



Our Ref: 5162555CO44

Vincent O'Malley
Transport Infrastructure Ireland



17th June 2021

By email to: [Redacted]

Re. Submission of Natura Impact Statement pursuant to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media pursuant to the requirements of Regulation 49(9)(c) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended)

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

Further to the submission of a Natura Impact Statement relating to works proposed to be undertaken a part of TO270 – Munster Term Maintenance Contract No 3 correspondence was received from Gerry Clabby, Head of Ecological Assessment, National Parks and Wildlife Service dated 18th May 2021.

Matters related to Appropriate Assessment

Point 1 – Biosecurity to prevent spread of crayfish plague

Biosecurity protocols shall be implemented during the construction phase of the proposed project to prevent the introduction of all invasive species, including those listed on the third schedule of the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, to site and the further spread of diseases. In addition to the consideration of invasive species, particular attention will also be given to the prevention of spread of crayfish plague spores. The following biosecurity measures will be adopted: -

1. All equipment intended to be used at the site shall be dry, clean and free from debris prior to being brought to site.
2. Prior to being brought on site, equipment should be : -
 - i. power steam washed at a suitably high temperature or at least 65 degrees, or
 - ii. disinfected with an approved disinfectant, e.g. Virkon or an iodine-based product. It is important that the manufacturer's instructions are followed and if required, the correct contact times are allowed for during the disinfection process. Items that are difficult to soak should be sprayed or wiped down with disinfectant.
3. During the duration of the proposed project, if equipment is removed off-site to be used elsewhere, the said equipment shall be cleaned and disinfected prior to being brought back to the works area of the proposed project.
4. Appropriate facilities shall be used for the containment, collection and disposal of material and/or water resulting from washing facilities of vehicles, equipment and personnel.



5. Importation of materials shall comply with Regulation 49 of the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

A pre-construction invasive species survey will be conducted prior to the commencement of works on site. If invasive species are recorded, the invasive species shall be fenced off using a 7m buffer from the outermost edges of the invasive species plant(s).

The current list of watercourses where crayfish plague has been recorded can be viewed at the National Biodiversity Data Centre webpage at - <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/projects/invasive-species/crayfish-plague/>.

Point 2 – Otter

“Otters are a qualifying interest of a number of the European sites relevant to the project and where this arises this matter must be addressed in the appropriate assessment. Where survey work indicates the presence of otter, mitigation measures should be in place to ensure no damage or disturbance of otter breeding sites or resting places occurs. Such assessment and any necessary mitigation measures should be set out in the NIS or in an addendum to it.”

Response

Atkins have reviewed again the list of Structures within the Munster Bridges Year 3 NIS to determine which structures are located on watercourses where Otter is a qualifying interest of a European site.

A summary is presented in Table 1. This is informed by an review of site location, site photographs and site survey reports, such as bat surveys undertaken in 2020. In the case of bats surveys the surveyor also looked for signs of other fauna such as nesting birds and otter at all bridges surveyed. The findings at each location are summarised.





In all cases due to the time elapsed from preparation of the NIS and mobilisation of the Contractor, a pre-construction survey will be undertaken. Tas set out in the Contract, this will be undertaken by the Contractor’s ecologist.







Table 1 Review of Structures with respect to Otter.

Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
Crossterry Bridge (CC-N71-002.00)	Glengarriff Harbour & Woodland SAC	Bat survey 2020		No signs of Otter noted in bat report. Site photographs etc. reviewed in full – no signs of conditions suitable for an otter holt with ca. 10m of bridge.
Reenmeen Bridge (CC-N71-003.00)	Glengarriff Harbour & Woodland SAC	Not surveyed.		Tidal structure. Not a suitable location for an otter holt.
Duncannon Bridge (CC-N72-001.00)	Blackwater River SAC	Not surveyed.		Site photographs etc. reviewed in full – no signs of conditions suitable for an otter holt with ca. 10m of bridge.



Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
Carrig Bridge (CC-N72-027.00)	Blackwater River SAC	Bat survey 2020; FWPM survey 2020		<p>Otter spraints on rock at downstream face of the bridge.</p> <p>Site photographs reviewed in full – no signs of conditions suitable for an otter holt with ca. 10m of bridge.</p>
Ballynamona Bridge (CC-N73-005.00)	Blackwater River SAC	Not surveyed.		<p>River banks flanked by GA1; narrow fringe of trees. Farm complex close to upstream side. Suitable locations for holt in woodland upstream of the site. No signs of conditions suitable for an otter holt with ca. 10m of bridge.</p>
Listowel Bridge (KY-N69-017.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC	Bat survey 2020; FWPM survey 2020		<p>No signs of Otter noted in bat report.</p> <p>Extensive structure. Preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS.</p>
River Galey Bridge (KY-N69-020.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC	Bat survey 2020		<p>During the bat survey an otter trail was recorded on the southern side of the bridge.</p> <p>Preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS.</p>

Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
				
Galey Bridge Culvert (KY-N69-021.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC	Not surveyed.		Small culvert. Bankside vegetation is mainly GA1; close to farmyard and housing. Not a suitable location for an otter holt.
Laune Bridge (KY-N70-012.00)	Castlemaine Harbour SAC	Bat survey 2020		Very large structure located within urban Killorglin. No information on Otter included in bat report. Preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS.
Caragh Bridge (KY-N70-015.00)	Castlemaine Harbour SAC	Bat survey 2020		<p>No signs of Otter noted in bat report.</p> <p>As suitable habitat / covers present close to the bridge a preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS.</p>

Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
Kilnabrack Upper Bridge (KY-N70-019.00)	Castlemaine Harbour SAC	Bat survey 2020		<p>A low / bridge culvert.</p> <p>No information on Otter included in bat report.</p> <p>Preconstruction survey required.</p>
Assroe Bridge (KY-N70-056.00)	Kenmare River SAC ca. 200m d/s of bridge	Bat survey 2020		<p>A clump of otter hair was noted on a rock at the upstream face.</p> <p>A large area of woodland is located upstream of the bridge. A preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS & to check tree cover on upstream side of the bridge.</p>
The Red Bridge (KY-N86-014.00)	Tralee Bay & Magharees Peninsula, West To Cloghane SAC ca. 250m d/s of bridge	Bat survey 2020		<p>No information on Otter included in bat report.</p> <p>Adjoined by a garden on roadside; farmland on other side. No suitable habitat for holting.</p>

Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
Rincullia Bridge (LC-N69-005.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC	Bat survey 2020		<p>Otter spraint recorded at the downstream face. While the immediate environs shown does not appear suitable for holting, a preconstruction survey is required to account for potential changes since preparation of the NIS & to check tree cover on other side.</p>
Ferry Bridge (LC-N69-011.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC	Bat survey 2020		<p>No signs of Otter noted in bat report.</p> <p>Immediate environs of the bridge does not provide suitable cover for holting.</p>
Lisdeen Bridge (CL-N67-007.00)	Lower River Shannon SAC ca. 800km d/s	Not surveyed.		<p>Based upon a review of recent photographs the immediate environs of the bridge does not provide suitable opportunities for otter holting.</p>

Bridge	Within	Field Surveys undertaken by an Ecologist in 2020	Photo (showing both upstream & downstream)	Information from bat survey
				



Point 3 – Strictly Protected Species

“The Department’s comments with respect to Regulation 51 of the 2011 Birds and Habitats Regulations prohibits the damaging or destruction of a breeding site or resting place referred to in Part 1 of the First Schedule, otherwise known as strictly protected species (species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive). Of particular relevance to this project are strictly protected species such as otter and all bat species.”

Otter. *Please refer to comments on Otter above.”*

In the case of **bats**, each year bridges to be repaired are assessed for the potential to negatively impact upon bats. For example, all masonry bridges where masonry repair works are called up are assessed and where appropriate a bat specialist is procured to survey these structures to check whether they support roosting bats. The results will inform what works can be undertaken and whether e.g. a derogation licence application needs to be submitted to the Department. Copies of bat survey reports can be provided to the Department if deemed appropriate. The appointed Contractor has an ecologist on their team who has extensive experience in bat survey and ecology (Dr. Caroline Shiel). Dr. Shiel co-ordinates any preconstruction checks called up in the bat reports; oversees any mitigation measures required and also oversees the application for derogation licence(s) as appropriate.

Point 4 – Nature Conservation

“Masonry bridges are a valuable habitat for a myriad of saxicolous vascular, bryophyte and lichen species.”

It is confirmed that under the Contract that only lime mortar is to be used for repointing, grouting etc. (as per TII guidelines as stated).

We agree with Department’s comments that the *“Removal of vegetation from the bridge surface, parapets and embankments”, should be carried out judiciously so as to avoid the wholesale removal of small vascular plants, bryophytes and lichens – their removal should be deemed necessary only for imperative reasons of engineering integrity.*” These concerns have been communicated to TII with a view to exploring how the need to protect *saxicolous vascular, bryophyte and lichen species* can be integrated into the need to protect a bridge from damage and structural deterioration.

A similar approach to the protection of bats is taken to nesting birds, notably species such as Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), which is Red listed in Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI); this species as well as Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*); Pied Wagtail (*M. alba*), and Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) all can nest under bridges or within neighbouring riverbanks. Other species considered include Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) (Annex I species under the EU Birds Directive and Amber-listed BoCCI) which breed in vertical sand / clay river banks. It is a requirement of the Contractor that any nests identified are protected.



Additional Information

Further to correspondence from NPWS, we note NPWS have requested that the regional ecologist (Dr Jervis Good) could be notified two weeks prior to works commencing on the Caragh Bridge (KY-N70-015.00), Co. Kerry.

Yours sincerely



Paul O'Donoghue
Associate Director / Ecologist

