

# APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CONCLUSION STATEMENT

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FOR THE

## DINGLE PENINSULA VISITOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

**for:**

**Fáilte Ireland**

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Dublin 1



**Fáilte Ireland**

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# Section 1 Introduction and Background

## 1.1 Introduction

This is the Appropriate Assessment (AA) Conclusion Statement for the the Dingle Peninsula Visitor Experience Development Plan. The obligation to undertake AA derives from Article 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC as transposed into Irish legislation by, inter alia, the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended. AA is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of a strategic action (such as a plan or programme) or project, alone and in combination with other strategic actions and projects, on the integrity of any European Site in view of its conservation objectives. This AA Conclusion Statement should be read in conjunction with the Plan and associated documents including the AA Natura Impact Statement (NIS).

## 1.2 Legislative Requirements in relation to AA

In carrying out the AA for the Plan, Regulation 42 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended), as amended, requires, inter alia, that Fáilte Ireland considers the matters arrayed in the first column on Table 1.1 below. The second column identifies how these issues have been addressed.

**Table 1.1 Matters taken into account by the AA**

Matter specified by the Regulations	How addressed by AA
(a) the Natura Impact Statement	An AA NIS accompanies this AA Conclusion Statement and the Plan
(b) any other plans or projects that may, in combination with the plan or project under consideration, adversely affect the integrity of a European Site	Throughout the AA NIS, particularly Sections 3.4, 4 and 6 and Appendix II of the NIS.
(c) any supplemental information furnished in relation to any such report or statement	This AA Conclusion Statement supplements the NIS that provides additional detail on European Sites.
(d) if appropriate, any additional information sought by the authority and furnished by the applicant in relation to a Natura Impact Report	A part of one submission made during the Plan preparation process that was relevant to the AA. This submission was made by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping consultations. The AA process has taken into account this submission – see Section 2 of this Statement.
(e) any information or advice obtained by the public authority	
(f) if appropriate, any written submissions or observations made to the public authority in relation to the application for consent for proposed plan or project	
(g) any other relevant information	

In addition to the above, the Regulations require that Fáilte Ireland makes available for inspection a determination regarding the outcome of the assessment with respect to whether or not the Plan would adversely affect the integrity of a European site (a copy of this determination is provided at Section 4).

## 1.3 AA Conclusion Statement

Non-Statutory AA guidance (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009) states that (Section 4.14) it *"is recommended that planning authorities include a clear and discrete AA Conclusion Statement as a distinct section in the written statement of the plan separate to the SEA statement."* This guidance recommends that the following issues are addressed by the AA Conclusion Statement:

- Summary of how the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan (see Section 2);
- Reasons for choosing the Plan as adopted, in the light of other reasonable alternatives considered as part of the AA process (see Section 3);
- A declaration that the Plan as adopted will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of European Sites (provided at Section 4); and
- The NIS (the AA NIS is accompanied by this AA Conclusion Statement and has informed the AA Determination – see Section 4).

As recommended, this AA Conclusion Statement addresses the above issues.

## Section 2 How the findings of the AA were factored into the Plan

The SEA and AA team worked with the Plan-preparation team at Fáilte Ireland in order to integrate requirements for environmental protection and management into the Plan.

Fáilte Ireland provides funding for sustainable tourism projects that emerge as part of specific, competitive, themed and time-bound grant schemes or as part of wider strategic partnerships. These include projects relating to land use, infrastructural development and land use activities and attractions. Reference made to such projects included in the Plan does not guarantee funding. While funding is provided to certain projects, Fáilte Ireland is not the developer.

In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for land use or infrastructural development or land use activities from Fáilte Ireland, Fáilte Ireland's stakeholders shall be required to demonstrate compliance<sup>1</sup> with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management contained within the following Fáilte Ireland published documents:

- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme Appendix 5 "*Site Maintenance Guidelines*" and other relevant measures from the Fáilte Ireland visitor and habitat management guidelines series (and any subsequent replacements); and
- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme Appendix 6 "*Environmental Management for Local Authorities and Others*" (and any subsequent replacements).

In order to be realised, projects included in the VEDP (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the VEDP is not part and does not contribute towards. Such legislation, policies, plans and programmes include:

- Requirements for lower-tier environmental assessment, including EIA and AA;
- The Kerry County Development Plan, include various provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management; and
- The Climate Action Plan 2019, the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions) and the National Mitigation Plan (2017 and any subsequent versions).

