

# SEA Statement Appendix I: Report on Submissions

---

RECEIVED ON THE

**SEA ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT  
AND  
NATURA IMPACT REPORT**

FOR THE

**WILD ATLANTIC WAY  
OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME  
2015-2019**

**RESPONSE TO RELEVANT SUBMISSIONS & UPDATES ARISING**

**for: Fáilte Ireland**

88-95 Amiens Street  
Dublin 1



**Fáilte Ireland**  
National Tourism Development Authority

**by:**

**CAAS Ltd.**

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, The Courtyard,  
25 Great Strand Street,  
Dublin 1



**AUGUST 2015**

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Responses to Submissions and Updates Arising.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1	Submission No. 1: Department of the Environment Northern Ireland.....	3
2.2	Submission No. 2: Environmental Protection Agency.....	5
2.3	Submission No. 3: Ruth Minogue .....	9
2.4	Submission No. 4: Birdwatch Ireland .....	13
2.5	Submission No. 5: Northern and Western Regional Assembly .....	21
2.6	Submission No. 6: Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.....	31

# 1 Introduction

This report responds to submissions which were made on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Environmental Report and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Natura Impact Report for the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Draft Operational Programme 2015-2019 while these documents were on public display from 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015 to 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

Responses are provided to the issues raised in the submissions and updates to the Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and AA Natura Impact Report are identified where relevant.

The findings of this Report on Submissions has been used to update the Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and AA Natura Impact Report.

## 2 Responses to Submissions and Updates Arising

### 2.1 Submission No. 1: Department of the Environment Northern Ireland

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
<b>1. SEA Environmental Report</b>			
a)	We are broadly content with the SEA Environmental Report as it relates to Northern Ireland. We note that the overall finding, including transboundary considerations, is that in view of the mitigation measures proposed, including the detailed Monitoring Strategy, that no significant residual adverse environmental effects will occur to the environment (SEA ER, Section 8, page 96).	Noted.	None.
b)	In terms of baseline air quality, information could, in the future, be obtained from local authorities in coastal locations adjacent to the Plan area. Air pollutant emissions could be considered along with meteorological data (prevailing winds) to see what effects (if any) activities may have on local air quality levels on land.	Noted. Significant adverse effects upon air quality are not predicted to happen. In order to provide a context for air quality in Northern Ireland, baseline information on Northern Ireland's air quality will be added to the SEA Environmental Report.	<p>To add the following text to the SEA Environmental Report baseline air quality section (Section 4.7.2):</p> <p>The most recent air quality report for Northern Ireland "Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2013" (Department of Northern Ireland, 2014) identifies that EU limit values, target values and corresponding Air Quality Strategy objectives, have been met by the due dates for the following pollutants: particulate matter as PM10 and PM2.5; carbon monoxide; benzene; sulphur dioxide; and, metallic pollutants lead, arsenic, cadmium and nickel.</p> <p>The report also identifies that a small number of sites close to busy roads in urban areas did not meet the limit values and objectives for nitrogen dioxide in 2013; locations within the Belfast Urban Area did not achieve compliance with the EU limit value for annual mean NO<sub>2</sub>. Belfast Urban Area is not alone in this respect: many parts of the UK (and other Member States of Europe) have reported similar exceedances.</p>
c)	We note that the Programme is coastal in nature and more consideration could have been given to specific marine issues and the good environmental status of the marine environment. We suggest that the monitoring section could take further account of the marine environment and the activities that take place.	Noted. Significant adverse effects upon the marine environment are not predicted to happen. Various indicators included in the Monitoring relate to the marine environment as well as the freshwater and terrestrial environments. A sentence will be inserted into Section 10 clarifying this.	<p>To add the following text to the SEA Environmental Report Monitoring Measures section (Section 10):</p> <p>Many of the indicators below relate to more than one of the marine, freshwater and terrestrial environments, for example: indicator B1 'Conservation status of habitats and species as assessed under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive' relates to marine, freshwater and terrestrial habitats and species; and indicator W1 'To maintain and</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
			improve, where possible, the quality and status of surface waters' relates to coastal and estuarine waters as well as rivers.
<b>2. Natura Impact Statement</b>			
d)	We are broadly content with the Natura Impact Statement as it relates to Northern Ireland (although a small number of European Sites within 15km distance of the WAWOP may not have been included). We note that the analysis of likely impacts is examined at a high level and that developments resulting from the Programme will be subject to further AA when works are identified at project level. We note that the statement has concluded that the WAW OP will not affect the integrity of the Natura 2000 network and that certain potential conflicts can be mitigated (SEA ER, Section 3.2, page 31).	Noted.	None.
e)	We are content that adverse impacts are unlikely on any of the SACs within a 15km distance of the WAW OP. It is noted in Table 11 of the report that all wintering bird species within SPAs are susceptible to disturbance and displacement due to the implementation of the Operational Programme. Lough Foyle SPA in Northern Ireland directly adjoins the WAW Operational Programme area. Whilst this designated site lies outside the Programme area, we feel that relevant project level AAs will have to carefully consider the possibility of adverse effects on this European Site, in particular in relation to disturbance to bird species caused by visitor activities, either on the adjoining Donegal side of the Border or by overspill along the coastal route into Northern Ireland.	Noted. It is important that Natura 2000 Sites in Northern Ireland - including the Lough Foyle SPA – and potential effects – including disturbance of bird activities – are considered at lower tier AA.	None.
f)	In relation to impacts on the qualifying features of Lough Foyle SPA from Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019 we would suggest that the following wording could be included within the mitigation section of the Appropriate Assessment, "During the lifetime of the programme Lough Foyle SPA will be monitored for any significant increase in winter visitor activities that would lead to an adverse impact upon over wintering and migrating bird species within the Lough."	This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).	The Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.
g)	We welcome that Fáilte Ireland have integrated the mitigation recommendations arising from the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment processes into the Draft Operational Plan. We consider that these mitigation measures are also relevant to subsequent proposals and projects that may have transboundary interactions with Northern Ireland.	Noted.	None.

## 2.2 Submission No. 2: Environmental Protection Agency

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
<b>1. Draft Operational Programme</b>			
a)	A commitment should be included in the Programme to undertake a formal review every 5 years. This commitment should take into account the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directives.	Noted and the following has been added to Section 1.7 of the OP 'In addition to this a review of the Wild Atlantic Way will be undertaken every five years and this will take account of the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directive'.	The following has been added to OP 'In addition to this a review of the Wild Atlantic Way will be undertaken every five years and this will take account of the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directive'.
b)	Consideration should also be given also including Appendices 4-6 as a separate Volume to the Programme, for example entitled Part II - Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme - Environmental Monitoring and Management.	Not considered necessary now as a new section has been added to the main body of the OP on Environmental Monitoring and Management so that is part of the main report now.	Section 4 has been extended to include additional detail on Environmental Monitoring and Management.
c)	The commitment in Section 3.1 -Wild Atlantic Way Route and candidate Discovery Points- Action 1 to review the route of the Wild Atlantic Way by the end of 2017 provides a significant opportunity to take stock and review the evidence from the Environmental Monitoring Strategy. This is in the context of the role of the review in ensuring the selected route is sustainable from a community, tourism an environmental perspective. Defining the criteria which will determine those candidate Discovery Points which are to be retained, excluded or have a change in emphasis will be an important initial stage of the proposed Environmental Monitoring Programme (Action 44 and Appendix 4).	Noted. Action 1 includes the following statement with respect to the mid-term review: <i>The results of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will also inform this process.</i>	None.
<b>2. Draft Operational Programme – Implementation and Governance</b>			
d)	Implementation and Governance The establishment of a <i>national Wild Atlantic Way Implementation Group</i> as provided for in <i>Section 3.5 Building Effective Partnerships - Action 45</i> is welcome. The proposed structure of this Implementation Group could be further expanded and strengthened by assigning a clear leadership and accountability role to Fáilte Ireland and where relevant its parent Department. The role of local authorities will be critical in committing to and addressing critical infrastructure deficits and county tourism initiatives and this should also be highlighted.	Noted and the following included in OP: 'Local Authorities are also key partners in the delivery and management of the Wild Atlantic Way on the ground, and in particular for the management, maintenance and delivery of critical infrastructure and projects where gaps occur.	Included in Section 3.5 Building Effective Partnerships.
e)	Key relevant other Departments and authorities should also be engaged in providing support and advice to Fáilte Ireland , its parent Department, regional assemblies and local authorities in the implementation of specific actions associated with the Programme. There may be merit in considering a tiered approach to implementation and governance with a relatively small and focussed national coordination group at tier 1, ideally led by the Fáilte Ireland , and accountable to Government for the implementation of the Programme; a broader consultative group at tier 2, along the lines of the proposed national Wild Atlantic Way Implementation Group led by Fáilte Ireland with Regional Assembly membership; and local consultative network and partnership groups at tier 3, ideally led by the relevant local authorities with local involvement of key	Noted and will be considered.	None at present.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	relevant government and non-governmental organisations.		
f)	Specific time frames over which the Programme Actions will be implemented would also be desirable. There would be merits in considering the development of an implementation plan with clear responsibility and accountability for the 48 actions in the Programme and specific time scales for commencement, duration and delivery.	Timeframes have been allocated to many of the fifty actions in the implementation plan, however many will be on-going for the lifetime of the OP and where this is the case it has been specified.	A table has been included at the end of Section 3 of the Operational Programme which includes timelines and a sentence has been added to the OP stating that: 'The following outlines indicative timelines for the fifty actions which will be initiated and implemented by Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with a number of partners and stakeholders over the duration of this Operational Programme.'
g)	Promoting strong collaboration with key stakeholders including business and community networks as provided for in Action 46 and national and regional partnerships with relevant environmental and heritage bodies - ( Action 47) will be critical to ensuring an integrated national coordinated approach to implementation of the Programme and protection of the environmental resources along the route.	Text amended in Section 3.5 Strategy to include '...will be critical to ensuring an integrated national coordinated approach to implementation of the Programme and protection of the environmental resources along the route'.	Text added to Operational Programme.
h)	The inclusion of a commitment to increasing awareness and understanding of these services by the public, landowners, and decision makers will promote a proactive approach to implementing evidence based best practice approaches to management of tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way and the associated wider regional catchments along the route.	Action 45 inserted as follows: ' <i>To proactively promote and increase awareness and understanding of evidence based best practice approaches to the management of tourism along the Wild Atlantic Way, and the wider regional catchments along the route.</i> '	Additional Action inserted.

**3. Draft Operational Programme – Section 3.4 Environmental Management and Sustainability**

i)	<p>The overall Strategy in relation to environmental considerations and the associated Actions are welcomed. These would, however, benefit from further development prior to finalising and implementation.</p> <p><i>Action 44 - Environmental Surveying and Monitoring - (Also Action 35)</i></p> <p>The <i>Draft Strategy for Environmental Surveying and Monitoring</i> in Appendix 4 should be aligned with, and reflect the relevant aspects of the proposed SEA related monitoring in Section 10 of the SEA Environmental Report (ER).</p>	<p>This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).</p> <p>As stated in Section 10 'Monitoring Measures' of the SEA Environmental Report, <i>Monitoring is an ongoing process and targets and indicators will be further refined when the findings of the Monitoring Strategy for Operational Programme candidate Signature Discovery Points emerge.</i></p> <p>It is proposed to add similar text to the Strategy for Environmental Surveying and Monitoring.</p>	<p>To add the following text to the Strategy for Environmental Surveying and Monitoring:</p> <p><i>Monitoring is an ongoing process and the targets and indicators detailed in Section 10 of the SEA Environmental Report will be further refined when the when the findings of this Monitoring Strategy emerge.</i></p> <p>Section 4 of the Operational Programme has also been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.</p>
j)	Fáilte Ireland should further develop the Monitoring Programme and agree on its implement in association with the key stakeholders, relevant local authorities, the Regional Assemblies and statutory environmental bodies.	This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).	Section 4 of the Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.
k)	<p>The following aspects should be considered in further developing the Monitoring Programme;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of Monitoring</li> <li>• Geographical Scope of Monitoring</li> <li>• Specific Parameters aspects to be monitored</li> <li>• Reporting Arrangements and Frequency of Reporting</li> <li>• Environmental Thresholds/ Criteria which will trigger remedial actions</li> </ul>	<p>In the SEA Environmental Report (Section 10 'Monitoring Measures') the following detail is provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of Monitoring for each indicator (Table 10.1 'Selected Indicators, Targets and Monitoring Sources');</li> <li>• Specific indicators to be monitored (Table 10.1 'Selected Indicators, Targets and Monitoring Sources');</li> </ul>	Section 4 of the Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.

## SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nature of any follow up remedial actions for specific environmental aspects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reporting Arrangements and Frequency of Reporting (Section 10.5 'Reporting'); and</li> <li>Environmental Thresholds/ Criteria which will trigger remedial actions (Section 10.6 'Thresholds and Corrective Action'); and</li> <li>The nature of any follow up remedial actions for specific environmental aspects (Section 10.6 'Thresholds and Corrective Action').</li> </ul> <p>The geographical scope of the monitoring of indicators included in the SEA Environmental Report will reflect the geographical scope of the study i.e. on a county-by-county basis.</p> <p>Further, this part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).</p>	
l)	Environmental monitoring and associated reporting should be linked with Programme related monitoring and there should be a clear line of responsibility and accountability.	This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).	Section 4 of the Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.
m)	A Wild Atlantic Way Environmental Monitoring Steering Group should be established to finalise the Draft Strategy and take it forward to Implementation Stage.	This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).	Section 4 of the Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.
n)	The requirements for critical water related infrastructure to accommodate increased tourism related numbers should be reviewed on an on-going basis. This will ensure adequate and appropriate infrastructure- waste water treatment and drinking water supply will be maintained and will reduce the potential for environmental pollution associated with waste water related discharges. Fáilte Ireland should take into account obligations associated with the following Directives in consultation with the relevant local and statutory authorities -Water Framework Directive, Bathing Water Directive, Shellfish Water Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.	Noted. The Operational Programme, including the measures which are detailed in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities', will help to facilitate compliance with all of these requirements.	None.
o)	We welcome the commitment in under <i>Section 4.1 Action 41</i> to continuing to contribute to the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark and Aran LIFE projects. The opportunities to incorporate best practice from these projects to other relevant geographical areas along the WAW route provides an on-going mechanism to improve the operation and implementation and monitoring of the Programme.	Noted.	None.
p)	<i>Action 47 advocating exploration of opportunities for international research and funding at an inter-regional level</i> is welcome could also reflect opportunities for research at a national level.	Noted. The following text has been included as part of Action 50 '...both nationally and with other EU states...'	The following text has been included as part of Action 50 '...both nationally and with other EU states...'
<b>4. Future Amendments to the Programme</b>			

SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
q)	Where amendments to the Programme are proposed following consultation and prior to adoption, these should be screened for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria as set out in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations and should be subject to the same method of assessment applied in the "environmental assessment" of the Plan.	The SEA and AA processes will ensure compliance with the Regulations with respect to updates to the Operational Programme.	None.
<b>5. Information on the Decision - SEA Statement</b>			
r)	Following adoption of the Programme, a copy of the SEA Statement summarising information on the decision and environmental monitoring arrangements should be prepared and should be sent to any environmental authority consulted during the SEA process.	Noted.	None.

## 2.3 Submission No. 3: Ruth Minogue

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
<b>1. Comments relating to the SEA Environmental Report of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme</b>			
a)	<p>Table 2.2 Relationship to Other Plans and programmes</p> <p>It is noted reference is made to the draft National Landscape Strategy 2014 (NLS) however in this table it is considered not applicable to the WAW Operational Programme.</p> <p>Given that the NLS aims to implement the above European Landscape Convention and applies a holistic approach to landscape management, this seems an omission.</p>	<p>This is already detailed in Table 2.2.</p> <p>The draft National Landscape Strategy is included on Table 2.2 (page 22, row 4).</p> <p>The relevance of the draft National Landscape Strategy to the Operational Programme is detailed under the fifth column which states:</p> <p><i>'Implementation of the Programme to cumulatively contribute towards – in combination with other users and bodies – the achievement of the objectives of the regulatory framework for environmental protection and management'</i></p>	None.
b)	<p>Furthermore the objective of the draft NLS is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implement the European Landscape Convention by integrating landscape into our approach to sustainable development;</li> <li>• establish and embed a process of gathering, sharing and interpreting scientific, technical and cultural information in order to carry out evidence-based identification and description of the character, resources and processes of the landscape;</li> <li>• provide a policy framework, which will put in place measures at national, sectoral - including agriculture, <b>tourism</b>, energy and <b>marine</b> - and local level, together with civil society, to manage, protect and properly plan through high quality design for the sustainable stewardship of our landscape;</li> <li>• ensure that we take advantage of opportunities to implement policies relating to landscape use that are complementary and mutually reinforcing and that conflicting policy objectives are avoided in as far as possible</li> </ul>	<p>Please see response under point a).</p> <p>Also, this objective is detailed in full on Table 2.2.</p>	None.
c)	<p>I would also point out that Action 5 of the draft NLS states: <i>Relevant government departments and agencies including semi-state agencies should ensure that sector-specific policies and strategies and relevant legislation within their remit are fully consistent with the objectives set out in the National Landscape Strategy.</i></p>	<p>Please see response under point a).</p> <p>The draft National Landscape Strategy is already included on Table 2.2.</p>	None.
d)	<p>To date, guidelines on facilitating the integration of the ELC have yet to be prepared for Ireland; although the NLS commits to same. In their absence the Guiding Principles developed for ELC integration in UK can offer a useful framework for consideration of landscape into sectoral plans (such as tourism).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure clarity in the use of terms and definitions</li> <li>2. Recognise landscape in a holistic sense</li> <li>3. Apply to all landscape</li> <li>4. Understand the landscape baseline</li> <li>5. Involve people</li> </ol>	<p>Various measures have been integrated into the Draft Operational Programme to ensure that it helps contribute towards the appropriate protection of the landscape, in compliance with relevant legislation and planning policy. The SEA has helped to ensure that any residual adverse effects will be minimal. It is not considered necessary to consider the cited principles.</p>	None.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	6. Integrate landscape 7. Raise awareness of the importance of landscape		
e)	I appreciate the NLS is at draft status but as this is the first tourism strategy nationally to be subjected to SEA, there is considerable merit in acknowledging the relationship of the WAW Operational Programme to the ELC and draft NLS.	Please see response under point a).	None.
<b>2. Section 4.10 Landscapes</b>			
f)	<p>There is a real opportunity with the WAW to enhance the coastal resources and landscape through tourism promotion, however the current description of the baseline landscape and seascape character is somewhat lacking. Further information would be useful to provide greater clarity and to highlight areas of potential conflicting landscape policies between counties.</p> <p>This is of particular significance given that the WAW relates to the whole Atlantic Coastline as defined.</p> <p>The figure below is taken from the 2009 Landscape Character Assessment Baseline Update Report by the Heritage Council that identified consistency (or lack thereof) between LCAs. As you will see there are counties with poor consistency in approach, scale and definitions.</p> <p>My understanding is that Co. Donegal is the only county that has updated or worked on a county level LCA in this intervening period.</p> <p>It is noted that there is no reference to seascapes or coastal landscapes within this section. An explanation of seascapes and a summary table listing the key characteristics of each LCA identified along the WAW would provide further information, evidence and justification for further mitigation or assessment.</p>	<p>In addition to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• providing a strategic description that helps to facilitate the assessment of environmental effects, at a level which is appropriate to the high level Operational Programme; and</li> <li>• providing full compliance with the legislation,</li> </ul> <p>this baseline description provides an original assessment of Landscape Regional Zones – a first for this level of SEA.</p> <p>Potential conflicting landscape policies between counties may exist, however the appropriate level at which these may be resolved is at the county level, through the review of development and local land use plans. Regardless of whether policies conflict at local authority level or not, policies of adjoining authorities are required to be complied with. It is noted that the policies of each local authority change on a non-simultaneous cyclical basis.</p> <p>The Draft Operational including the measures which are detailed in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities', helps to facilitate the protection of the landscape and compliance with the landscape policies of local authorities.</p> <p>The term landscape encompasses, inter alia, seascapes and coastal landscapes.</p>	None.
g)	<p><b>Comments for consideration</b></p> <p>Clarification on the methodology and approach used to inform the Regional based Landscape Assessment. Further information on the approach used to define landscape sensitivity and capacity in terms of the WAW.</p>	<p>The regional spatial assessment has been informed by the landscape of the Atlantic coastline and surrounds. Landscape components which have been considered include landform, landcover and human values. As stated in the SEA ER this is a very high-level assessment.</p>	<p>To add the following text to Section 4.10.1 of the SEA ER:</p> <p>The regional spatial assessment has been informed by the landscape of the Atlantic coastline and surrounds. Landscape components which have been considered include landform, landcover and human values (see Section 4.10 above).</p>
h)	<p>Collation of the available data relating to landscape character along the WAW and presenting same within the baseline chapter of the SEA ER would enhance the analysis, capture where consistencies and inconsistencies lie in terms of CDP policies, and objectives, and also help inform appropriate elements of the WAW as outlined in the Operational Programme.</p>	See comments under point f) above	None.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
i)	<p>The following information could be provided in an updated Landscape section of the SEA ER that would help address the above comments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New figure showing existing LCAs as they lie within the regional assessment.</li> <li>• New table naming and presenting summary of key characteristics of each LCA</li> <li>• Indication as to where policies, objectives, views/vistas, prospects and scenic routes are designated along the WAW.</li> <li>• Further information as to where potential conflicting policies etc arise.</li> <li>• Additional information where available on seascapes and coastal landscapes.</li> <li>• Methodology used for regional assessment, capacity and sensitivity.</li> </ul> <p>Whilst it is acknowledged that much of the WAW Operational Programme will be implemented through the local authority planning system, the SEA should provide sufficient detail and evidence to ensure the implementation of same reflects and enhances landscape and seascape along the WAW.</p>	See comments under point f) above	None.

### 3. Table 9.1 Provisions contained in Draft Operational Programme Appendix 'Environmental Management for Planning Authorities'

j)	<p>It is noted that this table under landscape provides the following mitigation measure for landscapes:</p> <p><i>Landscape Designations</i> Planning authorities shall contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection of county and local level landscape designations from incompatible developments. Proposals for development that have the potential to significantly adversely impact upon these anticipated and avoided to a level consistent with the sensitivity of the landscape and the nature of the designation. designations shall be accompanied by an assessment of the potential landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development - demonstrating that landscape impacts have been</p> <p><i>Coastal Areas and Seascapes</i> Planning authorities shall protect the character and visual potential of the coast and conserve the character and quality of seascapes.</p> <p>It is proposed that the following amendments to these mitigation measures be made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning authorities shall contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection of county and local level landscape designations from incompatible developments. Proposals for development that have the potential to significantly adversely impact upon these designations shall be accompanied by an assessment of the potential landscape <b>character</b> and visual impacts of the proposed development <b>and prepared in line</b></li> </ul>	The Operational Programme and related reports have been updated having regard to this recommendation.	<p>To update the cited measure as follows:</p> <p>Local authorities shall contribute, as appropriate, towards the protection of county and local level landscape designations from incompatible developments. Proposals for development that have the potential to significantly adversely impact upon these designations shall be accompanied by an assessment of the potential landscape <b>character</b> and visual impacts of the proposed development - demonstrating that landscape impacts have been anticipated and avoided to a level consistent with the sensitivity of the landscape and the nature of the designation. Such assessments should be prepared having regard to the relevant aspects of the <b>Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (2013 Landscape Institute)</b>.</p>
----	--	---	--

SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p><b>with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment ( 2013 Landscape Institute 3rd ed),</b> demonstrating that landscape impacts have been anticipated and avoided to a level consistent with the sensitivity of the landscape and the nature of the designation.</p>		
k)	<p><i>Coastal Areas and Seascapes</i>                      Planning authorities shall protect the character and visual potential of the coast and conserve the character and quality of seascapes.                       Comment: this may be difficult to implement in the absence of seascape character assessment.</p>	<p>When seeking funding, local authorities must protect the character and visual potential of the coast and the character and quality of seascapes. No change is recommended on foot of this part of the submission.</p>	None.

