential for likely significant effects. Table 5 summarises the Priorities which have been screened into the assessment.

Table 5 EU JTF Programme Priorities screening summary

Priorities	Screening conclusion
JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy	Screened in (alone and in-combination)
JTF2: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets	Screened in (alone and in-combination)
JTF3: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition	Screened in (alone and in-combination)

Screening Conclusion

4.5.2 On completion of the AA Screening, the following conclusion has been drawn.

4.5.3 The potential for likely significant effects cannot be ruled out at this stage of the assessment (either alone or in combination) in relation to JTF1, JTF2 and JTF3. It is therefore recommended that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is carried, and a Natura Impact Statement Report should be prepared (refer to Section 5 below).

5.0 STAGE 2 – NATURA IMPACT STATEMENT

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This NIS considers whether implementing the EU JTF Programme has the potential to adversely affect the integrity of one or more European site(s), including the consideration of transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland. Current EC guidance (MN2000) states that the integrity of a site is related to its ecological functions, and therefore the decision as to whether it may be adversely affected should focus on, and be limited to, the site's conservation objectives as set out in Section 4.2.
- 5.1.2 For project-level NIS, full details of the proposals are normally available and can be used to make an informed assessment of whether a site's conservation objectives would be affected. However, since the EU JTF Programme is, by its nature, aimed at a strategic level, no specific projects or proposals are included, and the full scope of potential impacts and their pathways cannot be fully identified at this stage. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to identify potential impacts based on our current understanding of the Priorities within the EU JTF Programme, potential impacts outlined in the AA guidance and professional judgement, where appropriate.
- 5.1.3 In addition, the EU JTF Programme will be supported by the robust planning process within Ireland which will ensure further focused assessment will be carried out, where necessary, to inform decision-making as requests for funding come forward (refer to Section 5.3).
- 5.1.4 The development of the EU JTF Programme has been a collaborative process, with the SEA being carried out concurrently with the AA, thereby identifying any potential issues at an early stage. This is in line with the Habitats Directive, which promotes a hierarchy beginning with avoidance before considering mitigation. This NIS is based on the EU JTF Programme dated 26/10/2022.

Assessment Approach

- 5.1.5 As detailed in the AA guidance (refer to Section 2.2), this NIS will comprise the following:
- **Impact Prediction** – Identify the types of impacts, such as construction and operational impacts; transboundary and in-combination impacts. The source-pathway-receptor model (set out in Section 4.2) has been used to identify potential impacts.
 - **Assessment of Effects** – Once the impacts of the EU JTF Programme have been identified and predicted, it will be necessary to assess whether there will be adverse effects on the integrity of the European site(s) as defined by the conservation objectives and status of the site(s). The precautionary principle will be applied when determining the potential for adverse effects.
 - **Mitigation Measures** – These are measures aimed at minimising, cancelling out or avoiding the negative effects of the EU JTF Programme before, during or after its completion or implementation. If required, mitigation measures may be an integral part of the specifications of the EU JTF Programme.

Priorities assessed in the NIS

5.1.6 Table 6 set out the Priorities within the EU JTF Programme screened into the NIS, refer to Section 4.

Table 6 Priorities and actions within the EU JTF Programme

Priorities	Types of Actions
<p>Specific objective: JSO8.1. Enabling regions and people to address the social, employment, economic and environmental impacts of the transition towards the Union's 2030 targets for energy and climate and a climate-neutral economy of the Union by 2050, based on the Paris Agreement</p>	
<p>JTF1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy</p>	<p>1.1 Foster the economic diversification of the territory by supporting productive investments in micro-enterprises, SMEs and economic stakeholders in key sectors, such as sustainable tourism and the bioeconomy, and by providing support to businesses to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new/expand existing services and products, such as those which contribute to a transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy. • Develop the digital capabilities of SMEs/businesses to make the most of opportunities offered by digitalisation. • Foster entrepreneurship, productivity, competitiveness, internationalisation, clustering and network development. • Enable SMEs and businesses to set-up, modernise, diversify and expand in the EU JTF Territory. <p>1.2 Support the implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies</p> <p>The EU JTF will support local authorities and local stakeholders in implementing economic and community objectives and actions of economic strategies which are developed through collaboration involving local and regional stakeholders and are adopted through democratic processes. The targeted strategies are Local Economic and Community Plans and Regional Enterprise Plans. This action may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on achievements of the National Just Transition Fund and on regional strengths as identified in the Smart Specialisation Strategy for Ireland. • Encourage the development of transformative projects in association with the local authorities and local stakeholders. • Supporting the transition towards a climate-neutral economy by supporting the diversification of the economy of the Territory in line with bottom-up local and regional and economic strategies. <p>In supporting implementation of bottom-up local and regional economic strategies, this action will support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities which are aligned with the single specific objective of the EU Just Transition Fund and which contribute to the implementation of the Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ireland; and • activities which are limited to the types of activities listed in Article 8.2 of the EU JTF Regulation, such as but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting new and existing businesses/SMEs to create jobs, improve and diversify employment in the Territory. • Supporting job creation and providing enterprise supports in green and low carbon sectors. • Supporting digitalisation and connectivity to open-up new employment options.

Priorities	Types of Actions
	<p>1.3 Support research, development and innovation activities to contribute to the development of the green and circular economy</p> <p>The EU JTF will support investments in research, development, innovation, cooperation and demonstration activities that contribute to the development through structuring (aligning relevant partners) and mobilisation (development of multi-actor engagement to enable knowledge exchange and innovation) of the circular economy of the Territory, including the bioeconomy. This would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) activities and fostering the transfer of advanced technologies, including through living labs. • Support to multi-actor cooperation for mobilising, supporting and enhancing the circular economy, including through waste prevention, reduction, resource efficiency, reuse, repair and recycling, including RD&I for sustainable higher value products for new circular, resource-efficient biobased industries. • Support the building of multi-sectoral engagement based on the principles of a circular economy and bioeconomy to consider the material flow (the territorial metabolism) as a resource which supports goals for ensuring food and nutrition security, managing natural resources sustainably, reducing dependence on non-renewable, unsustainable resources, limiting, and adapting to climate change and strengthening European competitiveness and creating jobs, welfare, and prosperity. • Support enabling communication, coordination and alignment with education, training, and skills activities to support activities and productive investments in relevant actors in the circular and bioeconomy including cooperative organisations, SMEs and industry for the development of new business models, value chains, technologies, products and services. <p>If relevant, actions in the field of clean energy could also be supported as they could be linked to actions in the field of bioeconomy.</p>
<p>JTF2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets</p>	<p>2.1 Restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including restoration/rehabilitation plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of measures to enable and monitor restoration and rehabilitation (where required) of degraded peatlands across multiple project sites. Project sites may be located within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and may not include peatlands that are subject to obligated rehabilitation or are currently subject to restoration under any other funded programme. Restoration measures will include blocking of drains (with peat or plastic dams); construction of bunds; imposition (or amendment) of grazing regimes; erection of fencing for stock control; control of scrub/invasive species; management of nutrient loadings from adjacent land, and; tree felling where appropriate. Drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017. • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the restoration measures to the wider public. <p>2.2 Research, knowledge transfer and monitoring activities on rewetting measures and overall land management improvements for farmed peat soils including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans.

Priorities	Types of Actions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments). • Rewetting of drained organic soils under grass. Rewetting is the deliberate action of raising the water table on drained soils to re-establish water saturated conditions (i.e. by blocking drainage ditches, disabling pumping facilities or breaching obstructions). • Research on rewetted soils to identify suitable land management practices to maintain low GHG emissions and support biodiversity while farming under wet conditions. Actions on the rewetted area may include, but are not limited to, reducing the grazing period with existing livestock and use of alternative crops and grazing animals. • Education, awareness-raising and community engagement activities presenting the benefits of the rewetting measures to the wider public. <p>2.3 Regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation measures such as feasibility and design studies including action plans. • Stakeholder engagement activities which could include landowner negotiations (including compensation payments or land purchase). • Implementation of regeneration and repurposing measures to include investments in the upgrade of existing industrial heritage assets for amenity and investments in new amenity assets such as, but not limited to, walking trails, cycle paths, signage/notice boards, seating, boardwalks and bog bridges. Any necessary 'environmental stabilisation' will, where relevant, have already taken place in accordance with the Polluter Pays Principle and/or requirements for obligated rehabilitation. <p>These actions will complement the activities under Priority 1 by providing employment for impacted workers and communities and by making the Territory a more attractive place to live, work and visit. Attracting visitors to the Territory by providing first-rate amenities and restored landscapes will support new and existing SMEs by creating a market for additional goods and services. The rewetting and restoration works will require and involve the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction. The research, education, community engagement activities and knowledge transfers possible under this priority will also increase the skills base of impacted communities, supporting the potential for further productive activities.</p>
<p>JTF3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition</p>	<p>As part of this priority, the EU JTF Programme will enhance sustainable and clean mobility in the Territory by supporting actions focusing on the decarbonisation of transport to provide clean transport solutions to the people working in, studying in and visiting the EU JTF Territory. Factors such as range anxiety, stretched resources and uncertain travel patterns following the pandemic, and rapidly changing technology, mean that the barriers to transport operators in the Territory taking advantage of zero carbon fleets are very high. By introducing relatively simple measures, the move to cleaner public transport for all can be accelerated in the EU JTF Territory. This will include the following type of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation of public local rural bus route(s) including scoping, installation of electric charging points, and purchase of electric buses. • Support to private bus operators in the territory to move to electric vehicles including consultancy support and support for specific aspect of the electrification upgrade • Installation of publicly available fast and high-powered charge point infrastructure at community centre sites, including consultancy support, support to infrastructure work (civil and electrical work) and purchase of necessary equipment and related installation measures <p>This Priority is key to ensuring the success of Priority 1. Sustainable and clean mobility in the region is essential to ensuring the Territory's population are able to access jobs and training in order to participate in the economic and community</p>

Priorities	Types of Actions
	diversification activities of Priority 1. It is intended that actions supported under this Priority will build more resilient communities by allowing earlier adoption of zero-emissions mobility options, providing workers with better access to local jobs, training and education opportunities. The creation of local sustainable transport solutions will better connect towns, remote working hubs and educational institutions in the Territory, better serving employees. Enhanced local sustainable transport enables communities to embrace clean and sustainable opportunities resulting from the green transition. It is envisaged that local suppliers of works, equipment and services will benefit from the investment of JTF funding of these actions, as well as local businesses which may be considering the use of zero-emissions vehicles for commercial purposes, particularly last-mile freight services and services associated with community programmes, such as meals on wheels or youth clubs.

5.2 Prediction of effects

5.2.1 In line with relevant guidance (refer to Section 2.2), the first stage of the assessment is to identify the types of impacts which could lead to potential effects on one or more European site(s). The source-pathway-receptor model has been used to identify potential impacts. In this instance:

- The **source** is the Priorities set out within the EU JTF Programme.
- The **pathway** relates to how implementation of the EU JTF Programme could potentially lead to adverse effects on a European site(s).
- The **receptor** is any European site(s), including those outside of Ireland, where a potential pathway has been identified.

Impact identification

5.2.2 A summary of the main potential impacts that could arise from the implementation of the EU JTF Programme and the types of actions arising from it are set out in Table 7 below. When referring to the development phase within Table 7, construction phase includes built development/ redevelopment as well as the activities associated with habitat restoration/ rehabilitation, for example works required to enable re-wetting of peatland areas.

5.2.3 Given the inland location of the EU JTF Territory and the size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding through the EU JTF Programme, impacts on coastal processes and the wider marine environment have not been considered in the assessment.

