

Report

Wicklow Noise Action Plan 2024 - 2028

## **Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening**

For Wicklow County Council (WCC).

19 August 2024

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report has been prepared by Logika Consultants Ltd. on behalf of Noise Consultants Ltd for the Action Planning Authority (APA), Wicklow County Council (WCC). This SEA Screening report considers the applicability of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004<sup>1</sup> (S. I. 435/2004) as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations (S.I. 200/2011)<sup>2</sup> of (hereafter referred to as the 'SEA Regulations'). The focus of this report is to provide justification for whether SEA is needed.

The requirement to prepare a Noise Action Plan (NAP) is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law<sup>3</sup> and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the national competent authority responsible for implementing the END and will ultimately report noise mapping and action planning to the European Commission. Under the Regulations, the APA is responsible for preparing a NAP for the County of Wicklow. The part of the County of Wicklow included in the Dublin Agglomeration was not considered in the Wicklow NAP.

The purpose of the NAP is to provide a strategic overview of the management of noise issues and effects within WCC. The NAP aims to develop clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to preventing environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health. The NAP also identifies areas to preserve environmental acoustic quality where the baseline is good.

The END requires routine updates to noise mapping and action planning every five years. The NAP to which this SEA Screening report refers is for the period 2024 – 2028. Further details are set out within **Section 3** of this report.

SEA is a formal process used to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before a decision is made to formally adopt the plan or programme. This SEA Screening Report considers the applicability of the SEA Regulations and the NAP ('pre-screening') as a 'plan or programme', presents details of the SEA screening process and ultimately determines whether further assessment is required in respect of the NAP.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared concurrently with this SEA Screening Report. This considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'.

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<sup>1</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

<sup>2</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 200/2011, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/200/made/en/print>

<sup>3</sup> The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the "Regulations"). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).

The structure of this SEA Screening Report is as follows:

- **Section 2: Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach.** This sets out the regulatory context and purpose of the SEA Regulations, along with a summary of the SEA process, focussing on Screening. Reference to SEA Screening guidance is presented;
- **Section 3: Summary of the Wicklow Noise Action Plan 2024 – 2028.** This summarises the NAP with a focus on the content of the NAP that could be applicable to the SEA Regulations;
- **Section 4: Wicklow Environmental Context.** This sets out the geographical context of the NAP and at a high level, environmental considerations proportionate to SEA and considering biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage, and landscape;
- **Section 5: SEA Screening.** Sets out the findings of pre-screening and considers the NAP against the criteria defined by SEA Regulations and guidance. This section also sets out the next steps in respect of consultation; and
- **Section 6: Consultation and Next Steps.**

## 2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Legal Context and Approach

### 2.1 The SEA Regulatory Context

SEA is a systematic process designed to assess likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme before it is formally adopted or implemented.

European Union (EU) Directive 2001/42/EC7 (the 'SEA Directive') requires EU Member States to ensure that certain plans and programmes are subject to a requirement for SEA. In the context of transport sectoral plans, the 'SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations, 2004 (S. I. 435/2004). This legislation has been amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 200/ 2011). For all other sectoral plans, the SEA Directive is transposed into Irish law by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations<sup>4</sup> (S. I. 436/2004), as amended by Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011<sup>5</sup> (S. I. 201/2011). As set out within the EPA Draft Guidance for Noise Action Planning<sup>6</sup>, the NAP is a form of 'Transport' sectoral plan. Therefore, if an SEA is required for NAPs, they would fall under the remit of S.I. 435, as amended, and not S.I. 436 of 2004.

Pre-screening checks have followed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland (2001-DS-EEP-2/5)' – Synthesis Report (Appendix B; SEA Checklist). The SEA process is defined by a series of stages which has been described in Section 2.2.

### 2.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening

#### 2.2.1 Overview

The procedure of undertaking SEA screening is based upon the evaluation of specific criteria in Annex II of the SEA Directive (Schedule 1)<sup>7</sup>.

According to the EPA Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening<sup>8</sup>, the screening process covers three different stages as below:

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<sup>4</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 436/2004, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/436/made/en/print>

<sup>5</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 201/2011, Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2011 (Accessed February 2024) Available at:

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/201/made/en/pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Environmental Protection Agency (2024). DRAFT Guidance Note for Noise Action Planning For the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018, Draft Version 2 (January 2024).

<sup>7</sup> European Union, Directive 2001/42/EC, Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment, as transposed by Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

<sup>8</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA Screening Good Practice 2021 [Accessed February 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-screening-good-practice-2021.php>

- Applicability;
- Screening; and
- Determination.

The core guidance declares that the overall characteristics of the plan should be checked to determine if the plan falls within the overarching requirements of the SEA Directive. This is therefore the first stage of 'Applicability' screening.

Should the first check determine that the plan falls within the requirements of the SEA Directive, further consideration should be made to any potential environmental significance resulting from implementing the plan itself. At this stage, the significance criteria outlined in Annex II (2) of the SEA Directive (Stage 2 'Screening') should be followed.