## 2.4 Submission No. 4: Birdwatch Ireland

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
a)	BirdWatch Ireland is the largest independent conservation organisation in Ireland. Established in 1968, we currently have over 15,000 members and supporters and a local network of over 30 branches nationwide. Our primary objective is the protection of wild birds and their habitats in Ireland through the efforts of our staff (including conservation scientists), members and volunteers alike. In order to fulfil this objective, we carry out extensive research and survey work, operate applied conservation projects and manage a network of reserves nationwide; we prepare and advocate policies; we recruit, retain and service a growing membership base; we promote the importance of this work through field education, dedicated media (such as <i>Wings</i> magazine, the BirdWatch Ireland website, our annual journal <i>Irish Birds</i> and other publications) and to the national media.	Noted.	None.
<b>1. Introduction</b>			
b)	BirdWatch Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on and provide some recommendations for the protection of birds and their habitats in the Draft Operational Programme of the Wild Atlantic Way 2015-2019 (Draft Programme). The Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) offers an opportunity to showcase the exceptional birdlife found along the west coast for domestic and international visitors and to raise awareness of this birdlife and habitats among service providers along the route. Fáilte Ireland was a stakeholder in our group species action plans for birds which are relevant to this Plan and references will be made to these in this submission.	Noted.	None.
<b>2. A Unique Selling Point: Birds and their Habitats along the WAW</b>			
c)	There are several actions listed in the Draft Programme which could benefit birds and their habitats in the medium and long-term and provide added value to the tourism sector. These include all actions that aim to raise awareness of, and ultimately to ensure that there are no impacts to, birdlife; actions that aim to protect biodiversity in general; actions to develop partnerships which will include conservation organisations; and actions which could contribute to the development of management plans for protected areas. The following actions in particular are ones where BirdWatch Ireland's experience, data and research could contribute to the successful implementation of the Draft Programme:	Noted.	None.
d)	Actions 6, 11, 12-16, <b>33</b> : BirdWatch Ireland is available to suggest text (and Site Guides) relating to birds, their habitats and relative to specific locations for any interpretation at Discovery Points. However, a coherent approach is needed to execute this and not in a piece meal, county-by-county basis. BirdWatch Ireland already has the experience with working with tourism businesses to increase the awareness of staff and the wider public on the amazing bird life along the WAW. We would be	Noted. The high-level Operational Programme (including Action No. 33 - <i>to undertake a series of initiatives with a range of stakeholders, such as the NPWS and Birdwatch Ireland, to raise awareness of the wealth of wildlife along the Wild Atlantic Way and to identify the best sites at which to view wildlife, in accordance with good environmental practice</i> ) will facilitate future interactions with stakeholders, including Birdwatch Ireland.	None.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>happy to work with local businesses and Fáilte Ireland on any training or awareness raising initiatives.</p> <p>In relation to Action 33, we very much welcome this addition to include BirdWatch as a stakeholder in awareness raising activities. We are currently working with the Cliffs of Moher on several projects to raise awareness of the wildlife at the Cliffs including the Cliffs of Moher Sea Bird Festival in May. We would like to discuss with Fáilte Ireland other opportunities which could exist to help identify important bird viewing sites as well as advising on their appropriate management in order to mitigate any negative impacts on these sites, some of which may be outside of the Natura 2000 sites.</p>		
e)	Action 41: LIFE projects: For information on BirdWatch Ireland LIFE project at Termoncarragh, the Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo, please visit our website. This project focused on improving the habitat for breeding waders and contributed to our knowledge on the requirements of species in this group of birds.	Noted.	None.
f)	Action 48 of the Operational Programme: BirdWatch Ireland would like to put itself forward as a relevant potential environmental and conservation partner at national and regional level to ensure the protection and responsible promotion of the core environmental and heritage assets upon which the Wild Atlantic Way is based.	Noted. Action No.48 provides for the establishment of partnerships and national and regional level and these will be established in due course. Birdwatch Ireland's comments are noted in this regard. The establishment of a Monitoring Group is also noted (see Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv)).	None.
g)	<p><b>Linking with BirdWatch Ireland reserves</b></p> <p>The WAW offers an opportunity to highlight and connect the WAW with BirdWatch Ireland reserves. Travelling south from Donegal the WAW goes past seven of our reserves (Sheskinmore, Illaunmaister, Termoncarragh Meadows, Annagh Marsh, Small Wood, Little Skellig, Puffin Island) and includes Cape Clear Island where we own the building that was formerly the Bird Observatory.</p>	Noted.	None.
<b>3. BirdWatch Ireland Group Species Action Plans</b>			
h)	<p>In December 2007, Ireland was found guilty of failing to properly transpose and implement two very important European Directives into Irish Legislation (European Court of Justice ruling case: C-418/04). The Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) provide the framework for the protection of Europe's wildlife. Fulfilling our national obligations under these Directives is vital to protect our biodiversity, ecosystems and the services they provide us, as well as to improve upon our poor compliance record with European Law. One of the main issues identified was the lack of a coherent strategy for the protection of 'priority, migratory and dispersed' bird species in the wider countryside (i.e. outside of protected areas) in Ireland. To address this problem BirdWatch Ireland led in developing a series of 10 Group Species Action Plans for Ireland's 'priority, migratory and dispersed' birds based on their habitat requirements. These plans encompass those species that are found on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (BoCCI) Red and Amber lists, including those regularly occurring birds in Ireland also found on Annex</p>	The issue raised by the submission is noted however the high-level Operational Programme provides for compliance with the Habitats and Birds Directives and associated transposing Regulations with regard to the protection of habitats and species etc.	None.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>I of the European Birds Directive and a few additional bird species needing protection. The SAPs can be found here.</p> <p><b>3.1 SAPs and the WAW</b></p> <p>As a stakeholder to the development of the SAPs, Fáilte Ireland is a co-partner in the implementation of actions to ensure the protection of birds especially in relation to recreation and tourism. <i>Further information on the actions identified for Fáilte Ireland in the action planning process can be reviewed via the online database).</i></p> <p>The Group Species Action Plans of particular relevance to the Draft Operational Programme of the WAW are Shore and Lagoon Birds, Marine and Sea Cliff Birds, Dune and Machair Birds, and Lowland Farmbirds. Other SAPs may also be relevant for other ecosystem types in specific locations (eg. Upland Birds, Woodland and Scrub Birds etc..). Each SAP includes actions for relevant stakeholders and includes raising awareness, research and policy actions. These are listed in the relevant tables under the appropriate themes in the SAPs. The SAPs can help identify threats to birds and help inform the planning of activities in specific sites along the WAW. The following paragraphs list some issues in relation to groups of birds relevant to the WAW.</p> <p><b>3.1.1. Shore and Lagoon Birds</b></p> <p>Birds using Ireland's coastal sites continue to face a number of pressures. Perhaps the greatest is the disturbance caused by a broad range of recreational activities which occur along our coastline year-round. It is important to encourage appropriate and sustainable levels of recreation at sites that are important for birds &amp; to sustain this through informing recreational users of the importance &amp; sensitivities of the sites &amp; restricting access to sensitive areas at key times. Please see Table 4 of the SAP for information on factors which impact on this group of birds and includes recreation and disturbance, habitat Loss and fragmentation, coastal developments etc.</p> <p><b>3.1.2 Marine and Sea Cliff Birds</b></p> <p>Recreation and tourism could be both beneficial &amp; damaging to marine and sea cliff birds. If carried out in an appropriate manner it could vastly improve awareness and support for bird and biodiversity conservation. The List of factors affecting this group of birds is identified in Table 4 of the SAP for Marine and Sea Cliff Birds. They include <b>lack of awareness, pollution, recreation and disturbance, climate change</b> etc. Several actions have been identified in the SAP with Fáilte Ireland as a co-partner (and marine-focused leisure entities) in order to raise awareness and understand the impacts of recreation and to conserve this important group of birds.</p> <p><b>3.1.3 Dune and Machair Birds</b></p> <p>Dune and Machair habitats are very sensitive to agricultural, planning and recreational activities. Environmental assessments should ensure that planning and certain recreational activities are not causing undue damage to these sensitive areas. Policies for activities, such as recreation and land-use planning, should be aware of the uncertainties that often surround these practices, particularly in relation to their potential effects on birds and habitats.</p>		

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>It is also important to consider the policies governing adjacent lands if the overall landscape is to be used sustainably. Table 4 of the SAP lists the threats to this group of birds which includes lack of awareness, habitat loss and degradation, recreation and disturbance and more.</p> <p>3.1.4 Lowland Farmland Birds This SAP should be referred to for information on the impacts of Breeding waders, Corncrake especially in relation to some of the more remote sites in the West of Ireland. Again Table 4 lists the different threats to this group of species.</p>		
<b>4. General Points of Concern</b>			
i)	<p>4.1 The Draft Programme states that the objective of growing length of stay (paid bednights) rather than number of visitors has less potential to result in adverse environmental effects but the potential exists for visitors who explore an area further will access more remote and environmentally sensitive sites and while the SEA and AA process is focused on the Discovery Points alone, we have concerns for the overall management of these more remote areas. While tourism has been happening in these areas for many years, the objectives of the Draft Programme will lead to increases in tourism activity and potentially in more sensitive sites as visitors are encourage into more remote areas. What will the impacts be on sensitive areas in the vicinity of Discovery Points? How will these be managed? Effective awareness raising activities and documentation could help mitigate impacts.</p> <p>4.2 The Plan proposes the development of Discovery and Embarkation points at 161 existing viewing points and lay-bys of which 26 are island sites. Our offshore islands are often highly sensitive sites and great care needs to be taken locally to manage any increases in visitor numbers.</p>	<p>With respect to biodiversity and flora and fauna, the following significant positive effects are identified in the SEA Environmental Report as being likely to occur:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitor management strategy will contribute positively to advancing the attainment of conservation objectives along and adjacent to the route and existing candidate Discovery Points, thereby benefitting the management of designated sites.</li> <li>• Continuation of and further contribution towards the protection of biodiversity and flora and fauna, including ecological connectivity, by: using existing routes, viewing points and lay-bys instead of developing new infrastructure; and contributing towards compliance with environmental legislation by local authorities</li> <li>• Providing management material [evidence, monitoring and guidelines] to assist in the implementation of management plans for designated habitats and to assist in achieving the conservation objectives of these relevant management plans for such sites and habitats.</li> </ul> <p>The SEA Environmental Report identifies the following potential significant adverse effects, if unmitigated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arising from both construction (including reuse and reinforcement of existing viewing points and lay-bys) and operation: loss of/damage to biodiversity in designated sites, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats; and disturbance to biodiversity and flora and fauna;</li> <li>• Habitat loss, fragmentation and deterioration, including patch size and edge effects; and</li> <li>• Disturbance and displacement of protected species and coastal squeeze.</li> </ul> <p>Taking into account the various and extensive measures which have been integrated into the high-level Operational Programme (including effective awareness raising activities and documentation and various measures applied to</p>	None.

SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
		<p>the islands), which will be implemented with respect to the protection and management of the environment, the following residual non-significant adverse effects are identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of an extent of non-protected habitats arising from the replacement of semi-natural land covers with artificial surfaces</li> </ul> <p>Monitoring measures are being implemented in order to, inter alia, cater for unforeseen effects. The first round of monitoring is focused on the 15 Signature Discovery Points. Future monitoring will expand to include Discovery points prioritised in order of sensitivity and significance – as directed by a Monitoring Group. The monitoring will be targeted to the conservation objectives of European sites, and to effects arising from the WAW individually and in combination with other plans and projects, taking into account existing uses, pressures and loadings.</p> <p>The design of any additional looped routes not included in the current Programme needs to be managed to ensure that there are no impacts to birds especially during the breeding season, and biodiversity in general.</p>	
j)	4.3 The design of any additional looped routes not included in the current Draft Programme needs to be managed to ensure that there are no impacts to birds especially during the breeding season, and biodiversity in general.	As stated in the SEA Environmental Report, the integration of loops into the Wild Atlantic Way and associated Operational Programme document, would need to be subject to lower tier environmental assessment where appropriate. Such loops could allow for and encourage the geographical dispersal of visitors which could allow for visitor management at a macro spatial level in terms of what sections of the western seaboard can accommodate increases in visitors at particular points in time.	None.
k)	4.4 Over the term of the Operational Programme, Fáilte Ireland will liaise with each of the Local Authorities in setting out a programme of work which aims to improve visitor management at a number of the candidate Discovery Points. They will also enter into Service Level Agreements with the local authorities for each Discovery Point. Any works in/near Natura sites will be screened for AA. Since the local authorities will be carrying out the works, the planning will go through Part 8 which means that while there will be public consultation, any decision of the councillors is final. BirdWatch Ireland requests that any Part 8 planning applications by the local authorities ensure that impacts on birds and the habitats they depend upon (some of which may be outside of SPAs, SACs) are thoroughly investigated.	Noted. Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities' has been integrated into the Operational Programme to this effect. Appendix 6 comprises various provisions which must be complied with by local authorities at lower levels of decision making in order to access funding from Fáilte Ireland.	None.
<b>5. Concerns Relating to Corncrake, Machair and Dunes, Twite, Seabirds</b>			
l)	<b>5.1 Breeding Wader and Corncrake Sites in Donegal</b>	The Operational Programme is a high-level document and has been subject to a high,	To add the following text to SEA Environmental Report Section 4.3 'Biodiversity and Flora and