Table 7 Impact identification

Impact/ development phase	Description
Habitat degradation Operational phase	Habitat degradation is the diminishment of habitat quality leading to a loss of habitat functions over time. It could arise during the operational phase from a number of sources e.g., trampling as a result of recreational pressure, increases in nutrients as a result of dog faeces/ urine and the introduction of invasive species.
Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species	There is the potential to disturb/ displace QI/SCI within European site(s) and/ or QI/ SCI species using land linked to such sites.

Impact/ development phase	Description
Construction/ operational phases	<p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/SCI species could occur where there is an increase in the sources of disturbance/ displacement, such as noise and visual effects from construction (e.g., construction machinery) or operational activities (such as recreational pressure from new visitors to an area).</p> <p>Disturbance/ displacement could lead to effects on QI/ SCI species sensitive to such impacts (including migratory and resident waterfowl/ waders, otters, and bats), resulting in potential changes to species distribution and/or changes that affect productivity or breeding success.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p>
<p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	<p>There is the potential to change water quality/ hydrology where construction works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).</p> <p>The source of alterations of water quality may be in-situ or ex-situ (i.e., downstream and outside of the immediate area of the works) and could include the release of suspended solids, increased nutrient run-off and spillages. These could all lead to effects on QI/ SCI habitats (such as SACs designated for their bog or riverine habitats) and species sensitive to such impacts, for example, contamination of watercourses used by fish species such as migratory salmon, could result in mortality and a reduction in the species ability to survive and reproduce.</p> <p>Alterations to surface or subsurface flows could also result in impacts to surface and groundwater dependent habitats. In particular, restoration/ rehabilitation of drained peatland habitats could result in changes to adjacent sensitive habitats.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p>
<p>Changes in air quality where works take place near a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction/ operational phases</p>	<p>There is the potential for changes in air quality as a result of increases in nitrogen deposition from construction/ operational activities.</p> <p>The sources of air pollution could include increased traffic (from vehicles during construction activities) and increased visitors to new recreational facilities during the operational phase.</p> <p>This could lead to effects on QI/ SCI habitats sensitive to such impacts (including raised bog and blanket bog), resulting in potential changes to species distribution and/or changes that could affect productivity.</p> <p>There is the potential for transboundary effects with NI.</p>

Impact prediction

- 5.2.4 As detailed previously, it is acknowledged that the EU JTF Programme is a high-level strategic document, and as such predicting the effects of the EU JTF Programme at individual European site level is not practical or possible due to the lack of project/ spatial detail to give context to the extent or significance of any potential effects identified.
- 5.2.5 Therefore, the potential for adverse effects will be based on our current understanding of the Priorities set out within the EU JTF Programme which can subsequently be used to

support the lower tier planning process and help to inform future decision-making as requests for funding come forward.

5.3 Assessment of effects and mitigation

Existing policy framework within the EU JTF Programme

5.3.1 The development of the EU JTF Programme has been undertaken alongside the SEA. This promotes a hierarchy beginning with avoidance before considering mitigation measures. Through discussion during the preparation of the EU JTF Programme, potential impacts have been identified and addressed at an early stage; this includes the addition of an Environmental and Do No significant Harm Statement (included within the text of the EU JTF Programme):

'The Programme includes environmental assessment documents on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA), Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal Screening (SFRA) and DNSH under Regulation (EU) 2021/241 requiring that no measure should lead to significant harm to any of the environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation (EU) 2020/852.

The Programme will contribute to mainstreaming climate actions and supporting activities that would respect the climate and environmental standards and priorities of the EU. To ensure compliance with the requirements for DNSH, the Programme will support activities that: protect biodiversity, water, air & land quality, and marine resources; encourage circular economy initiatives; reduce waste and increases recycling, and; reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

At the project level, all applications for development consents for activities that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment must be accompanied by the following, as relevant:

- *SEA Environmental Report*
- *Flood Risk Assessments*
- *Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report*
- *Appropriate Assessment*

Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.

The Programme seeks to protect, manage, and through enhanced ecological connectivity, improve the coherence of the Natura 2000 Network in the Territory.

Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA

and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.

The Programme supports relevant development proposals compliant with the Water Framework Directive, that aim to protect inland surface waters, transitional waters, coastal waters and groundwater, preventing pollution, further deterioration of water quality, promotes sustainable water use and enhance improvement of the aquatic environment.

Any planning consent process emanating from support through the Programme will ensure compliance with the EU Waste Framework Directive and Action Plan for the Circular Economy. As such projects will:

- be subject to the objectives of County Development Plans and Local Area Plans supporting the circular economy and prioritising waste prevention followed by re-use, recycling and recovery before landfill*
- adhere to Best Practice Guidelines on the Preparation of Waste Management Plans for Construction and Demolition Projects (DHLGH) and any updated guidelines*
- adhere to the National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy*

Thereby, minimising the use of natural resource inputs, reducing waste, pollution and carbon emissions and improving the productivity of resources used in development through extending the life span of materials and facilitating the repurposing, recycling and re-use of resources at end of life.'

5.3.2 It is important that this NIS and the wording outlined above provides the high-level reassurance that future projects/ initiatives which come forward for funding will follow the necessary process to identify and assess potential implications for European site(s). If there is the potential for projects funded through implementing the EU JTF Programme to adversely impact European site(s), these should be withdrawn, or amended and re-assessed, or pass the derogations set out under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, namely no alternative solutions, IROPI and compensatory measures secured.

5.3.3 In addition, in line with the 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) EU Regulation (under the 'protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems' environmental objective), the EMRA would not support any projects arising from the EU JTF Programme where adverse effects on European site(s) cannot be readily avoided/ mitigated. This will ensure compliance with National and European legislation and policy (including Northern Ireland legislation and policy where transboundary effects have been identified¹). A separate 'Do No Significant Harm' Report has been produced for the EU JTF Programme.

Assessment of Priorities

5.3.4 The following section provides the assessment of Priorities within the EU JTF Programme based on current knowledge available at the time of writing. The impacts detailed below are not considered to be a conclusive list of all possible impacts; however, every effort has

¹ Projects funded under the EU JTF Programme will need to comply with cross jurisdiction environmental legislation which extends into the marine environment. Projects flowing from the EU JTF Programme must act in accordance with EU and national environmental assessment requirements and legislation, specifically AA and EIA, within the jurisdiction of which they fall.

been made to identify those which are most likely to occur and to potentially generate effects.

JTF1: Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy

- 5.3.5 As noted in successive Country reports, the transition to a climate-neutral economy is having a significant impact upon the economy and employment. According to the SRSP funded analysis, such challenges can be addressed by supporting the local business environment and diversifying the economic fabric by developing sectors with growth potential. For example, one of the main strengths of the Territory (as identified in the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan) include significant tourism assets, the emerging low carbon/ Green Economy and quality of life. Furthermore, the Climate Action Plan 2021 identifies the green economy - including the circular economy, clean mobility, green and blue infrastructure (GBI) and the bioeconomy - as sectors which can create high-quality employment opportunities that will be a source of significant employment growth over the coming decades.
- 5.3.6 Actions funded by the JTF can, in line with the Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, unlock the commercial potential of the Territory while protecting the environment and enhancing the well-being of impacted communities. By supporting modernisation and diversification in key economic sectors in the Territory, JTF1 will complement EU programmes and National/ Regional policies to assist the Territory in addressing the negative economic impacts of the transition by capitalising on and creating new opportunities in key sectors to develop a thriving economy built on regional attractiveness for living, working, visiting and doing business.
- 5.3.7 The types of businesses which could receive funding through JTF1 include Use Class A1, A2, B1, C1, C2, C3, D1 and D2 use classes are defined as follows:
- A1 – Shops.
 - A2 – Financial, professional and other services.
 - B1 - Business (comprising offices, call centres, or premises for research and development which can be carried out without detriment to amenity by reason of noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, soot, ash, dust or grit).
 - C1 – Dwelling houses.
 - C2 – Guest houses.
 - C3 – Residential institutions (residential accommodation and care to people in need).
 - D1 – Community and cultural uses (comprising medical/ health services, day centre/ nursery, community centre, provision for education, display of artwork, museum, library, public hall or law court).
 - D2 – Assembly and leisure (comprising bingo hall, cinema, concert hall, dance hall or theatre).
- 5.3.8 Table 8 provides an assessment of potential impacts associated with the implementation of JTF1.

Table 8 Assessment of potential impacts associated with JTF1

Potential impact	Assessment
<p>Habitat degradation</p> <p>Operational phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The types of actions associated with JTF1 relate to addressing the negative economic impacts of the transition to net zero by creating new opportunities in key sectors to develop a thriving economy built on regional attractiveness for living, working, visiting and doing business. This will include encouraging investment within communities previously reliant on the peat cutting industry. The EMRA have confirmed that whilst a proportion of the development/ redevelopment funded through JTF1 will be within existing built-up areas (thereby avoiding more sensitive habitats); the majority of projects are likely to be located in more rural locations.</p> <p>Although the EU JTF Programme does not include reference to specific geographical locations, projects or proposals, projects funded through JTF1 could include: developing new and expanding existing businesses and services, town centre regeneration as well as activities to bolster the sustainable tourist industry in-line with <i>People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 – Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026</i> (such as walking/ cycling trails, visitor/ education centres, holiday accommodation and car parks).</p> <p>Whilst the focus of JTF1 is to encourage the circular economy and sustainable tourism/ recreation, attracting new visitors to the Territory still has the potential to increase recreational pressure on designated sites which could result in habitat degradation (from sources such as trampling sensitive habitats, increases in nutrients from dog faeces/ urine and introduction of invasive species)..</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to habitat loss/ degradation) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes/ feasibility studies have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme ‘<i>Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.</i>’ • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to habitat degradation which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood (for example, carrying out visitor surveys to

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p>determine potential increases in people coming to an area) and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (see below), as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme '<i>Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.</i>'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where potential for habitat degradation has been identified, the following measures to avoid/ reduce impacts on sensitive habitats could be considered; for example, use of fencing, signage, measures to prevent spread of invasive species, educational information boards, community engagement schemes/ training and employment of rangers/ wardens. Monitoring of mitigation measures should be carried out to determine the need for any remedial actions, if necessary. <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF1.</p>
<p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> <p>Construction and operational phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>As detailed above, although a proportion of the development/ redevelopment funded through JTF1 will be within existing built-up areas (which would avoid more sensitive habitats), the majority of projects are likely to be in more rural areas, and therefore there is potential for impacts associated with disturbance/ displacement.</p> <p>New buildings/ SMEs and business start-ups/ business expansion/ infrastructure funded through JTF1 could include visitor/ education centres, holiday accommodation and car parks. Although the EMRA has confirmed that development is likely to be concentrated within the footprint of existing sites, there is still the potential for disturbance/ displacement to European site(s) with QIs/SCIs sensitive to these effects or where such species (for example migratory and resident birds) are using land linked to a European site. For example, within County Roscommon there are 9 SPAs, and 29 SACs, several of which are close to former peat communities and therefore could be subject to disturbance/ displacement.</p> <p>During the construction phase, activities such as building works, increases in vehicle movements and human presence could lead to increases in noise, vibration, visual and lighting disturbance/ displacement effects. During the operational phase disturbance/ displacement could result from an increase in visitors (in particular, dog walkers).</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known, this could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p data-bbox="685 268 920 296"><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p data-bbox="685 316 2085 453">Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to disturbance/ displacement) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of this Priority:</p> <ul data-bbox="734 472 2085 1273" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="734 472 2085 724">• Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>‘Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.’</i> <li data-bbox="734 743 2085 960">• Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to disturbance/ displacement which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (see below), as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>‘Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.’</i> <li data-bbox="734 979 2085 1117">• Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects during construction works have been identified, measures such as buffer zones/ fencing, timing works to avoid sensitive times (such as bird breeding season, or fish migration periods), noise mitigation and visual screening (natural and artificial). An on-site monitoring plan in terms of noise, lighting etc. combined with behavioural monitoring of the sensitive QI/SCI could also be carried out. <li data-bbox="734 1136 2085 1273">• Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects during the operational phase have been identified, the following measures to avoid/ reduce impacts on sensitive habitats could be considered; for example, use of fencing, signage, educational information boards, community engagement schemes/ training and employment of rangers/ wardens. Monitoring of mitigation measures should be carried out to determine the need for any remedial actions, if necessary.