### 2.2.2 Stage 1 'Applicability' Methodology

The applicability stage of SEA screening consists of a 4-step process as outlined in the EPA Good Practice Guide on Screening (2021). Table 2-1 sets out these stages as below:

**Table 2-1: Stage 1 Applicability Steps**

Applicability Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	Establish and identify the status of the plan to be assessed, or the competent authority compiling the programme.  Is the plan (ie. The NAP) prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level?  Is the plan prepared by a relevant authority for associated adoption through a parliamentary or governmental legislative procedure?
Step 2	Establish the description of the plan or programme.  Is the NAP required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?
Step 3	Determine if the NAP is not exempt from SEA screening.  Is the sole purpose of the NAP for national defence, civil emergency, or finance/budget?
Step 4	Does the NAP require mandatory SEA?  Is the NAP prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecoms, tourism, town and country planning or land use, and does the NAP set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in the Annexes of the EIA Directive?  Or  Will the NAP require assessment under Article 6 or 7 of the EU Habitats directive?

Following this stage of SEA screening, there are three possible outcomes regarding whether the SEA Directive applies in this case:

- The SEA Directive **does not** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is not of a type which falls within the remit of the regulations themselves, and therefore there is no requirement to notify environmental authorities.
- The SEA Directive **does** apply to the NAP – this means that the NAP is of a type that falls within the remit of the regulations and therefore requires mandatory SEA. This then triggers the process of proceeding to SEA scoping and relevant consultation with designated authorities.
- The SEA Directive **may** apply to the NAP – in this scenario, the NAP may be within the remit of the SEA Directive because there is some uncertainty with the provisions considered at Stage 1 screening, therefore a case-by-case determination is required. At this point, the screening would proceed to Stage 2.

### 2.2.3 Stage 2 ‘Screening’ (If Applicable)

If there is potential that the NAP may give rise to significant effects or there is uncertainty on key characteristics, Stage 2 Screening helps to determine if further SEA is required for the NAP. While it is not a mandatory requirement, the production of a screening report has become good practice as part of the overarching process.

Stage 2 is a four-step process as per the EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA Screening Reports. Table 2 below summarises the next steps.

**Table 2-2: Stage 2 Screening Steps**

Screening Step	Step Guidance
Step 1	Describe the features of the NAP and the environment in which it would be received, outlining any environmental challenges.
Step 2	Identify the potential for significant environmental effects.
Step 3	Statutory consultation with designated environmental authorities (a minimum of 4 weeks).
Step 4	Draft determination.

Part of this screening stage includes a screening of environmental significance, to assess whether the plan is likely to result in significant effects and therefore taken forward for SEA. The criteria for undertaking this are embedded into Annex II of the SEA Directive and is transposed into Irish legislation as Schedule 1 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 as amended. The criteria that will be used as part of Section 5 of this report, is outlined in Appendix A1 Stage 2 SEA Screening. The aforementioned EPA’s Good Practice Guidance on SEA and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (2022)<sup>9</sup> have been used to guide this assessment.

At this stage it is required to consult with the relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks (Step 3), after which a draft determination can be prepared (Step 4) and finalised as Stage 3 following the input from consultation.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022). Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities. (Accessed February 2024) Available at: [218356\\_6c57ccf6-3d2b-4c43-b871-1698e7daab5d \(1\).pdf](https://www.doh.gov.ie/sites/default/files/2022-06/218356_6c57ccf6-3d2b-4c43-b871-1698e7daab5d_1.pdf)



### 2.2.4 Stage 3 'Determination'

Following the consultation with the relevant authorities, after the competent authority has made the final decision as to whether SEA applies to the NAP, a summary of the screening should be available for public inspection both digitally and as a hard copy. A copy of the final determination should also be made available to relevant SEA authorities who were consulted during screening.

## 2.3 Appropriate Assessment

It should be noted that concurrently Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening has been undertaken and a report documenting this prepared. AA Screening considers European Directives 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (the 'Habitats directive' and the 'Birds directive', respectively), which are transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011 (S. I. No. 477 of 2011)), the 'Habitat Regulations'. The overarching goal of the Habitat Regulations are to uphold or restore the 'favourable conservation status' of habitats and species recognised as of European Community Interest. These specific habitats and species are outlined in the Habitats and Birds Directives, with the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) aimed at safeguarding the most vulnerable among them. Together, these designations are commonly referred to as European Sites, also known as Natura 2000 sites. Should AA Screening determine that the likely impacts upon a Natura 2000 site of a plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans and considers whether these impacts are likely to be significant, then this will also trigger the requirement of SEA for the plan.

## 3 Wicklow Noise Action Plan 2024-2028

### 3.1 Overview

The Wicklow NAP will replace the current NAP 2018-2023. As required by the END, the NAP seeks to provide a framework for long-term management of environmental noise from transport systems, referring to the results of the strategic noise maps to inform assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise. The temporal framework for the NAP is 5 years<sup>10</sup>, at which time the noise mapping and NAP will be reviewed, and where necessary revised.

As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. The NAP also provides the basis for feedback and input from statutory authorities and the public to help inform the NAP in relation to the assessment and management of environmental noise.

The scope of the NAP includes: the identification of existing noise emissions; PIAs based on an assessment of harmful effects; and details of noise management measures for consideration and evaluation at implementation stage.

The preservation, prevention and mitigation measures included in the NAP, which are applied to areas subject to noise management activities, is also relevant to this assessment. The management of noise within the County of Wicklow focusses on the following approaches:

- **Preservation** – relates to the avoidance of increased exposure to environmental noise where practical, and the preservation of quiet areas.
- **Prevention** – measures which seek to avoid additional measures of the community being exposed to undesirable noise conditions.
- **Mitigation Measures** – relates to the identification and prioritisation of appropriate mitigation measures to reduce and/or mitigate noise levels in areas where they are potentially harmful to human health.