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>Some breeding wader and corncrake sites may be at risk in Donegal due to increased tourism activity at these areas. Corncrake is a species which was once ubiquitous in Ireland and has been at the brink of extinction in Ireland. The Corncrake is a red-listed, globally threatened species. At some key sites in Ireland its populations are slowly increasing due to the incentivised and proactive management by landowners and conservation efforts by BirdWatch Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Breeding waders include species such as Dunlin, Curlew, Red Shank, Lapwing, Golden Plover (all Red-Listed on the Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland list) and Snipe.</p> <p>Some of the WAW Discovery Points are located in areas which are not SPAs/SACs but have important numbers of species especially breeding wader sites in particular, which may not be captured by any designated sites at all and therefore may be missed entirely. We conducted an exercise in ArcGis to plot the Donegal mainland WAW Discovery Points against the mainland machair breeding wader sites and the corncrake data for 2013 (<i>Appendix J</i>). We recommend that Fáilte Ireland revisit the environmental assessment to make sure these sensitive sites and species are included. Please note the attached mapping exercise. All Corncrake data is available from NPWS.</p>	<p>Strategic Environmental Assessment, and associated Appropriate Assessment.</p> <p>Sensitive habitats and species have been integrated into the assessments and the provisions of the Draft Operational Programme (including those included in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities') and further consideration to specific habitats and species in specific locations will be given due consideration through project level planning and associated assessments.</p> <p>The SEA Environmental Report has been updated to take into account this part of the submission.</p>	<p>Fauna', Section 4.3.1 'Relevant Aspects', text after Protected Species:</p> <p>Specific habitats and species in specific locations will be given due consideration through project level planning and associated assessments. Depending on the nature of lower tier projects, sensitive species may include, for example, corncrake and breeding waders (such as Dunlin, Curlew, Red Shank, Lapwing, Golden Plover) and Snipe.</p>
m)	<p>In addition, 3 of the islands in Donegal that are identified as Discovery Points (Toraigh, Inish Bo Finne and Gabhla) are some of the most sensitive wildlife sites in the Country. They are all designated as SPA/SAC, but also have important populations of breeding waders which would not be listed in the Qualifying Interests. Gabhla and Inish Bo Finne in particular do not have many visitors at the moment and because of their importance for ground nesting birds such as Corncrakes and breeding waders, (as well as Terns, Chough and Seabirds, these last 3 would be identified as QIs) any increase in visitor numbers would be of concern to us unless it is very tightly managed: we should strongly recommend the following safeguards if it is intended to increase visitor numbers to these sensitive sites:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-if at all possible, additional visitors should be encouraged from late July/Aug, when nesting is finished.</li> <li>-any proposed paths should be constructed away from ground nesting bird colonies, to minimise people walking over open ground that may have nests or chicks,</li> <li>-clearly marked designated camp sites/grounds which are sited away from ground nesting bird colonies, with camping anywhere else strongly discouraged;</li> <li>- very clear guidelines and interpretation to ensure that people do not walk through these colonies and understand their importance;</li> <li>-especially, no dogs unless tightly controlled on leads.</li> <li>-greater public awareness campaigns on the importance of these sites to birds</li> </ul>	<p>Noted. Please see response under point l) above.</p>	<p>Noted. Please see update under point l) above.</p>
n)	<p><b>5.2 Machair and Dune Habitats</b></p> <p>It is estimated that these sand based habitats are restricted to about 25,000 ha in world-wide extent, with up to 7,500 ha occurring along the coastal strip from north Donegal to Connemara</p>	<p>Sensitive habitats and species have been integrated into the assessments and the provisions of the Draft Operational Programme (including those included in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local</p>	<p>To add the following text to SEA Environmental Report Section 4.3 'Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna', Section 4.3.1 'Relevant</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>(2,750 ha as flat stable machair grassland) and the remainder is found in south-western Scotland. It is estimated that 2% of this habitat in Ireland was lost between 1996 and 2006 primarily due to restructuring of land holdings and agricultural improvement, overgrazing and general recreation. There are very few rare plants restricted to these machair systems but their great complexity and diversity is a special feature, and they support nationally scarce/rare birds (for a list of the key species see our Species Action Plan for Dune and Machair birds in Ireland 2011-2020.</p> <p>Machair and Dune habitats also include some rare insects like the Great Yellow Bumblebee, Belted Beauty moth, the Red-banded Wasp or the click beetle <i>Selatosomus melancholicus</i> which are only found in these loose sandy habitats. The machair breeding wader populations, especially those of Dunlin and Lapwing (both red-listed BoCCI species) are now declining at an alarming rate and similar impacts are being seen with the other bird indicator species.</p> <p>We are concerned with the potential increase in visitors 'going off-road' once they reach a Discovery Point and how are they managed thereafter e.g. accessing beaches which may have impacts on our bird populations. During the 2009 machair breeding wader survey, it was found that up to 14% of the national population of Ringed Plovers breed along the machair beaches and that their populations on the mainland beaches had declined in the order of 47% since 1996 (Oystercatchers (also a 'beach breeder'), similarly, had declined by 32%). These declines were for unknown reasons but added recreational pressure could further impact on these populations. Similar concerns would also relate to breeding seabirds e.g. terns and gulls, particularly on offshore islands where most of their remaining breeding populations now exist. Careful management and monitoring of sites needs to be implemented. BirdWatch Ireland's most recent full survey of machair sites, including maps of important locations, is available here.</p> <p>The noted and projected increase in visitor numbers needs to be 'managed' in order to reduce their impacts on fragile habitats such as machair and dunes which are already suffering from pressures including recreational and development pressures. This Annex I habitat is already rated as being in Unfavourable Conservation Status/Bad overall and so any further impacts would not be particularly welcome.</p> <p><b>5.3 Twite</b></p> <p>The fragile machair &amp; dune habitat supports several nationally scarce/rare birds including Twite. Twite, as a breeding species, are found in a limited distribution (NW Mayo &amp; SW Donegal) along cliffscapes (nesting, feeding) backed up by species rich grasslands (feeding) – a concern would be, as in the machair habitat, of the wider issue of people 'going off-road' once they reach a Discovery Point and how are they managed thereafter e.g. accessing areas which may have impacts on our bird populations. Twite wintering populations are strongly linked with the out-wintering of cattle,</p>	<p>Authorities') and further consideration to specific habitats and species in specific locations will be given due consideration through project level planning and associated assessments.</p> <p>The SEA Environmental Report has been updated to take into account this part of the submission.</p> <p>As stated in the SEA Environmental Report, implementation of the Operational Programme will contribute towards significant positive effects upon the protection of biodiversity and flora and fauna including those which will arise from the Visitor Management Strategy which will contribute positively to advancing the attainment of conservation objectives along and adjacent to the route and existing candidate Discovery Points, thereby benefitting the management of designated sites.</p> <p>In addition, with respect to monitoring and as stated in the SEA Environmental Report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The development of a detailed Monitoring Strategy which is currently being implemented and will produce various data including an indication of the types of impacting activities at Signature Discovery Points and control sites (and the extent of ecological effect zones, if present) and the type of mitigation responses which may be required.</li> <li>The route and the candidate Discovery Points may change if the environmental monitoring strategy in particular locations produces results that show that visitor activity and/or visitor intensification is predicted or observed to result in a negative impact on the environment. For this reason, a mid-term review of the route and the candidate Discovery Points has been built into the Operational Programme. The Monitoring Strategy is included as an Appendix to the Operational Programme.</li> <li>Findings from the Environmental Monitoring will be used to inform Local Authorities, through the publication of a set of guidelines, on the nature and extent of any proposed interventions at candidate Discovery Points and candidate Signature Discovery Points in order to improve visitor management at these sites, where appropriate. The guidelines will be prepared in consultation with the Environmental Authorities.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, it is noted that the high-level Operational Programme (including Action No. 33 - <i>to undertake a series of initiatives with a range of stakeholders, such as the NPWS and Birdwatch Ireland, to raise awareness of the wealth of wildlife along the Wild Atlantic Way and to identify the best sites at which to view wildlife, in accordance with good environmental practice</i>) will facilitate future interactions with stakeholders, including Birdwatch Ireland.</p>	<p>Aspects', text after Protected Species:</p> <p>Specific habitats and species in specific locations will be given due consideration through project level planning and associated assessments. Sensitive habitats and their species may include machair, dunes and cliffs. Such habitats can support species such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rare insects like the Great Yellow Bumblebee, Belted Beauty moth and the Red-banded Wasp</li> <li>Sensitive birds such as Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers, Twite and Cloughs.</li> </ul> <p>Also, the Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group. Refer to Section 4 of the Operational Programme.</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>and the supplementary feeding of them, on the machair areas</p> <p><b>5.4 Sea and Cliff Birds</b> We would ask you to refer to BirdWatch Ireland's Group Species Action Plan for Marine and Sea Cliff Birds. If works are to be conducted at Discovery/Embarkation Points to improve the visitor experience it is imperative that the work should be conducted outside the breeding season (Sept through to April). Additionally, during the breeding season, visitors should not be encouraged to 'lean over' the cliff tops as this can flush sitting birds and they can knock their eggs or chicks out of the nest. For a small number of key sites which are good for Choughs, e.g. Bray Head (Valentia-a site used for foraging by a non-breeding flock of up to 20) any large increase in numbers could be problematic for this species.</p>	<p>Also, this part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme (Section 4), further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).</p>	
<b>6. Environmental Monitoring Strategy</b>			
o)	<p>The Environmental Monitoring Strategy is a welcome initiative in the Operational Programme and focuses on vegetation and habitats at the 15 signature sites. The Programme states that there will be a review of the candidate Discovery Points if it is found following the Environmental Monitoring that there have been negative impacts on sites. The signature sites may not be the most sensitive and we would like to ask how impacts will be monitored at the most sensitive sites? Some of these sites are indicated already and include sensitive machair and dune areas. How will tourist impacts at Discovery Points such as those with Corncrake populations as described above be monitored for impacts? We believe that some monitoring of impacts on birds and their habitats could be warranted as part of the monitoring strategy.</p> <p><b>More general points include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site surveys in relation to ecology should be conducted by professionals trained in the monitoring methodologies for the object of the survey (habitats/vegetation/species).</li> <li>• Unsure what is meant by 'wear and tear of wild-life' in Section 2 Objectives for Survey and Monitoring.</li> <li>• Table 3.7, Category 1: include boating, kite surfing.</li> <li>• Table 3.7, Category 3: include sandy soils.</li> <li>• Table 3.9: include salt marsh under marine section</li> </ul>	<p>This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme (Section 4), further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).</p> <p>The Monitoring Strategy document has been updated to take account of the list of bullet points provided by Bird Watch Ireland under this point.</p>	<p>The Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group. Refer to Section 4 of the Operational Programme.</p> <p>The Monitoring Strategy document has been updated to take account of the list of bullet points provided by Bird Watch Ireland under this point.</p>
<b>7. Environmental Management Guidelines</b>			
q)	<p>The development of the environmental guideline by Fáilte Ireland (FI) for the local authorities for development of projects is very welcome. It shows that FI is serious in ensuring that any funds provided by it will not lead to impacts on biodiversity especially birds and</p>	<p>Noted. The Operational Programme, including the measures which are detailed in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities', will help to facilitate protection and management of various environmental</p>	<p>None.</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	their habitats. At the end of the day the distinctiveness of our landscapes around our west coast composed of diverse and sometimes unique habitat types resulting from our climate and geology underpins our tourism industry. Most Visitor Surveys by Fáilte Ireland indicate that scenery/landscape is the number 1 or 2 item listed by visitors as an important factor in their choice of Ireland as a holiday destination. The most recent survey (2014) showed Scenery and Nature/Wildlife/Flora in the top 5 expectations of Ireland which were met by the holiday to Ireland. It will be very important that the WAW Operational Programme will enhance biodiversity and not detract from it.	<p>components including the landscape and biodiversity.</p> <p>The Operational Programme including the measures which are detailed in Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Local Authorities', helps to facilitate the protection of the landscape and compliance with the landscape policies of local authorities.</p>	
<b>8. Conclusion</b>			
r)	BirdWatch Ireland would be happy discuss any of the issues raised in this submission with Fáilte Ireland. We believe that the WAW does offer a good opportunity to raise awareness about birds, habitats and biodiversity in general along the WAW and to have carefully managed development of tourism along the Atlantic sea board. This is evidenced by the efforts by Fáilte Ireland to develop environmental management guidelines and monitoring. However, care is needed at some sites where habitats or bird species are particularly sensitive.	Noted.	None.