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF1.</p>
<p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology) on European sites, in those instances where development is required, the potential for adverse effects from changes in water quality/ hydrology cannot be ruled out as the details of such proposals are not currently known. For example, the main impacts associated with changes in water quality/ hydrology would occur during the construction phase, where construction site activities could lead to the increased risk of pollution incidents and release of suspended sediments.</p> <p>Consideration would also need to be given to the potential for changes in water quality/hydrology associated with European sites (and could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland), should new development come forward in locations which are hydrologically linked (located upstream) to European sites with QIs/SCIs sensitive to such effects. For example, this would be important in towns such as Athlone in County Westmeath, where the River Shannon flows through the town, downstream of which it is designated as the River Shannon Callows SAC.</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known, this could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme ‘Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to ‘environmentally sustainable development’ with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.’

Potential impact	Assessment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To protect water quality, all new developments would be required to ensure hydrological assessments are carried out to determine the potential for hydrological links between development sites and European sites, and to produce a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. Drainage strategies may also be required, which could include incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) features into scheme designs, to ensure the continued protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase. This would be in addition to according with relevant legislation and policy (such as National Policy Objective 57, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in water quality/ hydrology which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme '<i>Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.</i>' <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF1.</p>
<p>Changes in air quality where works takes place near a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction and operational phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, in those instances where new development is required, the potential for adverse effects from changes in air quality cannot be ruled out as the details of such proposals are not currently known. For example, many of the SACs within the Territory are designated for their bog habitats, which are highly sensitive to nitrogen deposition as they derive all their nutrients from the atmosphere.</p> <p>Where funding would lead to some element of development, the types of businesses which would be established do not include those which would lead to increases in air pollution. However, there is potential for impacts associated with changes in air quality during the construction phase (e.g. construction vehicles). Air quality guidance (NRA, 2011) suggests that any construction sites or routes used by construction vehicles within 50 m of a designated site; and the presence of any European site within 200 m of the main access roads used by HGVs accessing a construction site could lead to adverse effects on the European site (through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats).</p>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p>While projects associated with JTF1 will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, these could potentially result in adverse impacts associated with changes in air quality, for example, through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats. This could occur as a result of increases in visitor traffic and/ or the use of new parking facilities in the vicinity of designated sites.</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known, this could also include trans-boundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF1 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes/ feasibility studies (for example, traffic modelling) have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.'</i> • To protect air quality, all new developments would be required to ensure air quality assessments are carried out, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. This would be in addition to ensuring any emissions meet appropriate guidelines and complying with relevant policy (such as the emerging Clean Air Strategy for Ireland) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in air quality which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.'</i>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p data-bbox="689 268 808 293"><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p data-bbox="689 316 2085 378">Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF1.</p>

JTF2: Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets

- 5.3.9 From the 1940s, the Territory's peat resource was harnessed to provide an indigenous fuel source for electricity generation and home heating, peat moss for the horticultural industry, and reclaimed land for agriculture. This generated significant socio-economic benefits for rural communities across the Territory. However, it led to the rapid and unsustainable exploitation of peat, transforming peatlands from carbon sinks into carbon emitters. Damage to the peatland environment caused by extensive harvesting has been considerable.
- 5.3.10 The EU JTF Programme will contribute to JTF2 by supporting actions aimed at the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and the regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets such as access roads, tracks, trails, canals and peatland railways that will no longer be used for the extraction, transport and processing of peat.
- 5.3.11 Actions supported under this priority will complement peatland restoration and rehabilitation works already supported by funding additional restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands, research and knowledge transfer for sustainable land management of farmed grassland on drained organic soils and by providing opportunities for regenerating industrial heritage assets by linking them with new economic opportunities and drivers of socio-economic change.
- 5.3.12 Outcomes of actions supported under this scheme may include:
- Restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatland sites across and adjacent to the EU JTF Territory including fens, raised and blanket bogs and other wetlands types.
 - Research, skills development and knowledge transfer for improved environmental management of farmed grassland on drained organic soils.
 - Repurposing and redevelopment of existing routeways, waterways and existing infrastructures to create ecological corridors, trails and green & blue infrastructure networks (GBI) for walking, cycling, water and/or other recreational activities.
- 5.3.13 The EMRA has confirmed that peatland restoration/ rehabilitation/ regeneration projects funded through JTF2 could be located where peat has been removed (i.e. fens and degraded but active raised bogs) and/ or within European sites (although exact locations have not been identified within the EU JTF Programme).
- 5.3.14 Where projects come forward for funding associated with restoration/ rehabilitation of bog habitats (e.g. restoration of peatlands through rewetting) which are also designated sites, for example a bog designated as a SAC, the EU JTF Programme states that all actions and associated works would be in accordance with the conservation objectives for the site (further defined by site-specific attributes and targets):

'In those project areas which are designated by the national competent authority for conservation or in habitats that are protected, all activities will be carried out in accordance with the conservation objectives that are set or exist for those areas and the EU Taxonomy Regulation regarding new construction on adjoining land. There will not be any conversion of habitats specifically sensitive to biodiversity loss or with high conservation value, or of

areas set aside for the restoration of such habitats in accordance with national conservation objectives. Provisions will be made for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in accordance with national and local provisions.'

- 5.3.15 Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation/ regeneration projects outside of European sites come forward for funding, there is greater scope for wider environmental enhancement (in accordance with best practice guidance and EU/ National Legislation). The EU JTF Programme states that:

'Where relevant, the standard of rehabilitation shall be agreed with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the designated State body for the implementation of National and EU legislation and policies for nature conservation and biodiversity.'

Restoration measures will include blocking of drains (with peat or plastic dams); construction of bunds; imposition (or amendment) of grazing regimes; erection of fencing for stock control; control of scrub/invasive species; management of nutrient loadings from adjacent land, and; tree felling where appropriate. Drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017.'

- 5.3.16 In recent years, many peatlands in the Territory have been designated as SACs and as recreational spaces. As detailed in the TJTP, several initiatives have been established for accelerated restoration, rehabilitation and management of peatlands. The NPWS has also provided support to the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme to encourage communities to engage in peatland conservation. to promote public engagement and raise awareness of our natural heritage and environment. The EU JTF Programme will complement these initiatives in a manner that aligns with its single objective by supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatland habitats and the regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets in the Territory that are not already supported by existing funding programmes, adding value by linking with economic and social activities.

Table 9 Assessment of potential impacts associated with JTF2

Potential impact	Assessment
<p>Habitat degradation</p> <p>Operational phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The main focus of JTF2 is supporting actions for the enhanced restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets (such as access roads, tracks, trails, canals and peatland railways) that will no longer be used for the extraction, transport and processing of peat. These actions will complement the activities under JTF1 by providing employment for impacted workers and communities and by making the Territory a more attractive place to live, work and visit.</p> <p>Work funded through JTF2 could include peatland restoration/ rehabilitation, new and expanding existing businesses and services, as well as activities to bolster the sustainable tourist industry such as the upgrade of existing industrial heritage assets, new walking/ cycling trails, visitor/ education centres, holiday accommodation and car parks (as part of the strategy: <i>People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 – Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026</i>). These activities could occur within or outside of designated sites; however, the EMRA has confirmed that development within the boundaries of European sites would be limited to upgrading and installing new amenity assets, such as trails, broadwalks and bog bridges.</p> <p>The focus of the EU JTF Programme is to support sustainable development by protecting/ restoring/ enhancing the natural environment. In the long-term, the development and implementation of the EU JTF Programme is considered to be largely environmentally beneficial. Projects funded through the EUJTF Programme could include those similar to the existing Lough Boora Discovery Park, a former peat cutting area, which is now a nature reserve and an outdoor recreation attraction with a visitor centre, walkways and cycle paths, and sculpture trail.</p> <p>While restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, attracting new visitors to the Territory has the potential to increase recreational pressure on designated sites. In turn, this could lead to habitat degradation from a number of sources, such as trampling sensitive habitats, increasing nutrients as a result of dog faeces/ urine and introduction of invasive species.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to habitat loss/ degradation) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes/ feasibility studies (for example, visitor surveys to determine potential increases in people coming to an area) have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme ‘Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p><i>‘environmentally sustainable development’ with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.’</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where regeneration and repurposing projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to habitat degradation which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood (for example, where regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets could be funded through JTF2, feasibility and design studies (including action plans) should be carried out) and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (see below), as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>‘Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.’</i> • Where upgrading and installing new amenity assets, such as trails, boardwalks and bog bridges are within European sites, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>‘Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.’</i> Where potential for habitat degradation has been identified, the following measures to avoid/ reduce impacts on sensitive habitats could be considered: sensitive trail route selection, use of boardwalks and fencing, signage, measures to prevent spread of invasive species, educational information boards, community engagement schemes/ training and employment of rangers/ wardens. Monitoring of mitigation measures should be carried out to determine the need for any remedial actions, if necessary. • Where peatland restoration and rehabilitation could be funded through JTF2, the designs should include a Rehabilitation or Restoration Plan and be in accordance with best practice guidance and EU/ National Legislation. The standard of the enhanced rehabilitation should be agreed in consultation with the NPWS. All rehabilitation, regeneration and repurposing should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out the works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required).

Potential impact	Assessment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation could take place within a European site, all actions and associated works would be required to be in accordance with the conservation objectives for the site (further defined by site-specific attributes and targets) as well as best practice guidance (such as the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan, Peatlands Strategy, and the Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99: Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland) and EU/ National Legislation. All restoration/ rehabilitation should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out such works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required). <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF2.</p>
<p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> <p>Construction/ operational phases</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>While actions supported by JTF2 relating to the restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, actions which support new/existing businesses and services, and aim to bolster tourism (the upgrade of existing industrial heritage assets, new walking/ cycling trails, visitor/ education centres, holiday accommodation and car parks) and attract new visitors to the Territory, have the potential to result in impacts associated with disturbance/ displacement. These activities could occur within or outside of designated sites however, the EMRA has confirmed that development within the boundaries of European sites would be limited to upgrading and installing new amenity assets, such as trails, broadwalks and bog bridges.</p> <p>While restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, the activities above could result in disturbance/ displacement of QI/SCIs sensitive to such impacts. During the construction phase activities such as works associated with habitat restoration/ rehabilitation, building works, increases in vehicle movements and human presence could lead to increases in noise, vibration, visual and lighting disturbance/ displacement effects. Once the construction phase has been completed, attracting new visitors to the Territory has the potential to increase recreational pressure on designated sites (leading to disturbance/ displacement from sources such as walkers (in particular those with dogs), cyclists and increases in traffic).</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known at this stage, this could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p data-bbox="685 268 920 296"><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p data-bbox="685 316 2085 453">Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to disturbance/ displacement) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF2:</p> <ul data-bbox="734 475 2092 1386" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="734 475 2092 762">• Ensure rigorous site selection processes/ feasibility studies (for example, visitor surveys to determine potential increases in people coming to an area) have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.'</i> <li data-bbox="734 785 2092 1072">• Where regeneration and repurposing development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to disturbance/ displacement which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood (for example, where regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets could be funded through JTF2, feasibility and design studies (including action plans) should be carried out) and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified (see below), as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.'</i> <li data-bbox="734 1094 2092 1302">• Where upgrading and installing new amenity assets, such as trails, broadwalks and bog bridges are within European sites, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.'</i> <li data-bbox="734 1324 2092 1386">• Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects during construction works have been identified, measures such as buffer zones/ fencing, timing works to avoid sensitive times (such as bird breeding season, or fish migration periods), noise

