

# N63 LISS TO ABBEY REALIGNMENT SCHEME

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPLICATION TO AN BORD PLEANÁLA  
FOR APPROVAL OF THE N63 LISS TO ABBEY REALIGNMENT  
SCHEME

ABP Ref. ABP-312875-22 and ABP-312877-22

ORAL HEARING

Part 1.2 – Brief of Evidence – Biodiversity

November 2022

## Quality information

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## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	4
1.1	Qualifications and Experience .....	4
1.2	Role in Proposed Development .....	4
1.3	Submission by Development Applications Unit.....	4
2	Conclusion .....	5

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Qualifications and Experience

- 1.1.1 My name is Usna Keating. I am an experienced ecologist who has over 13 years of experience with a strong interest in species conservation and habitat enhancement. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Zoology, a MSc Degree in Marine Biology and a Masters by Research in a project focusing on species and habitat conservation and afforestation planning (B.Sc., M.Sc., M.Res). I have worked with universities, state agencies and NGOs and have published a number of scientific research papers, which have primarily focused on bird conservation. I have also worked on European Union funded projects including an EU LIFE Project in Biebrzanski National Park, Poland, and have worked with or in association with state agencies including Marine Institute and Inland Fisheries Ireland.
- 1.1.2 Since becoming an Ecological Consultant, I have worked on many large infrastructure projects, including such flood relief schemes as Bandon, Clonakilty, Ennis, and Glashaboy, windfarm developments including Grousemount Windfarm. I have also worked on numerous linear projects including the Passage to Mahon Greenway, the Midleton to Youghal Greenway, the Midleton 'Pontoon' Cycleway, the Great Southern Greenway and the Blessington Greenway. Other projects I have been involved in include ecological surveys for Irish Water on various water services upgrades.
- 1.1.3 In relation to road developments, I have carried out ecological surveys on the Macroom Bypass, the N5 Westport to Turlough and on this scheme, the N63 Liss to Abbey. I have conducted ecological assessments for public realm enhancement projects including for Bandon and Cashel. In addition to these projects, I have developed my skills on various biodiversity related projects including the development of community garden plans, rewilding and biodiversity plans for large public and private estates (Doneraile and Castle Leslie). In addition, I have recently developed site-specific biodiversity plans for some state and semi-state agencies.

### 1.2 Role in Proposed Development

- 1.2.1 I am the lead author of the Biodiversity Chapter for the proposed road development. I was also involved in the walkover surveys of the site. I also carried out surveys of the Annex I habitats within the scheme. I also carried out some of the wintering bird surveys on the project, as well as reviewing the bird survey data from other workers. Furthermore, I also completed much of the desktop survey work that contributed to the Biodiversity Chapter. Lastly, I also compiled the chapter following consultation with key stakeholders.

### 1.3 Submission by Development Applications Unit

- 1.3.1 This statement of evidence addresses issues raised in a submission by the National Parks and Wildlife Service's Development Applications Unit (DAU) in relation to the biodiversity chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment and the Natura Impact Assessment.
- 1.3.2 Chapter 7 of the EIAR and the Natura Impact Statement are to be taken as read in their entirety and not replicated here.
- 1.3.3 A separate and substantial response in relation to the DAU submission has already been forwarded to the department in advance of this hearing (ABP Oral Hearing Submission Part 2.2). This is summarised below.
- 1.3.4 The primary submission from the DAU relates to two principal habitat types which are: Annex I Habitats Molinia Meadows, and Petrifying Springs with Tufa Formations. Our response included outline method statements in respect of those habitats which the contractor will be obliged to comply with. The Molinia meadows method statement included the preparation of the site, and monitoring of the translocated area until confirmed established by an ecologist. Only the Molinia within the footprint of the road will be affected and the receptor site will result in a greater area managed for biodiversity in this habitat type.

- 1.3.5 The Petrifying springs Method statement outlines detailed direction on site set up, protection of the single identified spring during work and monitoring throughout the entire duration of the project (pre construction, during construction and post construction). This programme, along with the proposed sealed drainage system will result in greater protection for this habitat type than currently exists.
- 1.3.6 The DAU also made submissions in relation to Lamprey, Barn Owls and Otters which are also covered extensively in the submission response.
- 1.3.7 In relation to Lamprey, it was clarified in our response that Sea Lamprey do not occur within the Abbert River and are confined to below the Galway Regulating Weir. Additionally, mitigation measures for the protection of other Lamprey species were detailed once more in our submission and were laid out in Chapter 07 Biodiversity sections 7.5.2.6.4, 7.5.4.9.1 and 7.7.1.1.3.
- 1.3.8 It was confirmed in our response that the most recent mitigation measures recommended for Barn Owl conservation (in accordance with TII 2021) have been incorporated into our design.
- 1.3.9 We confirmed that Otter passage is enabled under the clear-span bridge structure at Abbert River which provides substantial set back of the abutments from the riverbank on both sides. In addition, a specific mammal underpass has also been incorporated into the design in locations required and is shown in drawing figure A7.11 of the EIAR. Further to this, otter passage will be enabled via crossing drainage ditches, which have been designed primarily for drainage purposes.
- 1.3.10 In addition, we committed in our response to update the requirement for reseeded adjacent the Abbert River to include native species such as Alder and Willow to encourage nature conservation along with planting native trees and shrubs.
- 1.3.11 Our response further outlined that the landscaping plan will allow for the creation of 3.5 hectares of hedgerow and mixed woodland and 0.04 hectares of shrub planting. This proposed landscaping will see the establishment of far more valuable habitat in terms of food plants, nesting, and roosting habitat than that lost within the road footprint of the scheme.
- 1.3.12 Finally, our submission reconfirmed that there will be no lighting on the Abbert River bridge to protect bat species and that the design includes for artificial bat roosts to be included in suitable locations as part of the new bridge structure, its associated abutments, and wing walls.

## 2 Conclusion

- 2.1.1 In conclusion, the authors of the Biodiversity Chapter are satisfied that the submission made by the DAU has been fully responded to or clarified as required. A comprehensive suite of mitigation measures has been devised in order to ensure no significant or residual effects on the ecological interests within the zone of influence of this proposed road development.