## 2.5 Submission No. 5: Northern and Western Regional Assembly

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
<b>1. Draft Operational Programme (Tourism Issues)</b>			
(a)	The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) wishes to make the following comments in relation to the Draft Operational Programme for the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) 2015-2019. The Assembly also wishes to express its gratitude for the presentation made to the Regional Assembly on 24 <sup>th</sup> April, 2015 by Ms. Eva Dearie (Leisure Sales Manager, WAW) and for the consideration of the feedback given by the Elected Members of the Regional Assembly.	Noted.	None.
(b)	In 2014, the Assembly published a <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> for the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon which is available from our website <sup>1</sup> . Initiated by the Chief Executives (i.e. County Managers) of the four City and County Councils in the West and influenced by the outcomes of consultation with a wide variety of clubs, groups, organisations and individuals - who provided an array of ideas, suggestions and recommendations, the Study was developed to consider how outdoor recreation can be improved to benefit local communities and the economy and ensure the natural environment is protected. The NWRA	Noted and will be considered as identified in Actions 6 and 7 of the Operational Programme.	None.

<sup>1</sup> <http://nwra.ie/the-study-of-outdoor-recreation-in-the-west/>  
CAAS for Fáilte Ireland

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>recommends that Fáilte Ireland considers the context and actions proposed in this Study.</p> <p>The vision of the Study seeks to <i>'encourage visitors and local people to get out into the great outdoors and participate in the many activities that can be availed of in the region and in local communities'</i>. It aims to stimulate the coordination and sustainable growth of outdoor recreational activities, providing a platform for sustainable expansion with social, health and economic benefits.</p>		
(c)	Existing hubs of activity were highlighted by the Outdoor Activity Finder <sup>2</sup> which collected details of existing recreational activities and their location in the region. The Study examined a range of strategies, policies and case studies (including the WAW which are relevant to outdoor recreation, the promotion of health, tourism, environmental protection and which provide a series of approaches that could be implemented in the region.	Noted.	None.
(d)	A series of actions were identified under a number of categories which seek to provide direction to the City and County Councils and other agencies involved in the promotion and development of outdoor recreation. The categories include national management, regional planning, facilities and infrastructure, environmental protection, community actions, marketing, health promotion, inclusivity, rights-of-way, emergency services and research and training.	Noted.	None.
(e)	The Study identified that communities have a role to play – continuing to be proactive, providing new information on outdoor recreation to the Local Authorities for the development of a future web-portal. They can get involved in local clubs, encourage others to take up outdoor activities, join local groups and encourage responsible outdoor recreation. Businesses can explore marketing opportunities (such as those in the Study) and consider what they can provide or promote in their area.	Noted and addressed in Section 3.3 of the Operational Programme and associated actions.	None
(f)	It was recommended that a Working Group be established within the City and County Councils to prioritise and implement key actions from the Study and identify opportunities for the region. In 2015, the Local Authorities began working together to progress the findings, a process which will include identifying funding sources, collaborating with outdoor recreation providers, communities and businesses, considering good examples that would be suitable in the west, among other activities. Figure 1 (included in the submission) summarises the steps taken during the development of the Study and proposed implementation.	Noted.	None.
(g)	<p><b>Wild Atlantic Way Draft Operational Programme 2015-2019<sup>3</sup></b></p> <p>The Regional Assembly wish to acknowledge the work conducted in developing the WAW brand and identifying the WAW route in partnership with the local authorities and other stakeholders. This included the identification of 'independent traveller' and 'coach' routes expressed separately due to the constraints of the road network and the approach to linking</p>	Noted, the points here pick up the key aims of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme. The Outdoor Recreation Study as referenced by the Assembly can inform future work and the development of further detail around the actions outlined in the Operational Programme.	None.

<sup>2</sup> This is hosted on Galway County Council's website - <http://galwaycoco.maps.arcgis.com/home/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.failteireland.ie/Wild-Atlantic-Way/Wild-Atlantic-Way-Draft-Operational-Programme.aspx>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>the discovery points/ viewing points. The Draft Operational Programme contains pertinent research to support future decision making and development of the WAW product.</p> <p>An examination of a range of alternatives for the development and expansion of the overseas tourism market, noting the lagging success of the regional approach to tourism, is a useful component of the Draft Operational Programme and follows an evidence based and logical approach.</p> <p>The report notes (p.8) that it is anticipated that while the WAW will draw visitors in (as a magnet), they are unlikely to complete the full route at any one visit, but will instead follow normal behaviour and base themselves in one or two centres, from which they explore the surrounding area. It is hoped that given the extent of the route, this will draw visitors back for repeat visits so they complete other sections of the WAW over time (similar to the Camino in Northern Spain). This is particularly important to sustain the success of the WAW and must be reflected in the approach to future marketing campaigns.</p> <p>The proposal to develop loops (p.9) off the WAW is welcomed and Fáilte Ireland should consider the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation</i> which supports the delineation of 'packaged areas' by activity type (e.g. fishing, mountain-climbing) or specific interest type (e.g. ecclesiastical routes), or geological features (e.g. <i>the lakes of Mayo and Roscommort</i>) which could be a loop off the main WAW. The proposed WAW groupings, namely six distinct geographical areas (with specific itineraries) will activity assist visitors in planning their stay and activities as well as showcasing product offerings.</p> <p>Digital/ online tools are critical supports to the packaged area approach and Local Authorities are likely to be open to disseminating Fáilte Ireland funding and other regional events to their Twitter/ social media followers. The West Regional Authority (<i>functions transferred to the Regional Assembly in 2014</i>) launched the <i>Hymany Way Walking and Cycling App</i> in 2013 through a European project (<i>Tourist Guide for Northern Periphery</i>). It sought to enhance the visitor experience in a rural and remote part of the West Region. This app is available free of charge from the Apple and Android stores/market place. Users can access photos and text and are encouraged to share the app on social networking sites. The app enables visitors to plan their cycling and walking routes and note points of interest along the way, which include historical monuments, religious sites and areas of high biological diversity. While it is not necessarily along the WAW, it is a loop which is ideally suited to an off-WAW packaged area. The Regional Authority also promoted the use of this technology platform for the development of another app for the future Connemara Greenway in conjunction with a</p>		

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	website (to be developed by Galway County Council <sup>4</sup> ).		
(h)	<p>During the preparation of the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation</i> report, an online platform for outdoor recreation was developed which identifies where activities take place within Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. As presented below (map included in the submission), there is a considerable diversity of assets and opportunities for outdoor recreation for communities and visitors.</p> <p>The <i>Outdoor Activity Finder</i> reveals a spread of outdoor activities across the region, yet clusters emerge around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Galway City;</li> <li>• Loughrea in east County Galway and Killary Harbour and Clifden in west County Galway;</li> <li>• Mid-Roscommon, Boyle and Ballaghaderreen in Co. Roscommon;</li> <li>• Westport, Castlebar, Ballina, Achill Island, the Mullet peninsula, Claremorris and Ballinrobe in County Mayo.</li> </ul> <p>Activities taking place in the east of the region are more dispersed, while there is a greater clustering of activities in the west along the WAW. Notably, activities in the Connemara area, north-east Galway, north-west to mid-Mayo and north and south Roscommon are not as prolific. Galway City has an abundance of outdoor activities. Although not undertaken as part of this Study, an audit of supporting facilities for outdoor recreation is required.</p> <p>The Draft WAW Operational Programme notes (p.7) that destinations along the west of Ireland are fragmented, without co-operation particularly for marketing purposes and are usually truncated by county boundaries. This fragmentation was also recognised in the Regional Assembly's <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i>. Local authorities in the region support a coordinated approach for the provision and maintenance of outdoor recreation activities and facilities across local government boundaries and with other providers such as Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, the National Trails Office, among others</p> <p>The Operational Programme refers to the WAW website, maps and app. Data collected for the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> should be incorporated<sup>5</sup> with that of Fáilte Ireland (namely the existing facilities) as this will serve to identify where future facilities are required (e.g. at activity hubs<sup>6</sup>), facilitating coordinated provision with the local authorities and other stakeholders.</p> <p>Basic infrastructure requirements highlighted in submissions on the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> included the need for secure parking, storage, changing areas, showers, toilets, seating, bicycle parking, disabled parking, access to water, information centres, meeting rooms and rental equipment.</p>		

<sup>4</sup> <http://192.168.0.4/en/Business/WestRegionalAuthority/EuropeanProjects/>

<sup>5</sup> This data can be downloaded from Galway County Council's opendata site: <http://galwaycoco.maps.arcgis.com/home/>

<sup>6</sup> Refer to Section 2.3.1 (p.73) of the Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West (Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly, 2014).

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	Such facilities could be provided at established (and relevant) Discovery Points along the WAW where the greatest number of visitors and local communities will benefit/ strategic locations.		
(i)	<p>Fáilte Ireland's intention to work with Local Authorities and other stakeholders to improve facilities and infrastructure is welcomed and will facilitate the implementation of actions in the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation</i>. Indeed the Regional Assembly will welcome the input of Fáilte Ireland into the development of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regions as the WAW is a major initiative for consideration within this strategic document. The WAW includes its hubs of Westport, Sligo, Donegal and Letterkenny as key anchors for the tourism initiative and are key settlements in the current Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border and West regions.</p> <p>The <i>Draft National Tourism Policy for Ireland</i> (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTS), 2014) recognises the central role that Local Authorities play in contributing to tourism, achieved through the provision of infrastructure, recreation and amenity facilities and environmental management which provides benefit to local communities and visitors alike. The role of local government in funding events and close working relationship with Fáilte Ireland are supported and promoted by DTTS. Local communities input in local initiatives such as Tidy Towns and the organisation of festivals are crucial to supporting tourism in the region and the Regional Assembly supports the proposed coordination of Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities in the incremental delivery of improvements to the public realm and streetscapes in prioritised towns and villages. The <i>Study on Outdoor Recreation</i> supports the alignment of plans and projects proposed by Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities. Local communities should also be supported to get involved in measures that will benefit their areas and support local economic development.</p> <p>The Draft Operational Programme identifies 200 towns and villages along or close to the WAW. During <i>'The Gathering'</i> initiative, Local Authorities played a much more structured role in local tourism and DTTS promotes continued coordination across local authorities in the management and development of tourism destinations and facilities for local people as attractions do not necessarily fit within administrative boundaries. In fact, DTTS are encouraging Local Authorities to take greater responsibility for tourism development in their region and continue to co-operate with neighbouring authorities to maximise tourism opportunities for their region as a whole.</p> <p>Fáilte Ireland's WAW brand vision and the simplicity and clarity of the initiative are welcomed. The <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation</i> considered a number of case studies including another example of a 'destination' type brand. <i>Queenstown</i>, New Zealand attracts adventure enthusiasts from around the world. It has multiple adventure activities with unparalleled</p>	Substantial feedback noted, much of which has been captured in the community and partnership actions outlined in Sections 3.3 and 3.5 of the Operational Plan. Invitation to feed in to the development of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy is acknowledged and welcomed.	None