### Infrastructure Capacity

With respect to infrastructural capacity (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) the potential impact on existing infrastructure as well as the potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourism-related traffic volumes along any routes resulting from the relevant initiative shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate, where relevant. The promotion of developing visitor friendly infrastructure where it is required will also be encouraged.

### Visitor Management

Those receiving funding shall seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers and/or any change in visitor behaviour in order to avoid significant effects including loss of habitat and disturbance, including ensuring that new projects are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities.

Extensive research by Fáilte Ireland has shown improved environmental outcomes (including improved attainment of conservation objectives) in areas with visitor management strategies. Visitor management strategies will be required for proposed plans, programmes and projects that are to receive funding as relevant and appropriate.

### Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services

Those receiving funding shall contribute towards the maintenance of existing green infrastructure and its ecosystem services, taking into account the output of the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services project being undertaken by the NPWS. Proposals for the development of any green infrastructure should demonstrate the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the: provision of open space amenities; sustainable management of water; protection and management of biodiversity; protection of cultural heritage; and protection of protected landscape sensitivities.

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<sup>1</sup> Demonstration of compliance may be supported by monitoring undertaken by the beneficiary.

A part of one submission made during the Plan preparation process that was relevant to the AA. This submission was made by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) scoping consultations (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Part of EPA submission relevant to AA and AA/SEA Response**

Point No.	Submission Text	AA/SEA Response
16	<p><i>Appropriate Assessment Considerations</i></p> <p>The Appropriate Assessment (AA) should consider hydrological connections between Natura 2000 sites and potential impacts of the Plan. Features of interest and conservation objectives should be taken into account when assessing the potential impacts of the Plan. The findings of the AA should be reflected in the relevant sections of the SEA. The AA should identify the sensitivities of SPAs/SACs whose integrity could be affected either by the Plan on its own or cumulatively/in combination with other plans and programmes.</p> <p>You should consult with the National Parks and Wildlife Service regarding any existing or proposed new conservation management plans or conservation management plans that may be prepared over the lifetime of the Plan. Where relevant, these should be integrated into the Plan and its implementation. Available conservation management plans can be consulted at: <a href="http://www.npws.ie/protectedsites/conservationmanagementplanning/conservationplans/">www.npws.ie/protectedsites/conservationmanagementplanning/conservationplans/</a></p>	<p>The AA will identify any SPAs/SACs whose integrity could be affected either by the Plan itself or cumulatively/in combination with other plans and programmes.</p>

## Section 3 Consideration of Alternatives

### 3.1 Description of Alternatives

#### **Alternative 1: Business as Usual**

With respect to reputation and volume, the Dingle Peninsula is high-performing destination. In tourism terms however, the area suffers from being seen as:

- Highly seasonal;
- High volume, low-value;
- Dominated by a mature area within the destination (hot spots - Dingle Town) juxtaposed with emerging destinations across the destinations not benefiting from tourism to the same level; and
- Functioning as a microcosm of the island of Ireland with 30% of the landmass holding 70% of the traffic.

The potential socio-economic benefits of tourism are not currently being realised and it is widely regarded that tourism on the Dingle Peninsula is at a crossroads. The volume of tourists is the cause of intense pressure on the local culture, community and environment, compromising the experience itself.

There is also concern that the nature of tourism demand and tourist behaviour is resulting in a sub-optimal economy with a lower than acceptable level of tourist spending and retained economic impact in the community.

Despite the association of high volumes of visitor traffic to the Dingle Peninsula, it is key pockets of the destination that experience this level of visitor pressure while surrounding areas continue to have capacity for development.

This current situation presents **Alternative 1 (Business as Usual)** to be considered by the SEA. Numbers of visitors would continue to increase under this scenario – consistent with the development of tourism over many decades. The most popular locations on the Peninsula would see the largest increases in visitors, which would occur during the peak season.

#### **Prepare a Plan (Alternatives 2A and 2B: Prepare a Plan)**

The challenges posed by the current situation (see Alternative 1 above) establish a potential need for a plan that seeks to better manage tourism on the Peninsula; facilitating, promoting, supporting and coordinating stakeholders (including local authorities, other government agencies, tourism operators, communities and visitors) in their activities in a way that is consistent with existing and emerging plans that have been subject to environmental assessment. Such a plan would not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent (such frameworks fall under the remit of other public authorities). Any projects would continue to be required to comply, as relevant, with the various provisions of documents that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework.