Preservation measures as set out in the NAP includes:

- Consideration of noise impacts at future developments outside of Important Areas and delimited quiet areas, to which measures may be required to manage activities in the context of existing ambient noise levels.

Prevention measures, as set out in the NAP, consist of the following measures:

- Planning guidance - In assessing proposed new residential developments against policies and goals outlined in the relevant Local and County Development Plans, planning applications should be supplemented by an Acoustic Design Statement, if there is the likelihood of an adverse noise impact; and

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<sup>10</sup> The European Commission allowed for one additional year for the Round 4 NAPs, reducing the five-year implementation period to four-years.

- Noise and the public realm - Public spaces should be designed to maximise and maintain good air quality, reduce environmental noise and improve the quality of sound, through measures such as:
  - Use of novel environmentally friendly design methods;
  - Pedestrianisation of streets and the use of green infrastructure;
  - Provision of options for active travel along routes other than beside busy roads;
  - Provision of and protecting tranquil outdoor environmental and positive acoustic environments;
  - Encouragement of exercise and other outdoor recreation to improve health and well-being; and
  - Provision of alternative acoustic interventions to create new positive types of sounds that mask environmental noise.

Mitigation measures, as set out in the NAP, include the identification and implementation of priority important areas. Noise mitigation measures within these areas should be evaluated for their effectiveness through the following steps as set out in the NAP:

- Noise measurements at Priority Important Areas (PIAs) - Surveys will be conducted by/on behalf of WCC at an initial stage to guide the assessment of PIAs, to verify that measured noise exposures accurately correspond to the results obtained from the strategic noise maps;
- Reviewing of the assumptions used to identify the PIAs - If there are any disparities between the noise measurements and the strategic noise maps, investigations will take place into noise factors to then compare within the noise models;
- Re-evaluation of PIAs - This is to ensure that the analysis conducted is representative of the 2021 assessment year, and relevant amendments to the model parameters have been incorporated;
- Identification of practical noise mitigation measures - Practical measures will take into consideration potential impact in terms of noise exposure and harmful effects reduction, planning, land-use cost, and available technology. These noise mitigation measures are collectively described as a noise management framework;
- Appraisal of noise mitigation options monetised benefits to health - An assessment of the identified practical noise mitigation measures, the outcomes of which provide the new present value of the noise level change resulting from the assessed mitigation scheme in Euros;
- Financial assessment of noise mitigation measures - The cost of mitigation implementation will be determined over the lifetime of the intervention, encompassing construction and maintenance expenses;
- Cost-benefit analysis - A cost-benefit ratio will be determined based on a comparison of benefits to health versus the cost of the noise mitigation measure. Ratios of less than 1.0 indicate the benefits to health outweigh the costs; and
- Recommendation of noise mitigation measure(s) - The most cost-effective noise mitigation measures will be proposed in collaboration with Noise Mapping Bodies and appropriate authorities subject to resources and funding.

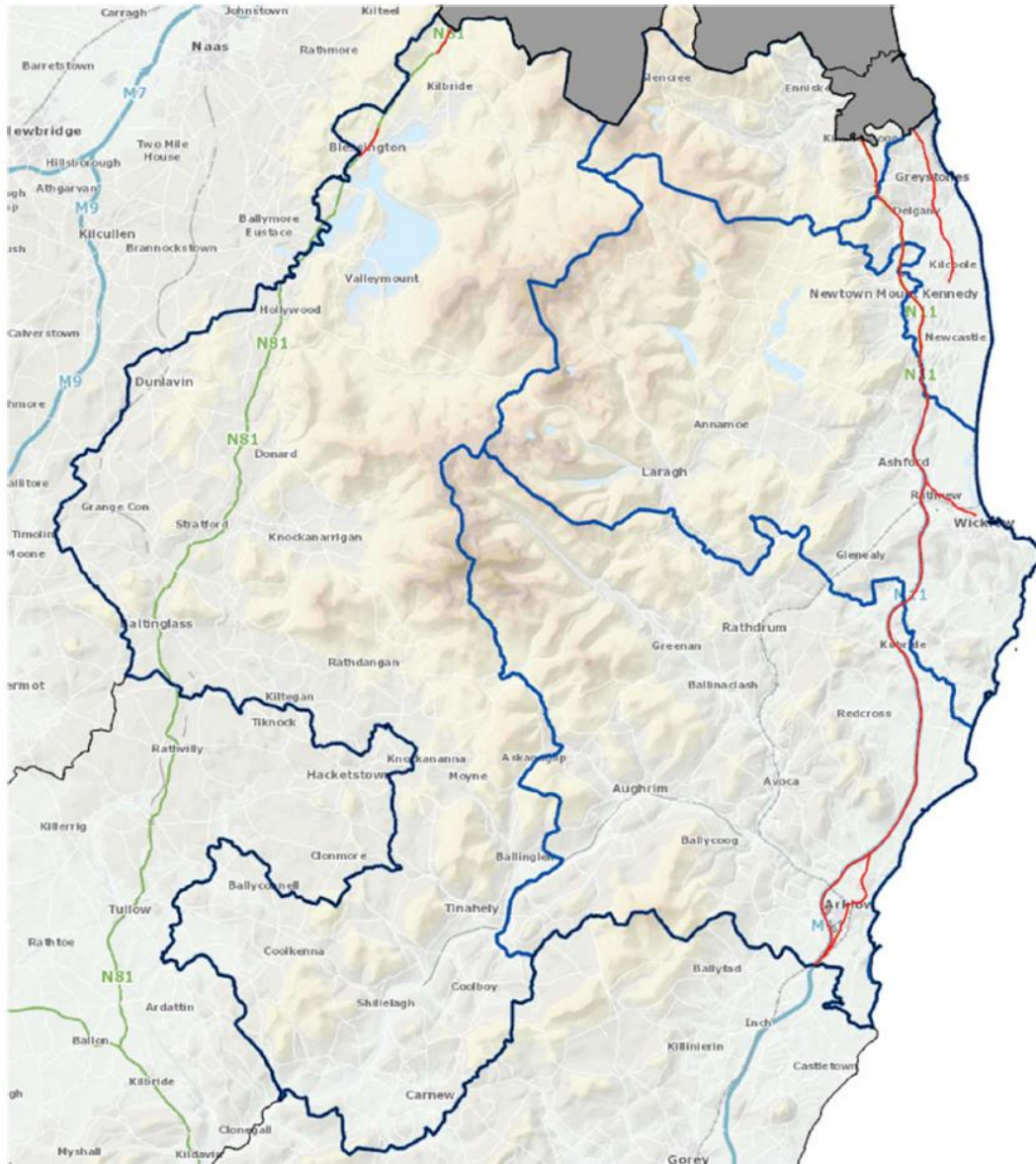
How the NAP identifies areas to be preserved for environmental noise quality, is also relevant to this assessment.