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p>mitigation and visual screening (natural and artificial) should be deployed. An on-site monitoring plan in terms of noise, lighting etc. combined with behavioural monitoring of the sensitive QI/SCI could also be carried out.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where potential for disturbance/ displacement effects during the operational phase have been identified, the following measures to avoid/ reduce impacts on sensitive habitats could be considered: sensitive trail route selection, use of boardwalks and fencing, signage, measures to prevent spread of invasive species, educational information boards, community engagement schemes/ training and employment of rangers/ wardens. Monitoring of mitigation measures should be carried out to determine the need for any remedial actions, if necessary. • Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation could be funded through JTF2, the designs should include a Restoration or Rehabilitation Plan and be in accordance with best practice guidance and EU/ National Legislation. The standard of the enhanced rehabilitation should be agreed in consultation with the NPWS. All rehabilitation, regeneration and repurposing should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out such works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required). • Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation could take place within a European site, all actions and associated works would be required to be in accordance with the conservation objectives for the site (further defined by site-specific attributes and targets) as well as best practice guidance (such as the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan, Peatlands Strategy, and the Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99: Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland) and EU/ National Legislation. All restoration/ rehabilitation should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out the works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required). <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF2.</p>
<p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The majority of projects funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology on European sites. However, where projects (such as regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets, new walking/ cycling trails and visitor/ education centres) are funded through JTF2 for example as part of regeneration initiatives, the potential for adverse effects from changes in water quality/ hydrology cannot be ruled out as the details of such proposals are not currently known. For example, adverse effects on water quality/ hydrology could occur during the construction phase as a result of pollution incidents and/or release of suspended sediments.</p>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p>While works associated with the restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, these projects could potentially result in adverse hydrological changes to nearby designated sites. For example, re-wetting of previously drained agricultural land or bogs has the potential to cause hydrological changes in nearby designated sites (if hydrologically linked).</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known at this stage, this could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in water quality/ hydrology) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes / feasibility studies have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.'</i> • To protect water quality, all new developments would be required to ensure hydrological assessments are carried out to determine the potential for hydrological links between development sites and European sites, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. Drainage strategies may also be required, which could include incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) features into scheme designs, to ensure the continued protection of water quality/ hydrology during the operational phase. This would be in addition to according with relevant legislation and policy (such as National Policy Objective 57, Marine Strategy Framework Directive, Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in water quality/ hydrology which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Support</i>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p><i>for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.'</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation could be funded through JTF2, the designs should include a Restoration or Rehabilitation Plan and be in accordance with best practice guidance and EU/ National Legislation. The Plan should contain careful consideration of local hydrological and pedological conditions, including the dynamics of soil saturation and the change of aerobic and anaerobic conditions. The standard of the enhanced rehabilitation should be agreed in consultation with the NPWS. All rehabilitation, regeneration and repurposing should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out such works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required). • Where peatland restoration/ rehabilitation could take place within a European site, all actions and associated works would be required to be in accordance with the conservation objectives for the site (further defined by site-specific attributes and targets) as well as best practice guidance (such as the National Raised Bog SAC Management Plan, Peatlands Strategy, and the Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99: Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland) and EU/ National Legislation. All restoration/ rehabilitation should be carried out by those suitably qualified and experienced to carry out the works (including the expertise of workers and contractors formerly involved in peat extraction, as required). <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF2.</p>
<p>Changes in air quality where works takes place near a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction/ operational phases</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>Whilst the majority of projects funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, in those instances where new development is required, the potential for adverse effects from changes in air quality cannot be ruled out as the details of such proposals are not currently known. For example, many of the SACs within the Territory are designated for their bog habitats, which are highly sensitive to nitrogen deposition as they derive all their nutrients from the atmosphere.</p> <p>Where funding would lead to some element of development, the types of businesses likely to be established do not include those which would lead to increases in air pollution. However, there is potential for impacts associated with changes in air quality during the construction phase (e.g., construction vehicles). Air quality guidance (NRA, 2011) suggests that any construction sites or routes used by construction vehicles within 50 m of a designated site; and the presence of any European site within 200 m of the main access</p>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p>roads used by HGVs accessing a construction site could lead to adverse effects on the European site (through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats).</p> <p>While works associated with the restoration and rehabilitation of peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial assets will generally have a positive effect on the environment and local biodiversity, these projects could potentially result in adverse impacts associated with changes in air quality, for example, through deposition of pollutants onto adjacent sensitive habitats. This could occur as a result of increases in visitor traffic and/ or the use of new parking facilities in the vicinity of designated sites.</p> <p>As the locations of potential projects which could come forward for funding are not currently known at this stage, this could also include transboundary effects with sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>Whilst it is likely that the majority of projects/ development funded through JTF2 will not lead to adverse impacts (relating to changes in air quality) on European sites, as the details of such projects are not known at this stage, planners and developers must adhere to the following measures to ensure no adverse impacts on integrity of European sites as a result of implementation of JTF2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure rigorous site selection processes/ feasibility studies (for example, traffic modelling) have been carried out to avoid adverse impacts wherever possible (as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Any reference to support for all activities in the Programme should be considered to refer to 'environmentally sustainable development' with no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites and no net loss of biodiversity, that shall be subject to appropriate feasibility studies, best practice site/route selection (to consider environmental constraints such as landscape, cultural heritage, protection of water quality, flood risks and biodiversity), environmental assessment including Ecological Impact Assessment Report to support development management and the completion of statutory SEA, EIA and AA processes as required.'</i> • To protect air quality, all new developments would be required to ensure air quality assessments are carried out, and to produce a CEMP which ensures any environmental impacts are avoided or minimised during construction. This would be in addition to ensuring any emissions meet appropriate guidelines and complying with relevant policy (such as the emerging Clean Air Strategy for Ireland) and relevant UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects could occur. • Where built development projects come forward for funding in areas with QI/SCIs sensitive to changes in air quality which cannot reasonably be avoided, ensure impact pathways are fully understood and that mitigation can be delivered where potential for adverse effects are identified, as per the following wording in the EU JTF Programme <i>'Support for other plans/programmes (and initiatives arising) is based on compliance with EU and national policy, directives and legislation ensuring appropriate SEA, SFRA, EIA and AA processes are undertaken. The Programme will not support any plans/programmes where adverse effects on the Natura 2000 Network cannot be avoided or mitigated.'</i>

Potential impact	Assessment
	<p data-bbox="689 268 808 293"><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p data-bbox="689 316 2085 378">Adhering to the measures set out above when allocating funding, as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation, would ensure no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF2.</p>

JTF3: Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition

- 5.3.17 As a result of the transition from peat, there is a need in the Territory for safe, reliable and clean local transport solutions connecting more people to more opportunities to work, (re)train, do business, meet and visit. The provision of local sustainable transport solutions is consistent with the aims of the National Planning Framework which emphasises the need to electrify mobility systems, including rural areas such as those in the Territory to better harness their potential for focused investment. Improved and sustainable local public transport links will increase economic competitiveness and create better places to work and live for impacted workers and communities.
- 5.3.18 The aim of JTF3 is therefore to help provide communities affected by the transitioning away from peat with smart and sustainable connections by supporting actions aimed at enhancing sustainable and clean mobility in the Territory focusing on the decarbonisation of transport to provide clean transport solutions to the people working, studying and visiting the EU JTF Territory.
- 5.3.19 Switching to sustainable and clean forms of energy will place the Territory on a more sustainable path by reducing the reliance on peat as a form of energy and supporting the Territory in achieving its greenhouse gas emissions targets. There are benefits which result from such actions such as improved air quality in the Territory and helping to mitigate the impacts of global climate change.
- 5.3.20 The EMRA has confirmed that the key activities under JTF3 will be focused on funding towards purchase of electric buses and installation of electric charging points.
- 5.3.21 Table 10 provides the assessment of effects associated with the implementation of JTF3.

Table 10 Assessment of potential impacts associated with JTF3

Potential impact	Assessment
<p>Habitat degradation</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	<p><i>Impacts</i></p> <p>The key activities under JTF3 will be decarbonisation of the transport network, including funding for the purchase of electric buses (in particular for rural services) and the installation of electric charging points. These actions will complement the activities under JTF1 by providing workers with better access to local jobs, training and education opportunities.</p> <p>The purchase of electric buses is considered to be beneficial for designated sites with the long-term positive effects related to reductions in air pollution.</p> <p>The enabling infrastructure for the electric charging points will involve some small-scale, short-term construction activities. However, the EMRA has confirmed that although there are no specific charging point locations identified in the EU JTF Programme, all charging infrastructure would be small-scale and concentrated within the footprint of existing developments and/ or centred around built-up areas (i.e. within existing settlements at existing community buildings), thereby avoiding impacts on sensitive habitats and species.</p> <p>Therefore, overall, the implementation of JTF3 is considered to be beneficial to the environment and has the potential to deliver positive benefits for European sites within the Territory, moving towards more sustainable transport solutions and reducing air pollution.</p> <p><i>Avoidance/ mitigation</i></p> <p>No specific avoidance/ mitigation measures required.</p> <p><i>Conclusion</i></p> <p>There would be no adverse effect on the integrity of European sites as a result of implementing JTF3.</p>
<p>Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	
<p>Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	
<p>Changes in air quality where works takes place near a European site(s)</p> <p>Construction phase</p>	

5.4 Conclusion (alone)

- 5.4.1 On completion of the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment, the following conclusion has been drawn.
- 5.4.2 The focus of the EU JTF Programme is to support sustainable development and protecting/ restoring/ enhancing the natural environment. In the long-term, the development and implementation of the EU JTF Programme is considered to be largely environmentally beneficial, with the potential to deliver positive benefits for European sites within the Territory. Overall, none of the Priorities within the EU JTF Programme are considered to be actively directing development in such a location or manner that potential impacts arising from projects receiving funding could not be avoided or mitigated.
- 5.4.3 It is not possible at this high level to identify all impacts associated with policy implementation; however, the AA process has determined the types of impacts which are most likely to be encountered and identified measures for each of the policies which would avoid/ mitigate for such types of impacts. These measures must be adhered to when allocating funding to ensure that there would be no adverse effects on the integrity of European site(s).
- 5.4.4 In Ireland, all plans and projects with the potential to impact European sites (regardless of their distance from such sites) are required to comply, as a matter of law, with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) which are transposed into Irish legislation by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 and the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011. Therefore, irrespective of the policy wording or mitigation measures set out in this NIS, statutory AA of plans/ projects would be required. Compliance with Irish legislation (as well as UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects with Northern Ireland have been identified) and the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out against each of the Priorities will provide an overarching safeguard which projects coming forward for funding will be required to adhere to. The EU JTF Programme would not support any projects where adverse effects on European sites cannot be avoided or mitigated.
- 5.4.5 The Appropriate Assessment (alone) therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented), there would be no adverse impacts on the integrity of any European sites a result of implementation of the EU JTF Programme.

5.5 In-combination effects

- 5.5.1 In line with AA guidance, a stepwise approach has been taken to consideration of in-combination effects, as follows:
- Identify plans / projects that might act in combination.
 - Identify the types of impact that might occur.
 - Define boundaries of the assessment.
 - Identify pathways for impact.
 - Impact prediction and assessment.