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>scenery and great hospitality. <i>Destination Queenstown</i> is a dedicated regional tourism organisation and marketing company which promotes Queenstown internationally and is funded by commercial rate payers and while it was once an overnight stop for coach tours and a winter ski resort, Queenstown is now a popular and highly desirable tourist destination all year round supported by direct flights from Auckland and Australia and a wide range of accommodation, retail outlets, restaurants and vibrant nightlife<sup>7</sup>.</p> <p>Section 2.4 (p.23) refers to the goals and outcomes of the WAW Operational Programme. In this context, there is an opportunity to include reference to supporting the health benefits and accessibility (supporting disability) of many of the experiences on the WAW. Other goals and outcomes in the Draft Operational Programme are supported.</p>		
(j)	<p>Section 3.2.1 refers to trade engagement on the WAW and includes an action to 'organise a series of business networking and innovation events' (p. 12). There are existing networks which could be built upon such as 'Destination Connemara' and 'Destination Westport' where existing stakeholders are already identified and are collaborating. Action 13 which seeks to 'provide a co-ordinated range of business supports for tourism businesses, in association with other business support providers to facilitate innovation and improvement in terms of the visitors' experience' is also welcomed. The Regional Assembly will seek to support inclusion of reference to the Wild Atlantic Way in new Local Authority <i>Local Economic and Community Plans</i> along the western seaboard.</p> <p>Fáilte Ireland aims to concentrate and develop opportunities during off-peak seasons (p.35). The <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> supported the exploration of non-traditional avenues and opportunities to attract visitors to parts of the region, for example through a range of outdoor recreation activities which are targeted at younger ages groups, seniors or alternative markets (e.g. rather than attracting adults for a particular tournament, hosting an under 19-girls tournament will attract both the competitors and their parents which will have an economic spin-off for an area).</p> <p>Sales and marketing are addressed at Section 3.2.2 and action 19 proposes to 'develop a one stop web platform for the Wild Atlantic Way destination brand to encourage engagement and interaction with the brand from consumer, trade and communities'. It is recommended that Fáilte Ireland utilises the data collected (with the assistance of communities and businesses in the region and the Sport Partnership Coordinators in Galway, Mayo and Roscommon) which was incorporated into the 'Outdoor Activity Finder'<sup>8</sup>.</p>	Noted and <i>The Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> can be used to inform the future development of these actions.	None.
(k)	Instilling community ownership of the WAW is an important element of the Operational Programme (p. 38) and will be critical to its long term success as local advocates provide the	Noted.	None.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.queenstownnz.co.nz/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://galwaycoco.maps.arcgis.com/home/>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>welcome to overseas and domestic visitors and will support the 'repeat visits' to the west coast. As the consultation on the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation</i> showed, there is phenomenal interest in tourism development within local communities and they can provide an array of ideas and suggestions which will contribute to this international brand and contribute to its success. They are also a vital source of 'warm geography' as they provide information on visitor performance and trends (i.e. qualitative information complementary to published statistics which is up-to-date).</p> <p>Action 45 (p. 43) seeks to establish a national Wild Atlantic Way implementation group comprising a number of key national agencies and Local Authorities to oversee the implementation and monitoring of the Operational Programme and ensure effective management of the brand. The NWRA supports this action and remains available to assist with this group.</p> <p>The 'zones' of the WAW are well described including those in the Northern and Western Region – the '<i>Northern Headlands: Journeys Begirl</i>', '<i>The Surf Coast: Wind And Waves, Way Out West</i>' and '<i>The Bay Coast: A Fresh-Air Playground</i>' are well composed and intrigue the reader. Reference is made to the market segment research conducted by Fáilte Ireland and while the WAW is identified as appealing to the 'culturally curious' and 'great escapers', there are parts of the WAW (primarily urban) which would appeal to the 'social energisers', particularly Galway and Sligo with Cork and Limerick close to the WAW.</p>		
(1)	<p><b>Comments by the Northern and Western Regional Assembly following a presentation by Ms. Eva Dearie, Fáilte Ireland, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2015</b></p> <p>The Regional Assembly Elected Members discussed a variety of issues pertaining to the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW). They welcomed the initiative taken by Fáilte Ireland in developing the WAW campaign and highly commended the work on this project which aims to develop international WAW recognition over time. Tourism was recognised as a particularly important driver of economic development in the region and Members from County Mayo referenced the benefit for smaller towns such as Louisburgh that are now reaping the benefits of the marketing approach and injection of investment.</p> <p>Elected Members recognised the benefits of the provision of supporting infrastructure to facilitate interpretation of the route for visitors which includes the consistent signage and signature discovery points. They did however express concern regarding the recent launch of '<i>Ireland's Ancient East</i>' and how it would compete with the WAW. Given the effort that has gone into developing the wide-ranging branding of the WAW, including funding prioritisation, it is hoped that new marketing for the eastern region will not be confused with the WAW to its detriment or significantly affect the financial support for further WAW development. They noted the need for basic facilities along</p>	Comments and Feedback noted.	None.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, Environmental Report and/or AA Natura SEA Report Impact Report
	<p>the WAW, considering how local authorities would fund remedial work and how coastal damage would be rectified. Communications infrastructure (namely broadband) was highlighted as a critical component to the development of tourism, particularly the availability of free wifi access at these locations.</p> <p>The proposed 'Wild Atlantic Salmon' Discovery Point is new along the WAW and members highlighted that appropriate signage must be available for visitors. The exclusion of Leitrim from the WAW campaign was discussed by the Members who accepted the regret of Fáilte Ireland in its omission. Elected Members promoted the spin-off routes to inland activities such as the 'Great Western Greenway', the Shannon-Erne canal ways or other Midland routes to encourage visitors to venture off the WAW (e.g. in looped routes) during their stay.</p> <p>As noted in the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i>, areas such as Roscommon and Leitrim require a dedicated strategy and approach. Visitors tend to go to well established tourism destinations or to the coastal resorts with relatively few travelling beyond the main centres. Specific intervention is required to bring about change in less developed tourism areas and in order to gain a competitive advantage, the focus must remain on offering excellent visitor management and service, authenticity, easy access, less congestion and tailor-made, special interest holidays. To achieve this, significant and extensive marketing is required to change attitudes and stimulate demand<sup>9</sup>. Lough Key Forest Park is a good example of how the Local Authority has been involved in promoting this facility and resource which has been developed to host a range of activities and offer interested and unique activities. The Regional Assembly Members support the development of a dedicated marketing and investment strategy for the Midland region, which is expected from Fáilte Ireland in the next 1-2 years. Events such as <i>'Destination Westport'</i> are extremely beneficial as noted by the Elected Members and a lot could be achieved with business and Fáilte Ireland support within these areas.</p> <p>Members expressed concern with the current marketing/ promotional material for the WAW which lacks details regarding accessibility options for the many visitors to the WAW who may have a disability or mobility issues. The Members felt that this warranted greater consideration in the preparation of new WAW Strategy. The National Disability Authority are an important contact in this regard. In its present format, WAW promotional material is geared towards the adventure/ athletic aspects of the WAW, perhaps appealing to younger age groups. Unfortunately this excludes a significant proportion of visitors and a WDC tourism report (2000) found that middle-aged and senior couples predominated in rural tourism in the region.</p>		

<sup>9</sup> Refer to the WDC's Blueprint for Tourism Development in the West – An Action Plan for Rural Areas [http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/reports/blueprint\\_tourism\\_development.pdf](http://www.wdc.ie/wp-content/uploads/reports/blueprint_tourism_development.pdf)

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>G Airport marketing was highlighted as another issue for the northern part of the WAW, with Derry City Airport being under promoted despite it being the fourth largest city in Ireland. Members supported the involvement of the Northern Ireland Tourism board in promoting this airport, in a similar manner to that of Ireland West Airport Knock.</p> <p>The 'segmentation research' conducted by Fáilte Ireland was considered useful by the Regional Assembly members as it profiles the types of overseas visitor who are likely to visit areas outside of the capital, namely the 'culturally curious' and the 'great escaper' or those interested in adventures. It also noted the type of traveller called the 'social energiser' who would be unlikely to travel beyond Dublin City. Finally the Regional Assembly supported the promoting the abundant 'Christian cultural' sites and heritage towns along the WAW, noting the many that occur in County Donegal.</p>		
<b>1. SEA/AA issues/ Environmental Considerations</b>			
m)	<p>It is noted that Section 3.1.1 (p.31) refers to Fáilte Ireland encouraging the inclusion of policies and objectives related to the Operational Programme in City/County Development Plans and refers to the use of the environmental monitoring strategy informing any route changes. Appendix 1 of the <i>Study of Outdoor Recreation in the West</i> contains a series of environmental considerations for landuse plans in the region which are also of relevance to the operational programme. Some of these are reflected in the WAW Operational Programme Appendix 6 'Environmental Management for Planning Authorities'.</p>	Noted.	None.
n)	<p>The introduction of an environmental monitoring strategy to monitor the effects of implementing the operational programme is welcomed, given the impact of increasing the intensity of the use of the WAW by visitors. The mid-term review of the route and the candidate Discovery Points will be an important component of the success of the WAW and ensuring protection of the asset underpinning the draw for visitors.</p>	Noted.	None.
o)	<p>Reference within the operational programme to the promotion of sustainable tourism is welcomed to prevent adverse effects on the environment, maximise benefits for local communities and businesses, and shares an awareness of and respect for the distinctive Irish or Gaelic Atlantic culture and heritage (p.20).</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the EcoTourism Ireland approach and certification programme supported by the Irish tourism authorities is referenced within the operational programme or incorporated into the WAW Brand Charter. The criteria are centred on environmentally sustainable practices and promote a high quality label. Businesses achieving certification are included on national tourism websites as an added attraction.</p>	There are a number of other certification programmes in Ireland and it is not appropriate to mention one above the other in the Operational Programme. Action 33 demonstrates a commitment the support for environmental certification.	None.
p)	<p>The identification of all (many existing) discovery points as 'candidate sites' is a useful approach, given that some may need to be</p>	Noted.	None.

SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	altered over time due to prolonged intensive use and existing site deterioration. The inclusion of all sites in the proposed environmental monitoring programme, and/or based on environmental assessment outcomes is also welcomed.		
q)	Section 3.3.1 of the Operational Programme recognises the necessity to protect the fragile and non-renewable assets which support tourism along the WAW and ensure that it doesn't have a detrimental effect on the resource. The programme also aims to support an understanding of Atlantic Culture and Fáilte Ireland are planning on working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Bird Watch Ireland, An Taisce and others to raise awareness of the wealth of wildlife and ensure environmental best practice. They proposed use the SEA process as a tool to avoid significant adverse effects on the environment and the promotion of the 'Leave no Trace' principles are also supported by the NWRA in its <i>Study on Outdoor Recreation</i> .	Noted.	None.
r)	It is most important to ensure that mitigation from the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Natura Impact Assessment are incorporated into the actions of the operational programme and implemented. All project proposed should be considered in a hierarchy of environmental assessment to prevent significant or adverse effects on the environment and European Sites. The proposed construction and environmental management plans will be particularly important aspects in this regard as will the oversight of an ecological clerk of works monitoring pre-development, construction and implementation of any projects (as proposed in the environmental monitoring strategy). The introduction of ' <i>WAW Site Maintenance Guidelines</i> ' are also pertinent.	Noted.	None.
s)	The SEA conducts a high level regional assessment (based on the WAW zones) of the various environmental receptors, noting the high sensitivity along the coastline. A five yearly review of the WAW is planned and it is stated that monitoring will occur in advance of this. Consideration should be given to biennial environmental monitoring report publication as significant damage can occur over short periods of time.	<p>As identified in the Draft Operational Programme, the findings of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will form a central part of the assessment and review of the Operational Programme, particularly at the mid-term review stage (the first of which will be in 2017), and it will inform any changes to the Operational Programme that are necessary. An annual summary of the results of monitoring will be publically available on the Fáilte Ireland website.</p> <p>This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating of the Operational Programme (Section 4), further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group. See also detailed response provided under Section 2.6, Submission 6, No. 2 d) (iv).</p>	The Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group. Refer to Section 4 of the Programme.

## 2.6 Submission No. 6: Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
a)	<p>The Department refers to your correspondence of 27/03/15, amended by your cover letter of 03/04/15, in relation to the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019, henceforward referred to as the Operational Programme. Reference is also made to the accompanying appendices, SEA Environmental Report and the document entitled "Natura Impact Report" (NIR).</p> <p>The following observations address the operational programme and its associated environmental assessments, and are intended to assist Fáilte Ireland in meeting its obligations in relation to European sites, and in relation to biodiversity and environmental protection in general. The observations are not exhaustive, and point out only some examples of issues that should be taken account of in Fáilte Ireland's appropriate assessment, pursuant to Part 5 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011. The Department recommends that further review and analysis of the operational programme and its implications for European sites be undertaken, and that the mitigation is further developed (including timelines for implementation) and integrated into the operational programme itself. Among other considerations and requirements, there should be a complete, precise and definitive conclusion of the appropriate assessment. These observations are made without prejudice to any future recommendation that may be made by the Department concerning the programme or its constitutive elements, including within the planning process.</p>	Noted – any issues flagged in this part of the text are dealt with under subsequent points.	None.
b)	<p>The Department has provided previous observations to Fáilte Ireland in respect of the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Signature Tourism Proposition, including in the submission of 04/12/13 (our ref. G pre00390/2013) and at meetings in 2014. It is understood that that process was discontinued and that the WAW was launched officially in February 2014.</p> <p>The Department also notes that Fáilte Ireland has recently announced a plan called "Ireland's Ancient East" "for east and south of Ireland with similar scale and ambition as Wild Atlantic Way [that] will turn a transit zone into a touring region"<sup>10</sup>. Many of the issues and observations below may be equally pertinent to the development of this new plan, given the ambition to deliver an additional 600,000 overseas visitors to the area by 2020. As noted in the Department's observations to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on the national tourism policy, all public authorities have a duty under Regulation 27 of the 2011 Regulations not to cause deterioration to European sites, <i>inter alia</i>, through the exercise of its functions.</p> <p>The Department would be happy to meet with Fáilte Ireland to discuss these observations, the on-going operation of the Programme</p>	These comments are noted and any future plan will be fully screened in accordance with the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directive. A meeting was held with the Department on 1 July 2015 to discuss this submission.	None.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.failteireland.ie/Footer/Media-Centre/Ministers-Donohoe-Ring-launch-%E2%80%98Ireland%E2%80%99s-Ancient-E.aspx> accessed 27th April 2015