# 4 Wicklow Environmental Context

## 4.1 Context

For the purposes of this study, Wicklow, excluding the Dublin Agglomeration, covers an area of 2,009km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 73,789. The total length of major roads included in the strategic noise maps is 72.2km, as shown in **Figure 4-1**. There are no major railways.

**Figure 4-1 Wicklow Area outside of the Dublin Agglomeration Boundary and Major Roads**



The environmental context of Wicklow has been identified in order to understand the environmental issues, trends and characteristics. Setting this environmental context can inform, if the NAP were to be considered a plan or programme in accordance with the SEA Regulations, what potential significant environmental effects could arise. The environmental context is set out with reference to the environmental issues indicated within the SEA Regulations (biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural

and archaeological heritage, landscape). The information presented is proportionate to the strategic nature of the environmental assessment required and the scale of the NAP itself.

The Dublin Agglomeration incorporates a portion of County Wicklow. For the purposes of this NAP and SEA screening, the part of County Wicklow included in the Dublin Agglomeration is not being considered and has been assessed as part of the Dublin Agglomeration Noise Action Plan and SEA Screening<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4.1.1 Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

The Wicklow baseline for biodiversity can be quantified in terms of the number of designated sites and an indication of the habitats and species across WCC. Government data indicates that there are 8 Special Protection Areas (SPA), 24 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). All areas are designated as Natura 2000 sites, which is an EU-wide network of protected areas covering vulnerable species and habitats, designated under the Birds and Habitats directives<sup>12</sup>. Further details on each protected site and why they are designated, can be found within the accompanying AA Screening of the NAP. There are no Ramsar sites identified across the Wicklow area.

In terms of the identified habitats across the Wicklow area, coastal terrestrial habitats and coastal reefs are present in the east. Large areas of heath and bog are present in central/ northern areas, as well as dispersed areas of Ancient Woodland and Woodland habitats along the eastern side of the Wicklow area. In terms of identified species within the Wicklow area, there are a wide variety of species present. There are records of otters and desmoulin's whorl snail in coastal areas and highland mammals including pine marten and mountain hare in central areas<sup>13</sup>. Arthropods such as marsh fritillary are found in central and southern areas, and white-clawed crayfish are recorded in northwestern areas. Amphibians including the common frog, and non-vascular plants such as the white cushion moss are widely distributed across the Wicklow area. Article 6 of the Habitats directive obligates Ireland to maintain and/or restore natural habitats and species of wild fauna and flora.

The National Biodiversity Action Plan<sup>14</sup> aims to meet urgent conservation and restoration needs for habitats and species in Ireland.

#### 4.1.2 Population and Noise

The focus of the Wicklow baseline for population and noise is with regard to the number of people affected by noise. Assessment within the Wicklow NAP suggests 5.16% of the population were classed as Highly Annoyed (HA) by noise with 1.56% of the population classed as Highly Sleep Disturbed (HSD). The population of Wicklow is likely to be at risk of annoyance or sleep disturbance from road traffic noise only as there is no major railway in Wicklow outside the Dublin Agglomeration. While variations between regions can present a different picture, from a national perspective approximately 10.3% of people in Ireland consider their health to either be fair, bad, or very bad<sup>15</sup>. In terms of the population who are affected by ambient noise, national figures suggest that as of 2017, approximately 950,200

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<sup>11</sup> Dublin City Council, Dublin Agglomeration Noise Action Plan 2024-2028 Consultation [Accessed August 2024] available at: <https://consultation.dublincity.ie/environment/dublin-agglomeration-noise-action-plan-2024-2028/>

<sup>12</sup> European Environment Agency, The Natura 2000 protected areas network [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/biodiversity/natura-2000#:~:text=Natura%202000%20is%20a%20network,on%20land%20and%20at%20sea.>

<sup>13</sup> EU Habitats Directive, Annex Species Article Report 2019 – Terrestrial Species [Accessed July 2024] <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/1a721520030d404f899d658d5b6e159a?item=2>

<sup>14</sup> National Parks & Wildlife Service, National Biodiversity Action Plan [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan>

<sup>15</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 – Summary Results, General Health [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/>

people across Ireland were directly exposed to high levels of noise above 55dB, from noise sources including road, rail, and air<sup>16</sup>. Noise levels can be concentrated into specific areas depending on receptors, perhaps making it difficult to positively affect change. While the data shows that there is a downward trend from 2018 onwards, 1,891 noise complaints were received by local authorities in 2019, which perhaps indicates the public concern over noise<sup>17</sup>.