5.5.2 Due to the high-level nature of the EU JTF Programme, and the lack of allocations or specific spatial elements, only similarly high-level and strategic plans/policies have been considered in the in-combination assessment.

5.5.3 In addition, only the effects of other plans or projects which would not be likely to be significant alone, need to be included in the in-combination assessment. If the effects of other plans or projects will already be significant on their own, they are not added to those associated with the EU JTF Programme as they already have their own measures in place to mitigate for those effects.

Impacts identification

5.5.4 The following potential in-combination impacts have been identified:

- Habitat degradation.
- Disturbance/ displacement to QI/ SCI species.
- Changes in water quality/ hydrology where works are hydrologically linked to a European site(s).
- Changes in air quality where works take place near a European site(s).

Assessment of effects

5.5.5 Table 10 sets out the in-combination assessment. Appendix C provide details of the other plans/ programmes/ strategies considered in the assessment.

Table 11 In-combination assessment with other plans/ programmes/ strategies

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	This Strategy is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment and has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010)	This document outlines the EU's ten-year growth strategy. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the aims of the strategy. Therefore, because it could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the strategy.
EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020	This report provides a framework for the coordination of social and economic policies across the EU. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies which will be developed as part of the framework. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward under the framework, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the framework delivery.
Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011	This roadmap outlines how Ireland can help transform Europe's economy into a sustainable one by 2050. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies which will be developed as part of the roadmap. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward as part of the roadmap, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of its delivery.
EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges	This study identifies and analyses EU's lagging regions but would not in itself lead to development, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2021	The RIS assesses the innovation performance of European regions but would not in itself lead to development, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2009)	The Sustainable Development Strategy sets out a framework for a long-term vision on sustainability in which economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand in hand and are mutually supporting. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the aims of the strategy. Therefore, because it could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the strategy.
EU (2019) European Green Deal EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030	All of these frameworks/ plans include aims/ objectives/ policies associated with decarbonisation, energy efficiency/ security, internal energy market and research/ innovation/ competitiveness. These all work towards positive benefits to the natural environment. Therefore, as their aims/ objectives are to protect/ enhance the environment and they have been designed with environmental safeguards in place, no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
<p>DECC (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030</p> <p>DCCAE (2021) National Climate Action Plan</p> <p>DCCAE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland</p> <p>DCCAE (2017) National Mitigation Plan</p> <p>National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012)</p>	
<p>Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030</p>	<p>The NPF and NDP combine to form Project Ireland 2040. The NPF sets the vision and strategy for the development of the country to 2040 and the NDP provides the enabling investment to implement that strategy. The objectives of the NDP match those of the NPF. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the investment Priorities and objectives Project Ireland 2040. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of these plans/ frameworks.</p>
<p>National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy</p>	<p>The Government's vision aims towards global leadership in the bioeconomy. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for the policy. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the policy.</p>
<p>DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021</p>	<p>The NBAP is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.</p>
<p>DAHG (2015) National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025)</p>	<p>The Landscape Strategy aims to support living landscapes and enhance community identity by protecting, managing and improving the quality of the landscape. The Strategy has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.</p>
<p>National Smart Specialisation Plan</p> <p>National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027</p>	<p>This Plan and Strategy aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. One of the goals of the strategy is to fund large-scale restoration of industrial peatlands. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through these documents. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plan/ strategy.</p>
<p>The National Recovery and Resilience Plan</p>	<p>The overall objective of this plan is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies within the plan. Therefore, because</p>

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
	the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plan/ strategy.
Future Jobs Ireland (2019)	Future Jobs Ireland sits alongside Project Ireland 2040, Global Ireland 2025 and the Climate Action Plan represents an integrated approach to prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future economy. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing its investment priorities and objectives and therefore where it facilitates projects, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of Future Job Ireland.
DCCAE (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018–2020	This Plan aims to provide a framework for how Ireland will implement the Sustainable Development Goals. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the plan. Therefore, because it could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plan.
Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020'	The Smarter Travel policy sets out proposals on how current unsustainable transport and travel patterns can be reversed, how the health and environmental impacts of current trends can be reduced and how quality can be improved. The Smarter Travel policy therefore aims to protect and enhance the natural environment. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the policy.
National Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025 Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan Transport for Ireland Local Link Rural Transport Programme (Local Links Strategic Plan) National Disability Inclusion Strategy	These documents/ policies support the enhancement of sustainable travel for all members of the community, such as promoting active travel (walking and cycling) and moving towards zero-emission public transport. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward as part of these policies/ strategies/ plans, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of their delivery.
National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020	The aim of the framework is to create a strong cycling culture in Ireland thus contributing to an improved quality of life, and a stronger economy and business environment. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the framework.
Get Ireland Active! A National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland	This plan focuses on different types of actions to encourage behaviour change and increase physical activity. The plan includes actions such as developing and promoting walking and cycling strategies. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plan.
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2022	The objective of the Scheme is to provide funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and for the necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland.

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
	Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the scheme.
National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP) (2021)	The National Air Pollution Control Programme is intended to show the pathway Ireland will follow to achieve compliance with the National Emissions Ceiling (NEC) Directive 2020 and 2030 targets. The measures and actions within the NAPCP aim to have an overall positive effect on air quality, which would be beneficial to European sites. The NAPCP has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy	The DNSH Regulation provides that no measure included in a Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) should lead to significant harm to environmental objectives. DNSH is designed to protect and enhance the natural environment, and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland	The aim of this plan is to deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs but would not in itself lead to development. No adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy	Impact 2030 will maximise the impact of research and innovation on national priorities but would not in itself lead to development. No adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) (2019-2031 and 2020 2032)	The RSESs set the strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of the Regions. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for supporting the delivery of key regional objectives and priorities of the RSES. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the strategies.
ERDF Regional Programmes (2021-2027)	The Regional Programmes promote balanced regional development by supporting the implementation of the RSESs. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for supporting the delivery their policy objectives. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the Regional Programmes.
Regional Enterprise Plans	Regional enterprise plans have been developed across the territory. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the Regional Plans. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plans.
Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)	New LECPs, covering a 6-year period, are currently being developed. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the policies developed through the LECPs. Therefore, because the EU JTF

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
	Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the plans.
Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022	The priority of the RDP (part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)) is restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry and aims to protect and enhance the natural environment. The RDP has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Rural Development Policy: Our Rural Future 2021-2025	Our Rural Future provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the Our Rural Future policies. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the delivery of the Rural Development Policy.
People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 – Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026	All of these plans/ strategies include aims/ objectives/ policies relate to developing Irelands potential as a tourist destination, encouraging sustainable tourism and improved green infrastructure. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing these plans/ strategies. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of their delivery
National Countryside Recreation Strategy	
Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways	
Realising our Rural Potential Action Plan for Rural Development	The aim of this Action Plan is to focus on the positive attributes of an area and unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level. The EU JTF Programme forms one of the potential funding mechanisms for implementing the plan. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of the plan delivery.
Peatlands and Climate Change Action Plan 2030	All of these plans/ projects/ strategies include aims/ objectives/ policies associated with peatland restoration, rehabilitation and repurposing. These all work towards positive benefits for peatland habitats and the wider natural environment. The EU JTF Programme will help to deliver the actions associated with these documents. Therefore, because the EU JTF Programme could facilitate projects which come forward, it is not acting in combination, but is instead part of these plans/ projects/ strategies
Peatlands Finance Ireland	
Connecting Communities with Peatlands	
Peatlands and People Project	

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
National Peatlands Strategy 2015	
National Peatland Strategy Progress Report 2017	
Food Wise 2025	Food Wise 2025 is a 10-year vision for the growth of the Irish agri-food sector but would not in itself lead to development. No adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
National Broadband Plan 2022	The aim of the Plan is to deliver high-speed broadband services to all businesses and households in Ireland. The EU JTF Programme could form one of the funding mechanisms for supporting the delivery of the National Broadband Plan and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector (2014)	Construction 2020 outlines measures aimed at stimulating activity in the building industry but would not in itself lead to development. No adverse in-combination impacts with the EU JTF Programme are expected.
EPA (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021	The RBMP outlines Ireland's approach to protecting rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters. The RBMP has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services)	The WSSP sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services up to 2040. The plan includes objectives to provide effective management of wastewater and protect and enhance the environment. The WSSP has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
National Water Resources Plan	The NWRP sets out how to balance the supply and demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term in Ireland. The plan includes measures to safeguard the environment. The NWRP has been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.
EPA National Waste Prevention Programme Regional Waste Management Plans National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan	These plans/programmes relate to waste prevention and management. They have been designed with environmental safeguards in place, therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified
Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy (2020)	This document sets out Ireland's long-term Renovation Strategy. In order to reduce emissions in line with national and international targets, Ireland's building stock will need to be highly energy efficient and largely decarbonised by 2050. This Strategy is designed to reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency within the existing housing stock and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.

Plans/ programmes/ strategies	In-combination assessment
National Retrofit Plan	This scheme pledges to upgrade the energy efficiency of 500,000 homes by 2030. This Strategy is designed to reduce energy use and improve energy efficiency within the existing housing stock and therefore no adverse in-combination impacts have been identified.