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	(including with respect to the mid-term review), as well as the development of the new Ancient East Programme, if that would be of benefit. The Department would also like to welcome the commitment within the Programme to support for the AranLIFE Programme.		
<b>1. Environmental assessments required</b>			
c)	<p>Fáilte Ireland, as a public authority under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, has confirmed that an appropriate assessment is required for the operational programme. This is to be carried out in accordance with Regulation 42 of these Regulations, and sub-sections 9-12 in particular. The NIR is taken by this Department to correspond to a Natura Impact Statement<sup>11</sup> (NIS) for the purpose of the above legislation and the appropriate assessment.</p> <p>Fáilte Ireland has also confirmed that an SEA is required for the draft programme.</p>	Noted.	None.
<b>2. Draft Operational Programme</b>			
d)	(i) The WAW is an existing tourism brand and long distance sign-posted route that was identified in May 2013. It extends roughly 2500km in length along the Atlantic coast from Donegal to west Cork, along which 161 candidate discovery points (existing viewing points and lay-bys) and 28 embarkation points to 26 offshore islands are identified. The immediate catchment for the WAW is the coastal zone but the Programme Area comprises the nine western coastal counties, Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Limerick, Kerry, and Cork.	Noted.	None.
	(ii) The Department understands that Fáilte Ireland is co-ordinating and promoting the WAW, providing funding, and setting standards and preparing guidelines, but is not undertaking the development of components of the WAW or associated upgrade or repair works. It is important, therefore, that robust systems are in place that will be overseen by Fáilte Ireland, or some other responsible group, to ensure that all key commitments made at the programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time), and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of European sites will result.	Noted and agreed. This comment has resulted in the inclusion of an Environmental Management and Monitoring Section in Section 4 of the Operational Programme, which commits to the setting up of a monitoring and management group to ensure that a robust system is in place to ensure that all commitments made at programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time) and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of the environment will occur.	Included in Action 46 of OP.
	(iii) In its co-ordinating role, Fáilte Ireland may wish to consider a mechanism for establishing compliance with the operational programme, and with the Habitats Directive and national legislation, including wildlife legislation, when considering applications for funding for development and works associated with the WAW, if this is not already in place.		
	(iv) The operational programme has an in-built review and monitoring system which will	Noted. This part of the submission and parts of other submissions have resulted in the updating	The Operational Programme has been updated, further expanding

<sup>11</sup> "Natura Impact Statement" means a report comprising the scientific examination of a plan or project and the relevant European Site or European Sites, to identify and characterise any possible implications of the plan or project individually or in combination with other plans or projects in view of the conservation objectives of the site or sites, and any further information including, but not limited to, any plans, maps or drawings, scientific information or data required to enable the carrying out of an Appropriate Assessment.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>assess, to some extent, the impacts of the WAW as part of a mid-term review in 2017, and this is welcomed. It is understood that changes can be made to the WAW route and discovery points if the environmental monitoring strategy predicts or observes that visitor activity and/or visitor intensification is resulting in a negative impact on the environment in particular locations. In this regard, there should be particular focus on the 58 candidate discovery points and 8 embarkation points that are within or close to (100m or less from) European sites (Table 5, NIR Appendix I). The monitoring should be targeted to the conservation objectives of European sites, and to the significant effects arising from the WAW on its own and in combination with other plans and projects, taking existing uses, pressures and loadings into account. Where adverse effects are identified, in addition to omissions from the WAW, visitor management should also be considered by Fáilte Ireland at sensitive sites, particularly where amenity and recreational pressures are affecting the conservation objectives of European sites. The Department is aware of proposals by local authorities to develop visitor facilities and amenities within European sites that, as currently proposed, may result in the loss of priority Annexed habitats that are qualifying interests for the European sites. This needs to be considered in the management of the operational programme and the environmental assessments.</p>	<p>of the Operational Programme, further expanding on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment up of a Monitoring Group.</p> <p><b>The Monitoring Group</b></p> <p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>Fáilte Ireland recognise that the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way as a brand to unify a number of existing and long-established routes and viewing locations carries with it legal and practical obligations.</p> <p>The legal obligation is to ensure that the Programme is framed in a way that no direct or indirect effects will harm the environment. The practical obligation is to ensure that the brand promise is kept of ensuring that the Atlantic Way remains Wild.</p> <p>The implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way in accordance with the Operational Programme offers an opportunity to improve the management and operation of routes and sites by third parties.</p> <p>The Operational Programme offers opportunities to consistently reduce adverse existing and emerging effects and to improve and accelerate environmental protection and improvement.</p>	<p>on monitoring provisions and committing to the establishment of a Monitoring Group.</p>
	<p>(v) It is unclear to this Department whether the above monitoring and review will be carried out by (or on behalf of) Fáilte Ireland, and how decisions will be made in response to the findings and conclusions. Again, it will be necessary for Fáilte Ireland to have robust management structures in place to ensure this aspect of the operational programme will be delivered and will be effective in ensuring that the requirements of Article 6(2) and 6(3) of the Habitats Directive are met in relation to European sites, (as noted in the previous paragraph).</p>	<p>However it is important to note that Fáilte Ireland are not a consent authority who can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compel or control development actors to carry out, cease or modify activities and developments;</li> <li>• Instruct Local Authorities or other State or Public officials in the exercise of their statutory duties; or</li> <li>• Control the activities of individuals – visitor or resident in the public realm.</li> </ul> <p>The role of Fáilte Ireland therefore is to become a persuader and gatekeeper who can influence better environmental outcomes along the Wild Atlantic Way.</p> <p>The principle persuasion mechanisms that will be used will be eligibility criteria for funding and support as well as the provision of monitoring data on the state of the environment in the vicinity of the Wild Atlantic Way.</p> <p><b>Environmental Monitoring</b></p> <p>The branding and promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way will be accompanied by environmental monitoring.</p> <p>The purpose of the monitoring will be to ensure that the effects of the implementation of the Operational Programme are understood and acted upon to ensure that there will be no delays in identifying existing or emerging activities that could threaten the environment. The principle concern is the capacity of the receiving environment – and European Sites in</p>	

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
		<p>particular – to sustainably absorb the impacts of the activities of existing visitors, and new.</p> <p>The Wild Atlantic Way is a branding exercise that unifies a series of existing and long-established touring routes along existing roads, viewing points and lay-bys.</p> <p>These predominantly seasonal activities have evolved over many years and now co-exist with a wide range of other year-round uses including farming, forestry and uses associated with settlement.</p> <p>The monitoring examines individual sites as well as larger-scale and regional indicators. It examines the types, spatial patterns and intensity of existing visitor activities at and adjacent to Discovery Points.</p> <p>This work, in turn, serves to direct monitoring ecologists to areas known to receive maximum, moderate, minimum and no loading. The ecologists survey these and control areas – having particular regard to the specific conservation objectives of relevant European Sites.</p> <p>Monitoring work is intended to describe the existing conditions of sites with a view to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute towards Visitor Management Strategies;</li> <li>• Contribute towards future editions of Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way Guidelines;</li> <li>• Identify medial action/works require;</li> <li>• Assess the capacity for future loadings; and</li> <li>• Integrate site management with future European Site Management Plans.</li> </ul> <p>Fáilte Ireland are committed to continuous monitoring of the environmental effects of the Wild Atlantic Way. The monitoring is described in separate detail – it includes both compilation of relevant regional data that is collected by other agencies – as well as site specific data collected on behalf of Fáilte Ireland.</p> <p>Future monitoring will expand to include Discovery Points prioritised in order of sensitivity and significance – as directed by a Monitoring Group.</p> <p><b>Monitoring Group</b></p> <p>The results of Wild Atlantic Way monitoring activities will be collated and presented to a Monitoring Group twice each year. The Group will consist of relevant actors along the Wild Atlantic Way. It aims to include, but not be limited to, representatives of Environmental Agencies – such as NPWS and EPA; Local Authorities; Tourism interests – including local development/community groups as well as relevant environmental NGOs – such as An Taisce and Birdwatch Ireland.</p> <p>The objective of the Monitoring Groups will be to ensure that that robust systems are in place, in appropriate existing authorities, to ensure</p>	

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
		<p>that all key commitments made at the Programme level will be delivered effectively (including at the appropriate time), and to ensure that no adverse effects on the integrity of the environment will result.</p> <p>The first meeting, in Q4 of each year, will be to present and review the results of monitoring during the previous six months. The purpose of the meeting will be to identify areas where monitoring highlights the existence or emergence of excessive loading on the environment. This information can then be used by relevant members of the Working Group to identify protective, remedial or improvement actions within their own areas of responsibility during the following year.</p> <p>The second meeting, in Q1 of the following year and in advance of the tourist season commencing, will be to approve the proposed next annual monitoring programme. The purpose of the meeting will be to ensure that monitoring is addressing areas of concern using methods and personnel that are appropriate. A secondary purpose would be to review progress made in addressing concerns raised by previous monitoring – in order to amend monitoring accordingly.</p> <p>An annual summary of the results of monitoring will be publically available on the Fáilte Ireland website.</p>	
	<p>(vi) The operational programme acknowledges that it has not yet been determined that the 'candidate Discovery Points' demonstrably comply with all relevant planning and environmental regulatory requirements but that this must happen prior to any modification or alteration of these points. It is also noted that, "<i>a number may have to change or be substituted by alternative sites, in the event of adverse findings of Environmental Assessment, undertaken in advance of any intensification of use or works. They may also need to be omitted on account of findings arising from the environmental monitoring programme thereafter.</i>" The risks of adopting the operational programme where these uncertainties exist should be given due consideration by Fáilte Ireland in the context of the appropriate assessment that has yet to be carried out. In this regard, it is important to note that case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (Case C-258/11, Sweetman and others) has established that the assessment carried out under Article 6(3) cannot have lacunae and must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions capable of removing all reasonable scientific doubt as to the effects of a project on a European site.</p>	<p>The Operational Programme is part of a hierarchy of decision making and the SEA Environmental Report and AA Natura Impact Report demonstrate compliance of the Operational Programme with all relevant planning and regulatory requirements. Through mitigation, the AA has demonstrated the Operational Programme will not impact on the Natura 2000 network of sites<sup>12</sup>.</p> <p>As is the law, lower tier projects will be subject to their own consenting procedures will not be permitted if they will impact on the Natura 2000 network of sites<sup>13</sup>.</p> <p>The principle of Subsidiarity makes specific provision for the need to recognise and respect that decision-making takes place within a hierarchical framework – that includes high-level programmes and policies that are subject to SEA and AA being followed by site specific EIA and AA. The case referred to relates to incomplete project-level (horizontal) information and not to the hierarchy of sequential decisions (vertical) involved in the transposition of high-level programmes to projects.</p>	<p>To clarify the following</p> <p>(vii) To add the following footnote after "the environment"</p> <p>This includes: achieving conservation objectives in European Sites; avoiding deterioration of habitats or species and avoiding disturbance of species, for which the sites have been designated in accordance with Regulation 27 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, or Section 177S of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.</p>

<sup>12</sup> Except as provided for in Section 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, programme or project to proceed; and
- c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