### 4.1.3 Water and Soils

The Wicklow baseline for water and soils can generally be described in terms of soil status, underlying geology and Water Framework Directive (WFD) status.

In terms of its underlying geology, the Wicklow area, is a mixture of bedrock, mainly comprising of Siluro-Devonian granite rocks and appinite and Lower-middle Ordovician slate, sandstone, greywacke, conglomerate, according to the GSI bedrock data<sup>18</sup>. Large areas of Cambrian greywacke, slate and quartzite is located in the northeast of the Wicklow area, Silurian deep marine mudstone, greywacke and conglomerate in the west, and Middle-Upper Ordovician slate, sandstone, greywacke, conglomerate in the south. Small areas of Ordovician volcanic rocks, Palaeogene granitic rocks, Serpentinite and sedimentary melange (Palaeozoic) and Tournaisian sandstone, mudstone and limestone are also found in the Wicklow area.

Wicklow's underlying soils are comprised mainly of sandstone and shale till and limestone sands and gravels in central and eastern areas, as well as peat and alluvium in central and southern areas. General trends indicate that peatland is declining across Ireland, with the National Peatlands Strategy set up to protect and restore specific sites across the country<sup>19</sup>. The WFD purpose is to quantify water quality status, bathing water quality, protected areas, and groundwater vulnerability across Ireland. Within the Wicklow boundary, there are 15 WFD waterbodies classified as having poor ecological status<sup>20</sup> (2016-2021). There are several WFD protected areas within County Wicklow, and there is also differentiated areas in terms of groundwater vulnerability, with low vulnerability in coastal areas and large areas of High and Extreme vulnerability as well as small pockets Moderate vulnerability across the Wicklow area.

### 4.1.4 Air Quality

The Wicklow baseline for air quality can be quantified in terms of emissions levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> and NO<sub>2</sub>. In terms of both, EU legal air quality limits were met in 2022<sup>21</sup>. Ireland is moving towards measuring their performance regarding these emissions to a more stringent air quality guideline set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) rather than the EU. Latest modelled maps for PM<sub>2.5</sub> show European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (EMEP) annual averages across WCC range from <2.0 in the west to between 6.0-7.0 in Wicklow city centre<sup>22</sup>. Burning solid fuels in homes remains a key issue to

<sup>16</sup> European Environment Agency, Ireland noise fact sheet 2021, Number of people exposed to high noise levels – Ireland [Accessed July 2024] available at:

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/human/noise/noise-fact-sheets/noise-country-fact-sheets-2021/ireland>

<sup>17</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Noise Complaints [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/noise/environmental-noise-complaints/>

<sup>18</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>19</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service, National Peatlands Strategy [Accessed July 2024] <https://www.npws.ie/peatlands-and-turf-cutting/peatlands-council/national-peatlands-strategy>

<sup>20</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, SEA GIS Report [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA>

<sup>21</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Air [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/environment-and-you/air/>

<sup>22</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Air [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/air/air-quality-in-ireland-2022.php>

reduce PM2.5 emissions across the WCC and indeed Ireland. In terms of NO<sub>2</sub>, latest modelled maps for NO<sub>2</sub> show EMEP annual averages across WCC range from <2.5 in the west, to 12.5-15 around the M11<sup>23</sup>. NO<sub>2</sub> emissions are mainly derived from road traffic, which is a key barrier to the reduction of these emissions generally albeit the growing trend of vehicles being powered by non-fossil fuel means, is and will continue to benefit air quality.

#### 4.1.5 Climatic Factors

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions data is not defined for the Wicklow area and so national emissions are considered. In 2022, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions across Ireland were estimated to be 60.76Mt CO<sub>2</sub> eq<sup>24</sup>. This figure is 1.9% lower than the previous yearly data and is contextualised by the EU target to reduce emissions outside of the EU ETS scheme by 30% by 2030<sup>25</sup>.

#### 4.1.6 Material Assets

The Wicklow baseline for material assets can be described in terms of the rate of housebuilding in the area as well as the number of vacant properties. In terms of housebuilding, across Ireland there was an overarching target to build 29,000 new units in 2023<sup>26</sup>. This target was exceeded, with approximately 32,695 units built across Ireland. More specific data on vacant properties within the WCC suggests that there are approximately 3,334 properties vacant in 2022<sup>27</sup>. This baseline information is set against the Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, which aims to provide every citizen with good quality homes through various interventions and investments<sup>28</sup>.

#### 4.1.7 Cultural Heritage

The Wicklow cultural heritage baseline indicates that there are many national heritage areas, sites, and monuments across the area. For example, there are thousands of specific sites and monuments of cultural interest, with approximately 3,425 Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) and approximately 1,293 National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) records within Wicklow<sup>29</sup>. Generally, sites are mainly concentrated in urban areas. As part of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, there is a requirement to compile and maintain a Record of Protected Structures (RPS) under the

<sup>23</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, Air [Accessed July 2024] available at:

<https://www.epa.ie/publications/monitoring--assessment/air/air-quality-in-ireland-2022.php>

<sup>24</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's 2022 Greenhouse Gas Emissions show a welcome decrease, but much work remains to be done" [Accessed July 2024] available at:

[https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/irelands-2022-greenhouse-gas-emissions-show-a-welcome-decrease-but-much-work-remains-to-be-done.php#:~:text=Provisional%20national%20total%20emissions%20\(including,EU%20and%20UN%20in%202024.](https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/irelands-2022-greenhouse-gas-emissions-show-a-welcome-decrease-but-much-work-remains-to-be-done.php#:~:text=Provisional%20national%20total%20emissions%20(including,EU%20and%20UN%20in%202024.)