5.6 Conclusion (in-combination)

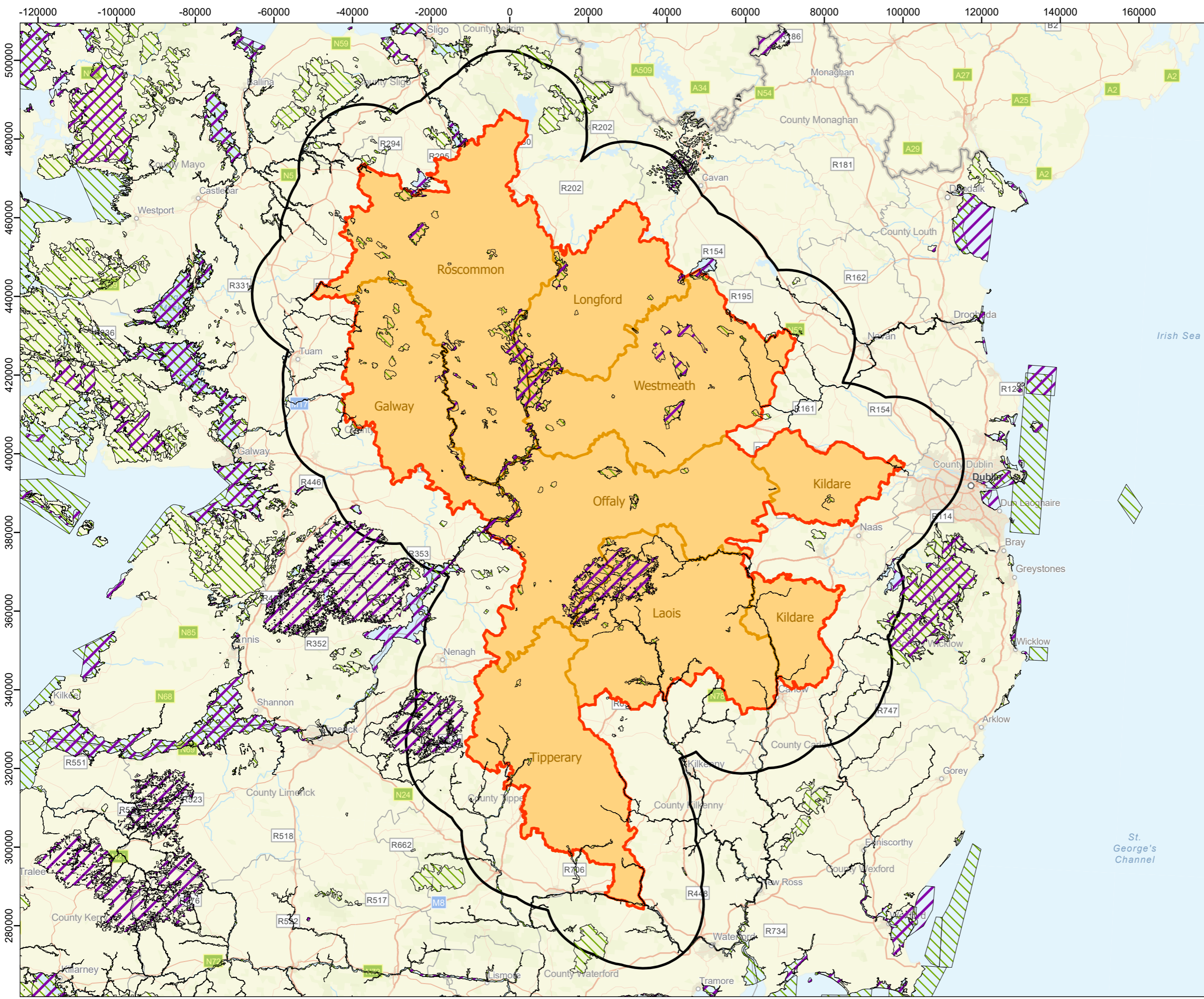
- 5.6.1 It is not possible at this high level to identify an extensive list of all plans/ programmes/ strategies which may lead to in-combination effects with the EU JTF Programme; and therefore in-combination effects cannot be completely ruled out. However, as stated previously, in Ireland, all plans and projects with the potential to impact European sites (regardless of their distance from such sites) are required to comply, as a matter of law, with the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the associated Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) which are transposed into Irish legislation. Therefore, irrespective of the policy wording or mitigation measures set out in this NIS, statutory AA of plans/ projects would be required.
- 5.6.2 Compliance with Irish legislation and the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out against each of the Priorities will provide an overarching safeguard which projects coming forward for funding will be required to adhere to. In addition, in line with the 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) EU Regulation (under the 'protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems' environmental objective), the EMRA would not support any projects arising from the EU JTF Programme where adverse effects on European site(s) cannot be readily avoided/ mitigated.
- 5.6.3 The in-combination assessment therefore concludes that (assuming the avoidance/ mitigation measures set out within this NIS are implemented as well as compliance with EU and National policy and legislation), there would be no adverse in-combination impacts on the integrity of any European sites as a result of implementation of the EU JTF Programme.

6.0 OVERALL CONCLUSION

- 6.1.1 Whilst this NIS has made it clear that it is difficult at this high-level stage of the planning process to be clear about how European sites may or may not be affected by implementation of the EU JTF Programme, it is important to note that the potential implications for European sites have been considered throughout the development of the EU JTF Programme, such that early avoidance of the issues (and/or reduction of risk) has been a key element of the process of developing the EU JTF Programme.
- 6.1.2 The focus of the EU JTF Programme is supporting sustainable development and protecting/ restoring/ enhancing the natural environment. In the long-term, the development and implementation of the EU JTF Programme is considered to be largely environmentally beneficial, with the potential to deliver positive benefits for European sites within the Territory. However, the NIS sets out the type of impacts which could occur through the implementation of the EU JTF Programme and identifies avoidance/ mitigation measures which must be adhered to when allocating funding to ensure no adverse impacts on European sites.
- 6.1.3 This, in addition to the legal requirement for projects with the potential to impact European sites (through EU and Irish policy and legislation (as well as UK policy and legislation where transboundary effects with Northern Ireland have been identified)) to undertake AA, provides sufficient safeguarding to be able to confirm that no adverse effects on integrity are anticipated as a result of implementing the EU JTF Programme (alone or in combination).

FIGURES

Figure 1 Location of European sites



- Legend:**
- EU JTF Boundary
 - Counties
 - 15km Buffer
 - Special Areas Of Conservation
 - Special Protected Areas



Rev	Date	Description	Drm	Chk	App
01	26/10/2022	2483902	ET	RPH	LT

East Midlands SEA AA RFRA Rep Ireland



TITLE: Figure 1:
Location of European Sites

SCALE: 1:900,000 @ A3

APPENDIX A – EUROPEAN SITES

Table A.1. SACs and SPAs within the EU JTF Programme Territory boundary and the 15km zone of influence.

SACs	SPAs
Lough Oughter And Associated Loughs SAC	Mongan Bog SPA
Barroughter Bog SAC	Wicklow Mountains SPA
Lough Corrib SAC	Lough Derravaragh SPA
Lough Ree SAC	Lough Ennell SPA
Clara Bog SAC	Glen Lough SPA
Cuilcagh - Anierin Uplands SAC	Glen Lough SPA
Cloonchambers Bog SAC	Lough Iron SPA
Turloughmore (Sligo) SAC	Lough Owel SPA
Slaney River Valley SAC	Lough Gara SPA
Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC	Lough Oughter SPA
Comeragh Mountains SAC	Lough Arrow SPA
Lough Bane And Lough Glass SAC	Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA
Wicklow Mountains SAC	Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough SPA
Lower River Suir SAC	Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA
River Barrow And River Nore SAC	Lough Ree SPA
Lower River Shannon SAC	Lough Sheelin SPA
River Moy SAC	River Little Brosna Callows SPA
River Boyne And River Blackwater SAC	Middle Shannon Callows SPA
Coolrain Bog SAC	River Suck Callows SPA
Clooneen Bog SAC	Ballykenny-Fisherstown Bog SPA
Monivea Bog SAC	Garriskil Bog SPA
Lisbigney Bog SAC	All Saints Bog SPA
Ridge Road, SW of Rapemills SAC	Bellanagare Bog SPA
Philipston Marsh SAC	Lough Rea SPA
Anglesey Road SAC	Dovegrove Callows SPA
Mountmellick SAC	Lough Croan Turlough SPA
Lisduff Fen SAC	Four Roads Turlough SPA
Island Fen SAC	Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA
Ballyprior Grassland SAC	Slievefelim to Silvermines Mountains SPA
Hugginstown Fen SAC	Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA
The Loughans SAC	River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA
Holdenstown Bog SAC	River Nore SPA
Galmoy Fen SAC	
Croaghill Turlough SAC	
Levally Lough SAC	
Errit Lough SAC	
Lisduff Turlough SAC	
Cullahill Mountain SAC	

SACs	SPAs
<p>Annaghmore Lough (Roscommon) SAC Liskeenan Fen SAC Lough Lene SAC Glenloughaun Esker SAC Killeglan Grassland SAC Ballymore Fen SAC Ballinturly Turlough SAC The Long Derries, Edenderry SAC Ferbane Bog SAC Carn Park Bog SAC Ardagullion Bog SAC Curraghlahanagh Bog SAC Tullaghanrock Bog SAC Lisnageeragh Bog and Ballinastack Turlough SAC Sharavogue Bog SAC Garriskil Bog SAC Derrinlough (Cloonkeenleananode) Bog SAC Ballygar (Aghrane) Bog SAC Aughrim (Aghrane) Bog SAC Derragh Bog SAC Mount Jessop Bog SAC Girley (Drewstown) Bog SAC Wooddown Bog SAC Schoaboy (Sopwell) Bog SAC Arragh More (Derrybreen) Bog SAC Carrownagappul Bog SAC Ballynafagh Bog SAC Knockacoller Bog SAC Cloonakillina Lough SAC Doocastle Turlough SAC Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC Moyclare Bog SAC Cloonshanville Bog SAC Kilduff, Devilsbit Mountain SAC Silvermine Mountains SAC Bolingbrook Hill SAC Silvermines Mountains West SAC Carrowbehy/Caher Bog SAC Derrinea Bog SAC Lough Rea SAC Mongan Bog SAC Lough Croan Turlough SAC Four Roads Turlough SAC Lough Forbes Complex SAC Coolcam Turlough SAC</p>	

SACs	SPAs
<p>Fortwilliam Turlough SAC Nier Valley Woodlands SAC Williamstown Turloughs SAC Mullygollan Turlough SAC Mount Hevey Bog SAC Red Bog, Kildare SAC Lough Owel SAC Bricklieve Mountains and Keishcorran SAC Lough Derg, North-east Shore SAC Killyconny Bog (Cloghbally) SAC Scragh Bog SAC Brown Bog SAC Flughany Bog SAC Rye Water Valley/Carton SAC Ballynafagh Lake SAC Castlesampson Esker SAC Lough Arrow SAC Pollardstown Fen SAC River Boyne And River Blackwater SAC All Saints Bog and Esker SAC Lough Funshinagh SAC Unshin River SAC Lough Gill SAC Raheenmore Bog SAC Shankill West Bog SAC Spahill and Clomantagh Hill SAC White Lough, Ben Loughs and Lough Doo SAC Templehouse and Cloonacleigha Loughs SAC River Shannon Callows SAC Kilsallagh Bog SAC Lough Lurgreen Bog/Glenamaddy Turlough SAC Charleville Wood SAC Callow Bog SAC Corliskea/Trien/Cloonfelliv Bog SAC Crosswood Bog SAC Ballynamona Bog and Corkip Lough SAC Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs SAC Corbo Bog SAC Ardgraique Bog SAC Bellanagare Bog SAC Ballyduff/Clonfinane Bog SAC Kilcarren-Firville Bog SAC Urlaur Lakes SAC Split Hills and Long Hill Esker SAC Drumalough Bog SAC</p>	

SACs	SPAs
Redwood Bog SAC Keeper Hill SAC Lough Corrib SAC Mouds Bog SAC Camderry Bog SAC Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC Boleybrack Mountain SAC Lough Ennell SAC	

APPENDIX B – CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Consultation responses (relevant to the NIS) were received from the following organisations, set out in Table B1 (refer to Section 3.3):

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) including the following:
 - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Natural Environment Division (NED) (Via NIEA).
 - Water Management Unit (Via DAERA).
 - Marine Fisheries Division (Via NIEA).

Table B.1. Consultation responses relevant to the NIS

Consultee	Consultee response	Action
DAERA (NED)	<p>NED acknowledges receipt of the Natura Impact Statement (NIS). NED notes that the area in which the works are to take place for JTF1 and JTF3 are within the territorial boundary as shown within Figure 1 of the NIS. However, within Section 6.9 of the SEA Environmental Report it states that projects funded within JTF1 are less likely to be located near the border and that any impacts are considered minor adverse.</p> <p>However, at this stage they cannot be ruled out. Works under JTF2 which are defined as Supporting the rehabilitation and restoration of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets, may potentially take place outwith this boundary and therefore potentially closer to Northern Ireland. NED acknowledge that it is difficult at this stage to know the geographical extent of works in relation to JTF1 & JTF2 and therefore the distance of any works from Northern Ireland.</p> <p>NED therefore recommend that due to this ambiguity in relation to the location of works and adhering to the precautionary principle the boundary of the territory and therefore the Zone of Influence should be amended to reflect the potential greatest extent of works and therefore include and assess the additional Natura 2000 sites as part of the NIS. NED also notes that this could require amendments to Appendix A which lists European Sites.</p> <p>NED also notes that migratory species have been mentioned only in relation to aquatic species. NED advise that migratory species are not limited to aquatic species and that the NIS should be amended to reflect this.</p>	<p>While there is the potential for peatland restoration/ rehabilitation occurring along the boundary of the JTF Territory to extend into adjacent areas; the 15km zone of influence would encompass any potential impacts that could arise from the types of projects coming forward for funding through the Programme.</p> <p>Reference to other types of migratory species added to the NIS, as appropriate.</p>
	<p>NED, however, does acknowledge that transboundary issues have been considered throughout the NIS. NED advises that should the NIS change in respect to impacts upon Northern Irish European Designated sites then NED should be re-consulted.</p>	Noted.