Features of such a Plan (in combination with the wider and extensive policy and wider and extensive policy and planning framework) would include:

- Addressing issues of seasonality and regionality while realising increased socio-economic benefits;
- Creating new and improve existing visitor experiences, and communicate cohesive and unified stories to the visitor;
- Motivating international tourists to visit and stay in the local communities across the Peninsula and increasing the economic dividend generated by international visitors to the area; and
- Supporting the ongoing tourism development of the Dingle Peninsula, evolving from visitor attraction to a year-round tourism destination.
- Simulating increased dispersion of visitors across the Dingle Peninsula throughout the year.

Under Alternative 2 there are two separate alternatives:

#### **Alternative 2A: A Plan with Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management**

Fáilte Ireland provides funding sustainable tourism projects including land use and infrastructural development and land use activities. In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for land use or infrastructural development or land use activities from Fáilte Ireland, **Alternative 2A** would require Fáilte Ireland's stakeholders to demonstrate compliance with measures relating to sustainable

development, environmental protection and environmental management contained within the following Fáilte Ireland published documents:

- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme Appendix 5 "*Site Maintenance Guidelines*" and other relevant measures from the Fáilte Ireland visitor and habitat management guidelines series (and any subsequent replacements); and
- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme Appendix 6 "*Environmental Management for Local Authorities and Others*" (and any subsequent replacements).

In order to be realised, projects included in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) would have to demonstrate compliance, as relevant, with various provisions of legislation, policies, plans and programmes that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the Plan is not part and does not contribute towards.

Further environmental requirements would be integrated into the Plan under Alternative 2A, relating to infrastructure capacity, visitor management and green infrastructure and ecosystem services.

### **Alternative 2B: A Plan without Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management**

Alternative 2B would not include the requirements for environmental protection and management described under Alternative 2A. Projects would continue to be required to comply, as relevant, with the various provisions of documents that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework.

## **3.2 Detailed Consideration of Alternatives**

### **Alternative 1: Business as Usual**

Sustainable development, environmental management and environmental protection under Alternative 1 is provided through the existing statutory planning and consent framework. These measures would contribute towards positive effects on the protection and management of all environmental components.

Tourism related development would continue to be planned for and consented through the existing statutory planning and consent framework. Potential adverse effects would continue to be mitigated through that process.

In the absence of a Plan, there would continue to be an increase in tourist numbers – consistent with the development of tourism over many decades. The most popular locations on the Peninsula would see the largest increases in visitors, which would occur during the peak season. This would give rise to greater concentration of tourists during peak seasons and in the most popular locations thereby increasing potential environmental effects on all components and peak load additions on various infrastructure in particular locations/at particular times.

Contributions towards an increase in travel related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air, including from aviation, would not occur as a result of a Plan that seeks to lengthen dwell time and grow visitor numbers however increases in tourist numbers would occur. Similarly, the positive mitigatory effects as a result of provisions of a Plan, such as those relating to sustainable mobility, traffic management and compliance with climate adaptation and management plans/strategies would not be provided for.

There would be one layer of mitigation under Alternative 1, through the existing statutory planning and consent framework.

### **Alternative 2A: A Plan with Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management**

In addition to the measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection, environmental management, which are provided under all alternatives, and measures relating to seasonality and regionality, provided for by this alternative and Alternative 2B, this alternative would provide additional requirements for environmental protection and management, including those taken from the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme and those relating to infrastructure capacity, visitor management and green infrastructure and ecosystem services. In order to be realised, projects included

in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) would have to demonstrate compliance, as relevant, with various provisions of legislation, policies, plans and programmes that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the Plan is not part and does not contribute towards.

Tourism related development would continue to be planned for and consented through the existing statutory planning and consent framework. Potential adverse effects would continue to be mitigated through that process.

Although a Plan would help to improve the seasonal and geographic spread of visitors, a Plan's objective would be to increase the number of visitors to the Peninsula. Although this would be likely to happen without a Plan, a Plan would have the potential to increase numbers of tourists – and associated potential adverse effects – to a greater degree than would be the case if there was no Plan.

This would be likely to contribute towards an increase in travel related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air, including from aviation. These increases will be mitigated by provisions that have been integrated into the Plan, including those relating to sustainable mobility and compliance with the Climate Action Plan 2019, the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions) and the National Mitigation Plan (2017 and any subsequent versions).