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, Climate Action, Effort sharing 2021-2030: targets and flexibilities [Accessed July 2024] available at: [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets/effort-sharing-2021-2030-targets-and-flexibilities\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/effort-sharing-member-states-emission-targets/effort-sharing-2021-2030-targets-and-flexibilities_en)

<sup>26</sup> Government of Ireland, Housing for All Q4 2023 Progress Report [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://assets.gov.ie/281768/bba967b9-80b9-4e5a-a876-d0239c805883.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census of Population 2022 Profile 2 – housing in Ireland [Accessed July 2024] Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp2/censusofpopulation2022profile2-housinginireland/vacantdwelling/#:~:text=Vacancy%20by%20Dwelling%20Type%20and,fell%20by%207%25%20from%20140%2C120.>

<sup>28</sup> Gov.ie, Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023-2026, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/df86c-vacant-homes-action-plan-2023-2026/>

<sup>29</sup> National Monuments Service, Historic Environment Viewer [Accessed March 2024] available at <https://www.archaeology.ie/archaeological-survey-ireland/historic-environment-viewer-application>



Planning Act 2000 (as amended)<sup>30</sup>. RPS includes hundreds<sup>31</sup> of structures which are of special architectural interest across in WCC. Across Ireland, key environmental issues such as land use change and climate change may have a long-term impact upon the cultural heritage baseline, due to the loss of heritage landscapes from human interventions, and increased biodiversity degradation which may have physical impacts on heritage assets across Ireland. Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out a framework to focus on protecting and managing Ireland's heritage assets<sup>32</sup>.

#### 4.1.8 Landscape

The Wicklow landscape baseline is largely comprised of peat bogs, transitional woodland scrub, coniferous forest, broad leaved forest, moors and heaths, as well as pockets of non-irrigated land, pasture and complex cultivation patterns. Additionally, areas of Discontinuous urban fabric are located in pockets along the coast and inland.

The National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) is a key driver for landscape targets in Ireland and Wicklow. The National Landscape Strategy for example, sets out to implement the European Landscape Convention to integrate landscape into the country's approach to sustainable development<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, Volume 3 – Appendix 4 - Record of Protected Structures [Accessed July 2024] available at <https://www.wicklow.ie/Portals/0/adam/Documents/MoMfuJJOq026cnaKftRt8w/Link/Appendix%204%20-%20Record%20of%20Protected%20Structures.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> No precise figure is available

<sup>32</sup> Gov.ie, Heritage Ireland 2030, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/778b8-heritage-ireland-2030/>

<sup>33</sup> Gov.ie, National Landscape Strategy, Department of Housing, Local government and Heritage [Accessed July 2024] available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/8a59b-national-landscape-strategy/>

## 5 SEA Screening

### 5.1 Stage 1 – SEA ‘Applicability’

#### 5.1.1 Is the P/P prepared and/or adopted by an authority at national, regional, or local level or prepared by an authority for adoption through a legislative procedure by Parliament or Government?

**Yes.** The NAP is prepared and then will be adopted at a regional level by the Action Planning Authority, Wicklow County Council (WCC).

#### 5.1.2 Is the P/P required by legislative, regulatory, or administrative provisions?

**Yes.** The NAP is required by The Environmental Noise Directive (“END”) (2002/49/EC). A European Union legal instrument vital for protecting public health and the environment by addressing the adverse effects of environmental noise. The END was transposed into Irish Law by the Environmental Noise Regulations 2006 (S.I. 140/2006) (the “Regulations”). The Regulations were revised by the European Communities (Environmental Noise) Regulations 2018 (S.I. 549/2018) and amended through the European Communities (Environmental Noise) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (S.I. 663/2021).

#### 5.1.3 Is the P/P prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism, town and country planning or land use?

**Yes.** The NAP is being prepared for the transportation sector. Noise issues and interventions may have relevance for other sectors but is being prepared in the context of planning and land use.

#### 5.1.4 Does the P/P provide a framework for the development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive?

According to the European Commission ‘Guidance on the implementation of Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment,’ this would “normally mean that the plan or programme contains criteria or conditions which guide the way the consenting authority decides an application for development consent. Such criteria could place limits on the type of activity or development which is to be permitted in a given area; or they could contain conditions which must be met by the applicant if permission is to be granted; or they could be designed to preserve certain characteristics of the area concerned (such as the mixture of land uses which promotes the economic vitality of the area).”

The NAP does **potentially** set a locational framework for interventions within identified Priority Important Areas in regard to noise, but due to its high level of intervention recommendations, it does not therefore provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive.

#### 5.1.5 Is the P/P likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site which leads to a requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments?

**No.** The NAP is a strategic-level document which is designed to provide direction for action through the designation of strategic priority areas to preserve low noise levels and reduce areas where noise disturbance is high. The NAP does however locate where potential interventions (including mitigation and prevention measures) could take place, which may correlate with Natura 2000 sites. However, as outlined in the Appropriate Assessment Screening Statement, the NAPs elements are not identified as having any direct or indirect impact on Natura 2000 sites. Therefore, there are no predicted likely

significant effects upon the identified Natura 2000 sites and no requirement for Article 6 or 7 assessments.