Consultee	Consultee response	Action
Water Management Unit Comments (Via DAERA)	<p>The Programme covers the JTF Territory, which does not border Northern Ireland. However, JTF2 may also extend to include the restoration and rehabilitation of peatland sites adjacent to the Programme Territory, which may be closer to the Northern Ireland border.</p> <p>If this is the case the SEA should consider any potential transboundary issues, including the potential disturbance to/impact on NI/Rol migratory/mobile species such as salmon. Such species rely and can be impacted by water quality and water resource issues.</p>	<p>Transboundary issues were considered throughout the SEA and NIS.</p> <p>Restoration under JTF2 including drain-blocking and bunding measures on deeper peats will follow the best practice guidelines outlined in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' published by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in 2017. Where relevant, the standard of rehabilitation shall be agreed with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the designated State body for the implementation of National and EU legislation and policies for nature conservation and biodiversity.</p>
Marine Fisheries Division (Via NIEA)	<p>Marine Conservation Response</p> <p>MCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly- EU Just Transition Fund Programme 2021-27 and where the proposals are in close proximity to Carlingford Lough the following should be considered:</p> <p>Marine Protected Areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carlingford Lough SPA and Carlingford Marine pSPA, which are designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended); • Carlingford Lough MCZ, which is designated under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013; • Carlingford Lough ASSI, which is declared under the Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002, and • Carlingford Lough Ramsar site, which is designated under the Ramsar Convention. <p>Furthermore, recent advice, relating to MPAs which have marine mammals as a site selection feature, recommends the following ranges should be used when considering for either Harbour or Grey seals and Harbour porpoise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all SACs within 100km of the project should be screened for Grey seals. • all SACs within 50km should be screened for Harbour seals. • all SACs within 100km should be screened for Harbour porpoise. <p>Therefore, Murlough SAC and Strangford Lough SAC should be considered for Harbour seal and the North Channel SAC should be considered for Harbour porpoise.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>Given the inland location of the EU JTF Territory and size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding through the EU JTF Programme, impacts on coastal processes and the wider marine environment have not been considered in the assessment.</p> <p>Given the inland location/ size/ scale/ nature of the projects which are likely to come forward for funding, impacts on marine mammals have not been considered in the assessment.</p>

APPENDIX C – SUMMARY OF OTHER PLANS/ PROGRAMMES/ STRATEGIES

Table B.1. sets out the other plans/ programmes/ strategies considered in the in-combination assessment of the NIS.

C.1. Other plans/ Programmes/ strategies considered in the in-combination assessment

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
EC (2020) EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	This strategy aims to ensure that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and our economy, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and with the objectives of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It addresses the five main drivers of biodiversity loss, sets out an enhanced governance framework to fill remaining gaps, ensures the full implementation of EU legislation, and pulls together all existing efforts. It covers three main areas: Protecting and restoring nature in the European Union, Enabling transformative change, and The European Union for an ambitious global biodiversity agenda.
Europe 2020 Economic Strategy. A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010)	Outlines the European Union's ten-year growth strategy and is about addressing the shortcomings of our growth model whilst creating the conditions for a different type of growth that is smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive. Five key targets have been set for the EU to achieve covering employment, education, research and innovation, social inclusion and poverty reduction, and climate/energy. Also, it includes seven flagship initiatives providing a framework through which the EU and national authorities mutually reinforce their efforts in areas supporting the Europe 2020 Priorities such as innovation, industrial policy and resource efficiency.
EU Country Report (Ireland) 2019 and 2020	These reports analyse the country's key socio-economic challenges which result in providing a framework for the coordination of social and economic policies across the EU. For 2019, the reports included a specific Annex on Investment guidance for cohesion policy 2021/2027' which was not included before. For 2020, the report focused on the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a new section dedicated to the analysis of Member States' environmental challenges and sustainability.
Roadmap for Resource Efficient Europe 2011	The Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe outline how Ireland can transform Europe's economy into a sustainable one by 2050. It proposes ways to increase resource productivity and decouple economic growth from resource use and its environmental impact. It illustrates how policies interrelate and build on each other
EU Lagging Regions - state of play and future challenges	This study identifies and analyses EU's lagging regions while also proposing a new classification to recognise regions which are most vulnerable. It identifies challenges that arise from economic transitions and examines the lagging regions input in EU policies while also outlining recommendations to improve their future support.
EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2021	The Regional innovation scoreboard (RIS) is a regional extension of the European innovation scoreboard. The RIS 2021 follows the revised methodology of the European innovation scoreboard (EIS) but with a reduced number of indicators due to the lower level of innovation data availability at the regional level providing a comparative assessment of the performance of regional innovation systems across 240 regions of 22 EU countries. The Northern and Western Region is now the only region in Ireland to be considered a "Moderate Innovator"
EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2009)	A framework for a long-term vision on sustainability in which economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection go hand in hand and are mutually supporting. European Union using this strategy has mainstreamed the objective of sustainable development into a broad range of policies.
EU (2019) European Green Deal	The European Green Deal is a roadmap for sustainability in the EU with actions to boost efficient resources by moving to a clean, circular economy, restore biodiversity and cut pollution. Key elements of this include the Biodiversity Strategy to 2030, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the Farm to Fork Strategy.
EC (2018) A Clean Planet for all: A European strategic long-term vision for	The aim of this long-term strategy is to confirm Europe's commitment to lead in global climate action and to present a vision that can lead to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 through a socially-fair transition in a cost-efficient manner. It is meant to set the direction of travel of EU climate and energy policy, and to frame what the EU considers as its long-term contribution to achieving the Paris Agreement

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy	temperature objectives in line with United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals, which will further affect a wider set of EU policies. This strategy involves two main areas which are Transition to a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions economy; and Investing into a sustainable society.
EC (2014) A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030	<p>Key Elements of the 2030 framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 40% • A renewable energy target at EU level of at least 27% • Energy Efficiency increase of 25% in 2030 • Reform of the Emissions Trading System • Ensuring competition in integrated markets • Competitive and affordable energy for all consumers • Promoting security of energy supply
DCCAE (2020) National Energy & Climate Plan 2021-2030	<p>The plan builds on previous national strategies and details the objectives regarding the five energy dimensions together with planned policies and measures to facilitate achievement of those objectives. The energy dimensions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation – GHG emissions and removals and renewable energy • Energy efficiency • Energy security • Internal energy market • Research, innovation and competitiveness
DCCAE (2021) National Climate Action Plan	<p>This plan is the Irish Government's Climate Action Plan which is committed to achieving a net zero carbon energy systems objective for Irish society and in the process, create a resilient, vibrant and sustainable country. The Government will take the lead on this agenda through this Plan in defining a roadmap to this goal and initiating a coherent set of policy actions to get us there. The plan highlights a number of actions relating to targets, governance, carbon pricing, electricity, enterprise, built environment, transport, agriculture, waste, public sector, international action, citizen engagement, and adaptation.</p>
DCCAE (2018) National Adaptation Framework: Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland	<p>This framework sets out a whole-of-government basis, what Ireland is doing and is planning to do to further their transition to a low-carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050. The aim of adaptation is to reduce the vulnerability of our environment, society and economy and increase resilience. Adaptation also brings opportunity through green growth, innovation, jobs and ecosystem enhancement as well as improvements in areas such as water and air quality. Key actions under the framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting in place revised governance and reporting arrangements • Formalising the status of existing guidelines • Formalising long term operational support for key sectors • Facilitating the establishment of regional local authority climate action offices • Increasing awareness around climate adaptation and resilience • Integrating climate adaptation into key national plans and policies
DCCAE (2017) National Mitigation Plan	<p>This plan represents an initial step on the pathway to achieve the level of decarbonisation required by the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development Goals. The main strategic objectives for this plan are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy will contribute to reductions in Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions and enhancement of sinks in a manner that achieves the optimum benefits at least cost;