A Plan would also help to promote new experiences – including those relating to land use activities and developments. These would also have the potential to increase adverse effects.

Notwithstanding this, there would be three layers of mitigation, through:

- The existing statutory planning and consent framework;
- Visitor management strategies; and
- Additional environmental requirements for environmental protection and management, under this alternative.

### **Alternative 2B: A Plan without Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management**

In addition to the measures relating to sustainable development, environmental management and environmental protection, which are provided under all alternatives, this Alternative (2B) would provide measures to improve seasonality and regionality – Alternative 2A would provide this also. Seasonality and regionality provide a greater spread of tourists throughout the year and across the Peninsula thereby reducing potential environmental effects and peak load additions on various infrastructure in particular locations/at particular times.

Tourism related development would continue to be planned for and consented through the existing statutory planning and consent framework. Potential adverse effects would continue to be mitigated through that process.

Although a Plan would help to improve the seasonal and geographic spread of visitors, a Plan's objective would be to increase the number of visitors to the Peninsula. Although this would be likely to happen without a Plan, a Plan would have the potential to increase numbers of tourists – and associated potential adverse effects – to a greater degree than would be the case if there was no Plan. This would be likely to contribute towards an increase in travel related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air, including from aviation. These increases would be mitigated by the wider planning framework.

A Plan would also help to promote new experiences – including those relating to land use activities and developments. These would also have the potential to increase adverse effects.

Notwithstanding this, there would be one layer of mitigation, through the existing statutory planning and consent framework.

Table 3.1 provides a comparative evaluation of alternatives against Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are methodological measures developed from policies that generally govern environmental protection objectives established at international, Community or Member State level e.g. the environmental protection objectives of various European Directives that have been transposed into Irish law and that are required to be implemented.



**Table 3.1 Comparative Evaluation of Alternatives against SEOs**

	Likely to <b>Improve</b> status of SEO			<b>Potential Conflict</b> with status of SEOs - likely to be mitigated by complying with other measures included within the Plan		Probable <b>Conflict</b> with status of SEOs- unlikely to be fully mitigated
	to the <b>Greatest</b> degree	to <b>Moderate</b> degree	to a <b>Lesser</b> degree	to a <b>Moderate</b> degree	to a <b>Greater</b> degree	
Alternative 1: Business as Usual			✓		✓	
Alternative 2A: A Plan with Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management	✓			✓		
Alternative 2B: A Plan without Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management		✓			✓	

### 3.3 Reasons for choosing the selected alternative in light of other alternatives considered

Taking into account the environmental effects detailed in the accompanying SEA documents (including those relating to European sites) and summarised above and the challenges and opportunities present for tourism across the Dingle Peninsula, Fáilte Ireland have proceeded with Alternative 2A "A Plan with Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management".

## Section 4 AA Determination

**Appropriate Assessment Determination under the  
European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (as amended)  
for the  
Dingle Peninsula Visitor Experience Development Plan**

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Determination, pursuant to Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, as to whether a plan or project would adversely affect the integrity of a European Site, and Regulation 42 (11) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended), is being made by Fáilte Ireland.

In carrying out this AA, Fáilte Ireland is taking into account the relevant matters specified under Regulation 42 (12) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended). The AA Natura Impact Statement (which considers other plans and projects) has been carefully considered and its reasoning and conclusion agreed with and adopted. All other documents prepared and submitted during the preparation process for the Dingle Visitor Experience Development Plan were also considered in making this determination, including the Plan to be finalised and written submissions made on the Draft Plan and associated documents while they were on public display.

It is determined that the risks to the safeguarding and integrity of the qualifying interests and conservation objectives of the Natura 2000 network have been addressed by the inclusion of achievable mitigation measures that will prioritise the avoidance of impacts in the first place and reliably mitigate these impacts where they cannot be avoided. Furthermore, in order to be realised, projects included in the Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with the various provisions of legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier AA) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the Plan is not part and does not contribute towards.

Having incorporated these mitigation commitments; it is determined that implementation of the Dingle Peninsula Visitor Experience Development Plan will not have a significant adverse effect on the ecological integrity of any European Site, either individually or in combination with any other plan or project<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, no further assessment is required.

Date: 05.05.20 \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:  \_\_\_\_\_

Signatory  
Approved Officer

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<sup>1</sup> Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be:  
a) No alternative solution available,  
b) Imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the plan to proceed; and  
c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.