#### 5.1.6 **Is the sole purpose of the P/P to serve national defence or civil emergency or is it a financial/budget P/P or is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme?**

**No.** The NAP's sole purpose is not to serve national defence or civil emergency nor is it a financial/budget P/P nor is it co-financed by the current SF/RDF programme.

### 5.2 **Outcome of Stage Applicability**

The pre-screening checks as set out in **Section 5.1**, indicate that the NAP is not a plan or programme to which the SEA applies, as the NAP does not provide a framework for development consent for projects listed in the EIA Directive (see **Section 5.1.4**). However, for completeness the NAP was assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states '*A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (...) are likely to have significant effects on the environment*'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations (Stage 2 as follows).

### 5.3 **Stage 2 – SEA 'Screening'**

As the Wicklow NAP does not provide a framework for development consent nor will it have a significant effect upon a Natura 2000 site (assessed through the categories established within the Stage 1 criteria), it is concluded that an SEA is not required. However, the NAP has been assessed further in relation to criteria 9(3) which states '*A competent authority shall determine whether plans and programmes (...) are likely to have significant effects on the environment*'. This is established by criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA regulations<sup>34</sup>. A table detailing the Stage 2 SEA screening of significance, is presented in Appendix A1 of this report.

### 5.4 **Outcome of Stage 2 Screening (Steps 1 and 2)**

The Stage 2 Screening of the Wicklow NAP, as detailed in Appendix A1, determines that no further SEA is required. It has been determined that the NAP will operate at a high level and therefore a full SEA would not be proportionate relative to the NAP itself. The NAP does not satisfy the conditions for mandatory SEA under S.I. 435/2004.

This report will now be sent as part of a request for consultation with the environmental authorities (Step 3).

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<sup>34</sup> Irish Statute Book, S.I. 435/2004, European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Accessed February 2024) Available at: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2004/si/435/made/en/print#article1>

## 6 Consultation and Next Steps

Step 3 of Stage 2 of SEA Screening indicates there is a specific requirement to consult with relevant environmental authorities for a minimum of 4 weeks, regarding the outcomes of the SEA screening report. These authorities are:

- Environmental Protection Agency
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Development Application Unit
- Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous

Following consultation, an SEA Screening Statement (Stage 3: Determination) can be prepared by the competent authority to be appended to the SEA screening report. This Screening Statement should be made publicly available upon determination.

# A1 Stage 2 SEA Screening

Table A-1 and A-2 set out the SEA criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive (Steps 1 and 2 of Stage 2: SEA Screening).

**Table A-1: Stage 2 Screening Table- The characteristics of plans and programmes**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Wicklow NAP
1. The characteristics of plans and programmes, having regard, in particular, to	
<p>-the degree to which the plan or programme sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources</p>	<p>The primary objective of the NAP is aimed at the long-term management of environmental noise and is based on the results of the strategic noise maps which informed assessments of population exposure and harmful effects of noise.</p> <p>Therefore, the mapping and the results of exposure assessments do not represent a framework. However, the NAP does set out principles and locational allocation of PIAs, along with mitigation which could constitute a plan or programme depending on their scale, nature and details of the mitigation.</p> <p>Where mitigation is set out in the NAP for Priority Important Areas these are suggested approaches and not site specific, they do not set out operating conditions or allocate resources. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives specific change is limited and therefore not significant.</p> <p>As there is no provision in legislation upon which the actions outlined in the NAP can be enforced, reliance will be made on various other plans and policies such as the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, the National Planning Framework 2040, and the Planning Acts, for their implementation. Therefore, the degree to which the NAP drives other activities, is not significant.</p>
<p>-the degree to which the plan or programme influences other plans and programmes including those in a hierarchy</p>	<p>The degree to which the NAP influences other plans and programmes is deemed to be minimal. It can be argued that the NAP sits within a horizontal hierarchy. The NAP refers to and relies upon other adopted or emerging plans, policies and programs rather than defining others specifically. The NAP does not require new plans or policies to be created to help implement its key aims. Therefore, there are no new environmental effects as they already have been considered in the assessment of other plans and policies themselves. For example, as part of the Eastern &amp; Midland Regional Assembly – Regional Spatial &amp; Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031, an SEA was produced at draft stage to assess at a strategic level, the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the draft strategy.</p>

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Wicklow NAP
<p>-the relevance of the plan or programme for -the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development</p>	<p>The Wicklow NAP promotes environmental considerations and sustainable development, through the identification of noise-related issues in the Wicklow area. However, the NAP does not go as far as recommending specific actions to deliver sustainable development within the Wicklow area. The provision of Priority Important Areas should make decision-makers aware of noise issues and should supplement other initiatives indirectly. Therefore, the NAP does not go against the principles of sustainable development, but it also does not have a direct influence over its integration. Therefore, the relevance of the NAP against this metric is deemed to be not significant.</p>
<p>-environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme</p>	<p>The NAP directly addresses environmental noise within the Wicklow area and sets out clear priorities based on detailed noise mapping results, with a view to preventing environmental noise where necessary; particularly where exposure to noise levels can induce harmful effects on human health.</p> <p>Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health. In SEA terms it is not deemed that, when considered against other environmental conditions and problems, the Wicklow NAP (as set out within Section 4) would give rise to significant environmental effects on account of the high level and strategic nature of the mitigation set out in the NAP. This is also on account of the reliance upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA.</p>
<p>-the relevance of the plan or programme for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans and programmes linked to waste-management or water protection)</p>	<p>The requirement to prepare a NAP is set for members of the European Union under the Environmental Noise Directive (END) (2002/49/EC), a legal instrument for addressing adverse effects of environmental noise which have been transposed into Irish law and require preparation of strategic noise mapping and implementation of NAPs. Therefore, the NAP must be consistent with the implementation of this EU Directive which is directly related to the protection of the environment and human health.</p>