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stable and predictable policy and regulatory framework will be underpinned by rigorous analysis and appraisal, supported by strong research and analytical capacity; • The Government will pursue investment, innovation and enterprise opportunities towards building a competitive, low carbon, climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economy; and • The citizen and communities will be at the centre of the transition.
National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2012)	The policy contained in this framework provides a strategy for the response to climate change in Ireland and is intended to evolve and adapt over time as planning and implementation progresses. The aim of this plan is to help people deal with disruptions from the impacts of climate change and help them reduce them; comprehend the changes necessary to improve their quality of life; and facilitate economic recovery from possible changes to climate patterns and extreme events.
Government of Ireland (2018) Project Ireland 2040: National Development Plan (NDP) and National Planning Framework (NPF) 2021-2030	The National Development Plan (NDP) sets out the investment Priorities that will underpin the successful implementation of the new National Planning Framework (NPF). The objectives of the National Development Plan match those of the NPF. A fundamental underlying objective of the NDP is, therefore, to focus on continued investment to yield a public infrastructure that facilitates Priorities such as high-speed broadband and public transport in better cities and in better communities. The public goods generated through investment in physical infrastructure will be critical to strengthening Ireland's human capital and to fostering the development of clusters in important growth areas in order to attract new investment.
National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy	The Government's vision aims towards global leadership in the bioeconomy, moving beyond a compliance and carbon mitigation focus to integrating sustainable economic development into our economic model, as we transition to a low carbon and circular economy.
<p>DCHG (2017) National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021</p> <p>Work on drafting Ireland's 4th NBAP is underway which will be published in 2023.</p>	<p>The NBAP for 2017-2021 demonstrates Ireland's continuing commitment to meeting and acting on its obligations to protect their biodiversity for the benefit of future generations through a series of targeted strategies and actions. The plan has seven objectives;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors 2. Strengthen the knowledge base for conservation, management and sustainable use of biodiversity 3. Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services 4. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside 5. Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine environment 6. Expand and improve management of protected areas and species 7. Strengthen international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services.
DAHG (2015) National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025)	A key objective of this strategy is to implement the European Landscape Convention. It highlights the importance of cultural, social, economic and environmental values within Ireland's landscapes. It aims to both support living landscapes and enhance community identity.
National Smart Specialisation Plan	<p>Smart Specialisation is an enterprise innovation policy concept developed by the European Commission that aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths.</p> <p>The development of a new Smart Specialisation Strategy (also known as S3) presents an opportunity to assess, with stakeholders, our regional competitive advantages, future market opportunities, solutions to societal challenges, and the effectiveness of the current suite of enterprise innovation supports.</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027	Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy will embrace a regional approach to addressing Ireland's Research, Development, and Innovation (RD&I) challenges.
The National Recovery and Resilience Plan	The overall objective of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan is to contribute to a sustainable, equitable, green and digital recovery effort, in a manner that complements and supports the Government's broader recovery efforts. One of the Priorities of the plan is Advancing the Green Transition, which will invest in the rehabilitation of former industrial peatlands.
Future Jobs Ireland (2019)	<p>Future Jobs Ireland, along with Project Ireland 2040, Global Ireland 2025 and the Climate Action Plan represents an integrated approach to prepare for the opportunities and challenges of the future economy.</p> <p>Future Jobs Ireland focuses on five pillars namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Innovation and Technological Change • Improving SME Productivity • Enhancing Skills and Developing and Attracting Talent • Increasing Participation in the Labour Force • Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy
DCCA (2018) Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 – 2020	<p>This Plan aims to provide a framework for how Ireland will implement the Sustainable Development Goals from 2018-2020, to support national policies which contribute to meeting the Goals, and to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation. The strategic Priorities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness: Increase public awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, their relevance to Ireland, and national efforts to achieve them. • Participation: Provide stakeholders with meaningful opportunities to contribute to national follow-up and review processes regarding the Goals, and with opportunities to further the development of the national implementation framework. • Support: Support and encourage communities and organisations to make their own contributions to achieving the Goals, and to foster public participation. • Policy Alignment: Support and promote policies and initiatives across government which contribute towards meeting the Goals at home and abroad and identify opportunities for enhancing policy coherence.
Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future. 'A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020'	Published by the Department of Transport, the policy sets out proposals on how current unsustainable transport and travel patterns can be reversed, how the health and environmental impacts of current trends can be reduced and how our quality of life can be improved.
National Sustainable Mobility Policy Action Plan 2022-2025	<p>The National Sustainable Mobility Policy sets out a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel (walking and cycling) and public transport journeys to help Ireland meet its climate obligations. It is accompanied by an action plan to 2025 which contains actions to improve and expand sustainable mobility options across the country by providing safe, green, accessible and efficient alternatives to car journeys. It also includes demand management and behavioural change measures to manage daily travel demand more efficiently and to reduce the journeys taken by private car.</p> <p>The policy aims to deliver at least 500,000 additional daily active travel and public transport journeys by 2030 and a 10% reduction in the number of kilometres driven by fossil fuelled cars. It will make it easier for people to choose walking, cycling and use public transport daily instead of having to use a petrol or diesel car</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan	The Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan is a major national public transport initiative developed by the National Transport Authority (NTA), with the aim of increasing connectivity, particularly for people living outside our major cities and towns
Transport for Ireland Local Link Rural Transport Programme (Local Links Strategic Plan)	The Local Link strategic plan focusses on responding to rural isolation and enhancing the mobility, accessibility and community participation of local people, particularly those at risk of social exclusion.
National Disability Inclusion Strategy	The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 is the key framework for policy and action to address the needs of people with disabilities.
National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009-2020	The focus of this policy is to create a strong cycling culture in Ireland thus contributing to an improved quality of life, and a stronger economy and business environment. There are a total of 19 objectives developed in the policy which cover: Infrastructure, Communication/Education, Financial Resources, Legislation and Enforcement, Human Resources and Coordination and Evaluation and Effects.
Get Ireland Active! A National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland	This plan focuses on different types of actions to encourage behaviour change and increase physical activity. The plan includes actions such as developing and promoting walking and cycling strategies in each Local Authority area and prioritising the planning and development of walking and cycling and general recreational /physical activity infrastructure.
Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2022	The objective of the Scheme is to provide funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and for the necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland. It specifically supports the growing outdoor activity tourism sector as prioritised in "Our Rural Future", Ireland's Rural Development Policy 2021-2025.
National Air Pollution Control Programme (NAPCP)	The National Air Pollution Control Programme is intended to show the pathway Ireland will follow to achieve compliance with the National Emissions Ceiling Directive 2020 and 2030 targets. The update to the National Air Pollution Control Programme is being formulated to demonstrate how existing and additional measures will enable Ireland to meet National Emissions Ceiling Directive targets.
Do No Significant Harm (DNSH) Taxonomy	<p>The Regulation establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) provides that no measure included in a Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) should lead to significant harm to environmental objectives within the meaning of Article 17 of the Taxonomy Regulation.</p> <p>The DNSH principle is based on the provisions of the "Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance" adopted to promote private sector investment in green and sustainable projects and help achieve the goals of the Green Deal.</p>
Housing for All 2021 a new Housing Plan for Ireland	<p>Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland' is the government's housing plan to 2030. It is a multi-annual, multi-billion-euro plan which will improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. The government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to a good quality home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To purchase or rent at an affordable price • Built to a high standard and in the right place • Offering a high quality of life
Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy	<p>Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy' puts RD&I at the heart of addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges.</p> <p>Impact 2030 will maximise the impact of research and innovation on many national priorities. It will progress objectives shared across the Irish RD&I system such as maximising its impact on public policymaking and implementation and nurturing and attracting talent.</p>

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) (2019-2031 and 2020-2032)	The RSESs set the strategic planning and economic development framework for future economic, spatial, and social development of the Regions in line with vision and objectives for national change in the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP) supporting the implementation of Project Ireland 2040.
ERDF Regional Programmes (2021-2027)	The Regional Programmes assist the Ireland Government's aim of promoting balanced regional development by supporting the implementation of the Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies (above) and is focused on the following key strategic outcomes: Developing smarter more competitive regions; Creating greener more energy efficient regions and a just transition; and Supporting sustainable urban development.
Regional Enterprise Plans	Regional development plans are currently being developed across Ireland. They are being developed by regional stakeholders and focus on undertaking collaborative initiatives that can help realise enterprise growth and job creation in each of the nine regions across Ireland.
Local Economic and Community Plans	New LECs, covering a 6-year period, are currently being developed and are expected to be in place in 2023, setting out objectives and actions needed to promote and support economic, local and community development, both by local authorities alone and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders. LECs are the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward relevant actions arising from national and regional strategies and policies with a local remit.
Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022	The Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2022 is part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The leading priority of the Irish RDP is restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry. Following the most recent CAP reform, new rural development measures have been set up to enhance the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieve more sustainable management of natural resources and ensure a more balanced development of rural areas.
Rural Development Policy: Our Rural Future 2021-2025	Our Rural Future provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years. One of the key deliverables is transitioning to a climate neutral economy by investing in rehabilitating peatlands to contribute to reduced carb emissions, carbon sequestration, and enhanced biodiversity.
People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 – Regional Tourism Strategy for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands 2022-2026	This strategy sets out policies to prioritise investment that will maximise the return from tourism in the long term. The overall tourism goals are that by 2025, revenue from overseas visitors will increase to €5 billion, employment in the tourism sector will be 250,000, and there will be 10 million visits to Ireland annually.
National Countryside Recreation Strategy	This strategy sets out strategic objectives to achieve sustainable recreation in the countryside, promote caring recreational use of the countryside, develop a framework that promotes the rights and responsibilities of owners and users, develop a structure to deliver a national countryside recreation service in a strategic and co-ordinated way, and to secure funding to deliver the objectives of the strategy.
Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways	The objective of this Strategy is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a quality experience for all Greenways users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity.
Realising our Rural Potential Action Plan for Rural Development	The aim of this Action Plan for Rural Development is to focus on these positive attributes and unlock the potential of rural Ireland through a framework of supports at national and local level. Action no.186 will explore the potential for the development of new tourism and recreation activities within the context of the National Peatlands Strategy, including the consideration of a National Peatlands Park and centre of excellence.

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
Peatlands and Climate Change Action Plan 2030	This plan aims to ensure the protection of peatlands that are currently in good condition and support their range of ecosystem functions, and to enhance the resilience to climate change of all Ireland's peatlands through management, funding, education, and collective effort.
Peatlands Finance Ireland	This project will generate a new vision for landscape-level peatland restoration by combining government-led assistance with private investment.
Connecting Communities with Peatlands	This is a Just Transition Fund project which aims to deliver training and support to community-led groups in the Midlands to engage with, manage and conserve peatlands in their areas.
Peatlands and People Project	This EU Life Project aims to contribute to towards the realisation of Ireland's Climate Action plan by restoring and rehabilitating peatlands, attracting investment, generating jobs, and establishing tracks and trails.
National Peatlands Strategy 2015	The development of the overall strategy arose from the need to take a broad strategic approach to the future management of Ireland's peatlands. Its purpose is to set down clear principles which will guide Government policy in relation to all Irish peatlands.
National Peatland Strategy Progress Report 2017	The National Peatlands Strategy contains a comprehensive list of actions, necessary to ensure that Ireland's peatlands are preserved, nurtured and become living assets within the communities that live beside them. In order to ensure that these actions are implemented, a group was formed to monitor its implementation. This first report shows the work undertaken, since the publication of the National Peatlands Strategy, where each Department, agency and Semi-State body reported on how and when the actions relevant to them will be completed.
Food Wise 2025	Food Wise 2025, agreed by a committee of 35 stakeholders from the industry, is a ten-year vision for the growth of the Irish agri-food sector. It was published with the Food Wise Implementation Plan and in the Environmental Analysis as a final strategy in 2015. The strategy aims to create a more strategic and competitive sector within the international marketplace while supporting Ireland's sustainable and high-quality producers by targeting more quality conscious consumers.
National Broadband Plan 2022	Aligned with the Digital Agenda for Europe, the National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to deliver high-speed broadband services to all businesses and households in Ireland.
'Construction 2020, A Strategy for a Renewed Construction Sector' (2014)	Construction 2020 outlines a series of measures agreed by the Government and is aimed at stimulating activity in the building industry. The total action points set out are 75 which ensure that sensible and necessary development can take place without unnecessary obstacles.
EPA (2018) River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018-2021	<p>This 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 over the next four years. The following evidence-based Priorities have been adopted for this river basin planning cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure full compliance with relevant EU legislation • Prevent deterioration • Meet the objectives for designated protected areas • Protect high-status waters • Implement targeted actions and pilot schemes in focused sub-catchments aimed at (1) targeting water bodies close to meeting their objective and (2) addressing more complex issues that will build knowledge for the third cycle
Water Services Strategic Plan (A Plan for the Future of Water Services)	<p>This Water Services Strategic Plan (WSSP) sets out strategic objectives for the delivery of water services over the next years up to 2040. The plan takes into consideration its interaction with other national and regional plans such as the National Spatial Strategy and River Basin Management Plans.</p> <p>There are six strategic objectives that the plan is required to address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Customer Expectations;

Plan or Programme	Main objectives and environmental / socio-economic requirements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a Safe and Reliable Water Supply; • Provide Effective Management of Wastewater; • Protect and Enhance the Environment; • Support Social and Economic Growth; and • Invest in Our Future.
National Water Resources Plan	<p>The NWRP identifies how a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable water supply will be provided to customers now and into the future whilst also safeguarding the environment.</p> <p>The NWRP will set out how we will balance the supply and demand for drinking water over the short, medium and long term. It is a 25-year strategy to ensure we have a safe, sustainable, secure and reliable drinking water supply for everyone.</p>
EPA National Waste Prevention Programme	<p>The National Waste Prevention Programme (NWPP) is a Government of Ireland initiative, led by the EPA, which supports national-level, strategic programmes to prevent waste and drive the circular economy in Ireland.</p>
Regional Waste Management Plans	<p>Regional waste management plans give effect to national and EU waste policy, and address waste prevention and management (including generation, collection and treatment) over the period 2015-2021.</p>
National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan	<p>Irish Water has published the first National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan (NWSMP) outlining its strategy for managing wastewater sludge over the next 25 years.</p> <p>The NWSMP sets out a nationwide standardised approach to ensure that treated wastewater sludge across the country is effectively managed, stored, transported and re-used or disposed of in a sustainable way, to the benefit of the public and the environment.</p>
Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy (2020)	<p>This document sets out Ireland's Long-Term Renovation Strategy. In order to reduce emissions in line with national and international targets, Ireland's building stock will need to be highly energy efficient and largely decarbonised by 2050. This will require:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensuring that new buildings are to at least a nearly zero-energy building (NZEB) standard, and 2. The retrofitting of the majority of existing buildings.
National Retrofit Plan	<p>The Irish government's National Retrofitting Scheme pledges to upgrade the energy efficiency of 500,000 homes by 2030 — around one third of homes in Ireland. It forms part of the Irish government's Climate Action Plan, which has set the target for an overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 51% by 2030, and to achieve net zero by 2050.</p>



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