**Table A-2: Stage 2 Screening Table- Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected**

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Wicklow NAP
2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to	
-The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects	The measures within the NAP aim to have an overall positive effect on noise levels, and consequently human health and the environment in the long term. The mitigation set out is high level and strategic. Consequentially, details that would identify duration, frequency and reversibility of effects are not available. Furthermore, there is a reliance in the NAP placed upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development.
-The cumulative nature of the effects	The Wicklow NAP is prepared alongside other national plans and programmes to act in conformity with the suite of measures that they identify. The environmental impact of those measures will be evaluated within the plans themselves, some of which will be subject to mandatory SEA and AA. Therefore, because this NAP is not in direct conflict with the external overarching aims, the NAP itself is unlikely to have resulting significant effects and therefore cannot be cumulative in nature.
-The transboundary nature of the effects	On account of the scale and nature of the NAP, and the high-level strategic nature of the mitigation presented, the Wicklow NAP will have no direct transboundary effects of its own account.
-The risks to human health of the environment (e.g. due to accidents)	There are no expected risks to human health or the environment because of the NAP. Overall, the NAP seeks to manage the risk of additional members of the community being exposed to undesirable noise levels where they would have an adverse effect to health.
-The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)	The Wicklow NAP covers an area of 2,009km <sup>2</sup> , with a population of 73,789. The population that is directly affected or considered as part of the NAP's aims (the implementation of important areas) is however considered to be at the local level. For example, there are approximately 1,623 people within the six identified Priority Important Areas within Wicklow. On this basis and considering the strategic nature of the NAP mitigation, the environmental effects are not considered to be significant because they are strategic.
-The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:  Special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage;	Where areas identified within the Wicklow NAP coincide with areas of special natural characteristics, or cultural heritage, owing to the reliance the NAP places upon existing or emerging plans and policies that are already or will be considered in respect of SEA, or other environmental instruments linked to infrastructure development, it is unlikely

Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive	Wicklow NAP
Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values; or Intensive land use	<p>a significant effect would arise. This also applies to intensive land use.</p> <p>In respect of exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, through its noise management framework, will aim to manage noise levels across County Wicklow generally, prevent impacts of adverse noise upon new developments and thus additional members of the community, and mitigate where practicable through management measures in PIAs and across County Wicklow.</p>
-The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status	<p>The Wicklow NAP covers an area which includes 8 SPA and 24 SAC sites, which are sites with national and EU protection status regarding flora, fauna, species, and habitats. Measures included in the NAP are not likely to have specific geographic relevance because there is no MIA or PIA which overlap with the geographic extent of the identified SPA and SAC sites. Therefore, the NAP and its subsequent interventions may not necessarily lead to positive effects on protected sites. It should be noted that the factors to which SAC and SPA sites are designated for, do not necessarily correlate with changing noise levels. In summary, the Wicklow NAP is not considered to have a significant effect upon recognised protected sites within the County. This is consistent with the findings of the AA Screening Report.</p>
Section 5: Summary and Conclusion	
<p>In terms of setting a framework, the Wicklow NAP does in one sense set out a locational framework for noise, but it is however limited in terms of scale and does not necessarily drive specific changes or actions at a site-specific level which would be undertaken separately.</p> <p>It should also be noted that the NAP will have a minimal influence on other plans and programmes within Wicklow. The NAP is inherently a plan which promotes environmental best practice, but it does not influence the implementation of sustainable development principles.</p> <p>There are several designated sites across Wicklow and various social, economic, and environmental factors which indicate a diverse geographic area. The NAP is also relevant in the context of EU Directive implementation and must be consistent with these relevant directions.</p> <p>In terms of the characteristics of effects, the NAP is a strategy which should not have any transboundary effects of its own accord, nor bring any expected human health or environmental risks because of its implementation. The NAP is also unlikely to be cumulative in nature because it should be implemented in compliance with other plans and programmes that have been stress tested by the SEA process. The NAP's interventions, and thereby the vulnerability and value of the area likely to be affected by the NAP, are relatively localised. The effects of the NAP upon national, EU or internationally protected sites is not significant because the areas to which the NAP identifies for interventions are mostly not corresponding to protected sites within WCC.</p> <p>To conclude, this stage of the SEA screening process determines that the Wicklow NAP does not require further SEA.</p>	
Section 6: Statutory Consultation	



<b>Criteria for determining the likely significance of effects referred to in Article 3(5) of the SEA Directive</b>	<b>Wicklow NAP</b>
<p>The following statutory and non-statutory bodies will be consulted with through the SEA screening process. Following this consultation, updates will be made to summarise the issues raised by those consulted, and how this has influenced the final screening determination.</p> <p>The SEA environmental authorities according to the regulations are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Protection Agency;</li> <li>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine;</li> <li>Department of Environment, Climate and Communications;</li> <li>Development Applications Unit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage;</li> <li>Any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of the planning authority.</li> </ul>	