<sup>13</sup> Except as provided for in Section 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, programme or project to proceed; and
- c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>(vii) While it is welcomed that <i>“this and future Programmes will constitute an iterative process which will continually adapt to meet the needs of visitors, the local community and culture, the environment and the tourism industry and trade, while striving all the time to strike a balance between them”</i>, the current and future programmes should also acknowledge the need for adaptation to ensure that the conservation objectives of European sites are achieved, and/or to ensure that there will be no delays towards their achievement. It should also be acknowledged that adaptation may be required to ensure that, in European sites, there is no deterioration of habitats or of the habitats of species and no significant disturbance of species for which the sites have been designated in accordance with Regulation 27 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, or Section 177S of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended.</p>	<p>“the environment” in the quote provided encompasses (amongst other things): achieving conservation objectives in European Sites; avoiding deterioration of habitats or species and avoiding disturbance of species, for which the sites have been designated in accordance with Regulation 27 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011, or Section 177S of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as amended. This can be clarified in the text.</p>	<p>To clarify in the text of the Operational Programme (and associated documents where this text is reproduced) what “the environment” encompasses.</p>
	<p>(viii) The Department understands that development which is part of the operational programme will be carried out by relevant local authorities, and possibly by other groups (e.g. Local Development Groups, Tidy Towns Committees, etc.) or individuals. It is important, therefore, that the relevant regulating mechanisms, and assessment requirements, are reflected accurately in the operational programme documents. Mitigation measures should also form part of the programme, where necessary, and/or should amend the wording of or the commitments in the programme. Some examples of issues requiring review, clarification and amendment are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development or works are more likely to be carried out by a local authority, as opposed to a planning authority;</li> <li>• a local or planning authority is unlikely to carry out an appropriate assessment of their own development as the competent authority in such instances is likely to be An Bord Pleanála;</li> <li>• a local authority must screen projects or proposed development for appropriate assessment to determine whether a Section 177AE application to An Bord Pleanála is required;</li> <li>• references to Part 8 applications should be reviewed as this is unlikely to be the regulatory process in most cases: programme/project elements by a local authority that require appropriate assessment will be the subject of Section 177AE applications, and smaller projects by a local authority may not come under Part 8 because of project type and/or low cost (under threshold);</li> <li>• developments or works by other groups or individuals may require planning permission or, if not, may require ministerial consent in European sites;</li> <li>• the planning authority is likely to be responsible for deciding whether there are restrictions on exemptions</li> </ul>	<p>Projects will generally be undertaken by local authorities. Occasionally projects will be undertaken by others e.g. local development groups, community groups etc. When discussing the undertaking etc. of projects, the Operational Programme and associated documents generally refer to local authorities. Such references should be taken as being applicable to others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) where relevant.</p> <p>Projects undertaken by others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) will be required to comply with relevant Planning and Development Regulations etc.</p> <p>Detail will be provided on the regulating mechanisms involved with respect to the projects <i>Figure 2: SEA and AA Requirements</i>.</p> <p>Mitigation measures already form part of the Operational Programme and provide for compliance with all relevant planning and regulatory requirements however the suggested clarifications and amendments will be made the Operational Programme.</p>	<p>To replace references to “planning authorities” with “local authorities”, in all documents.</p> <p>---</p> <p>To insert the following text in the Operational Programme and associated documents.</p> <p>Projects will generally be undertaken by local authorities. Occasionally projects will be undertaken by others e.g. local development groups, community groups etc. When discussing the undertaking etc. of projects, the Operational Programme and associated documents generally refer to local authorities. Such references should be taken as being applicable to others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) where relevant.</p> <p>Projects undertaken by others (e.g. local development groups, community groups etc.) will be required to comply with relevant Planning and Development Regulations etc.</p> <p>---</p> <p>To add “Projects by others” to references to ‘Projects by Local Authorities’ on Figure 2 in the Operational Programme and Figure 3.2 in the SEA Environmental Report.</p> <p>---</p> <p>To edit Section 1.7 of the Operational Programme as follows to clarify the regulating mechanisms involved with respect to the lower tier projects.</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	in the case of exempted development by a group or individual.		<p>1.7 Strategic Environmental Assessment <b>and Appropriate Assessment</b></p> <p>A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has been undertaken alongside the preparation of this <del>draft</del> Operational Programme and it has informed much of its content. The SEA has resulted in a <del>Draft</del> Environmental Report which accompanies this <del>draft</del> Operational Programme.</p> <p>The following chart illustrates the stage at which the Strategic Environmental Assessment is being undertaken as part of the over Wild Atlantic Way initiative.</p> <p>A <del>draft</del> Environmental Monitoring Strategy has been devised which will be implemented each year and which seeks to monitor the impacts of the implementation of this Operational Programme over its five-year term. The findings of the Environmental Monitoring Strategy will form a central part of the assessment and review of the Operational Programme, particularly at the mid-term review stage, and it will inform any changes to the Operational Programme that are necessary.</p> <p><b>In addition to this a review of the Wild Atlantic Way initiative will be undertaken every five years and this will take account of the requirements of the SEA and Habitats Directive.</b></p> <p><b>An Appropriate Assessment (AA) has also been undertaken alongside the preparation of this <del>draft</del> Operational Programme and it has informed much of its content. The SEA has resulted in a Natura Impact Report which accompanies this <del>draft</del> Operational Programme.</b></p> <p><b>Proposals for development must be screened for the need to undertake appropriate assessment as per the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (Part 5, Section 42).</b></p> <p><b>A local authority is unlikely to carry out an appropriate assessment of their own development as the competent authority in such</b></p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
			<p>instances is likely to be An Bord Pleanála. A local authority must screen proposed developments for appropriate assessment to determine whether a Section 177AE application to An Bord Pleanála is required.</p> <p>If proposals are screened out then planning exemptions are not lost. If a Stage 2 AA is required then planning exemptions are lost and planning permission must be sought<sup>14</sup>. If a local authority is applying for the permission and Stage 2 AA is required, then the application must go to An Bord Pleanála.</p> <p>Developments or works by other groups or individuals may require planning permission or, if not, may require Ministerial consent in European sites. Local authorities are likely to be responsible for deciding whether there are restrictions on exemptions in the case of exempted development by a group or individual.</p> <p>---</p> <p>To update Appendix 6 of the Operational Programme to take account of the above clarification of the regulating mechanisms involved with respect to the lower tier projects.</p>
	<p>(ix) The operational programme has a total of 48 actions. Some of these actions require further analysis in the NIS, and the incorporation of high level mitigation to ensure that no adverse effects on European sites will result or be perpetuated. Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 2: the new loops off the WAW that are to be identified in the latter half of 2016 should be informed by consideration, among other things, of their likely significant effects, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on European sites, and should be subject to screening for appropriate assessment.</li> <li>• Actions 4 and 5: these support or promote the development of other tourist and recreational facilities that are not geographically specific. High-level mitigation measures are required in the programme to ensure that future projects are planned, designed and regulated, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 2: These new loops will be informed by consideration of, among other things, of their likely significant effects, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on European sites, and will be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment.</li> <li>• Actions 4 and 5: The SEAs of the relevant Planning Authorities – together with compliance with planning and environmental legislation, including the measures which are included in Appendix 6 of the Operational Programme – addresses these issues. Fáilte Ireland is not a consenting authority – but is an active Statutory Consultee – with a specific remit to protect tourism assets. FI will continue to use this role to contribute towards compliance in the planning process.</li> <li>• Action 7: This action is aimed towards at hotels and settlements (charging points already exist at</li> </ul>	<p>Minor changes to the NIS to help clarify some of the issues raised.</p> <p>Action 2 in the Operational Programme has been updated as follows:</p> <p>Action 2: During the latter half of 2016, Fáilte Ireland, in association with relevant partners, will initiate a process to identify suitable loops off the Wild Atlantic Way, which are intended to become part of the overall Wild Atlantic Way experience. There are a number of good examples of these that have already been in existence for a number of years which are being promoted locally. This process will be informed, <i>inter alia</i>, by an analysis of visitor movement patterns throughout the Wild Atlantic Way Programme area. The identification and</p>

<sup>14</sup> As per Part I, Section 4 (4) of the Planning Act 2000 as amended states that [Notwithstanding paragraphs (a), (i), (ia) and (l) of subsection (1) and any regulations under subsection (2)]: development shall not be exempted development if an environmental impact assessment or an appropriate assessment of the development is required.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>screened or assessed to ensure that adverse effects on the integrity of European sites or on other sensitive ecological receptors will not result. In the absence of such mitigation measures, it is unlikely to be possible to determine that adverse effects will not result from the implementation of the operational programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 7: charging points and associated electrical connections in European sites, if such sites are not possible to avoid, could have adverse effects and may require planning permission. Further analysis of this action and additional mitigation measures are required to eliminate the potential for adverse effects to arise.</li> <li>Visitor Management (general): proposals to extend the visitor season and length of stay could lead to greater or more prolonged disturbance at sites, and in different seasons, with the result that adverse effects might occur. This should be further analysed in the NIS, with high/programme-level mitigation specified as necessary. Any unsustainable loadings of sites should normally be predicted by the assessment process for the project in question, or the relevant or related plan(s), prior to consent or adoption. Note that post-assessment action to reduce impacts may be insufficient if impacts will need to be avoided. Unsustainable loadings require further examination and analysis to address potential adverse effects that may exist or arise, notably in the context of cumulative or in combination effects, and the requirements of Article 6(2) of the Habitats Directive.</li> <li>Action 10: existing motorhome parking and overnighting facilities should also consider, among other things, effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives, and whether deterioration of habitats is being caused, as per the previous point.</li> <li>Action 11: unsustainable environmental loadings should be considered further at a strategic level in the NIS. Such consideration should also have informed the selection of the route of the WAW and of the points along the route – see also above.</li> </ul>	<p>some of these) – not at Discovery Points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitor Research shows that at managed sites there is no direct link between increased visitor numbers and environmental loading.</li> <li>Visitor Management (general): Monitoring is continuing to examine this issue. 'post-assessment' infers that these are new uses – as stated in the Operational Programme and associated documents, tourism in these areas has existed long before these areas were designated. Management is aimed at improving long-established patterns of activity.</li> <li>Action 10: As stated above Management is aimed at improving long-established patterns of activity. The local authorities also have separate and specific powers to control uses. The Monitoring Group will provide data to local authorities to augment and support their planning and enforcement functions.</li> <li>Action 11: see comments under Visitor Management above.</li> </ul>	<p>establishment of loops off the main spine will also encourage the dispersal of visitors throughout the wider destinations. <b>These new loops will be informed by consideration of, among other things, of their likely significant effects, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on European sites, and will be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment.</b></p> <p>Action 7 in the Operational Programme has been updated as follows:</p> <p>Action 7: Work with the ESB in delivering sufficient E-Car charging points to ensure that the Wild Atlantic Way can be experienced by electric car by 2020, with sections 'electrified' by the end of 2016. <b>Charging points would be delivered in built up areas including hotels, towns and villages and are not planned for Discovery Points.</b></p> <p>Action 10 in the Operational Programme has been updated as follows:</p> <p>Action 10: Undertake a review of the current provision of motorhome parking and overnighting facilities along the Wild Atlantic Way and identify priorities for the future improvement of such facilities, informed by good practice internationally, and in association with the Local Authorities. <b>This review will, amongst other things, consider potential effects on European sites in view of their conservation objectives.</b></p>
<b>3. Appendix 6</b>			
e)	The purpose and content of Appendix 6 requires review and revision for clarity and accuracy, including in the context of points raised above and what is meant by the " <i>lower levels of decision making in order to get funding</i> ". The 'topic' and 'requirement' columns would also benefit from explanation or clarification.	The purpose and content of Appendix 6 will be clarified.  Fáilte Ireland in its co-ordinating role, have devised a mechanism for establishing compliance with the Operational Programme, and with the Habitats Directive and national	To rename Appendix 6 "Environmental Management for <b>Local Planning Authorities and Others</b> "  ---

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>In particular, the element with the heading 'NPWS and integrated management plans'<sup>15</sup> is queried and requires further consideration and explanation as it is making commitments for this Department and for planning authorities that have not been discussed, agreed or programmed to date. Furthermore, any such plans, if they were to be prepared, would have to prioritise achieving the conservation objectives of the European sites in question, in compliance with the Birds and Habitats Directives and relevant legislation. This Department is currently implementing a programme of work to set site-specific conservation objectives for all SACs and SPAs, and these should be completed by 2018. The Department would welcome a commitment from those responsible for adopting and implementing the Operational Programme to integrate the conservation objectives into forthcoming plans, policies etc.</p>	<p>legislation, including wildlife legislation, when considering applications for funding for development and works associated with the WAW. This requires applicants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be fully and demonstrable compliant with all relevant planning and environmental legislation</li> <li>• Comply with the Wild Atlantic Way Guidelines – which include, inter alia, the requirement for contractors to engage an Ecological Clerk of Works to oversee the preparation of any plans for site works and to attend and supervise the execution of said works to ensure compliance with the provisions of the Habitats Directive, namely to prevent any effects on the conservation objectives of European Sites.</li> </ul> <p>Regarding, integrated management plans, Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive requires that Member States establish the necessary conservation measures for Special Area of Conservation involving, if need be, appropriate management plans specifically designed for the sites or integrated into other development plans. The NPWS's current priority is to identify site specific conservation objectives; management plans may be considered after this is done.</p>	<p>To update the introduction at the beginning of Appendix 6 as follows:</p> <p><b>The objective of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development.</b></p> <p><b>The SEA which has been undertaken for the Operational Programme (OP), the findings of which have been informed by the Appropriate Assessment and are presented in an SEA Environmental Report which accompanies Operational Programme, has resulted in the integration of this Appendix into the Operational Programme in order to facilitate environmental protection and sustainable development at lower levels of decision making.</b></p> <p>This appendix includes various provisions with which local planning authorities and others will demonstrate compliance at lower levels of decision making in order to get funding. These decision making processes will include project level Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA), as appropriate.</p> <p><b>Proposals for development must be screened for the need to undertake appropriate assessment as per the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (Part 5, Section 42).</b></p> <p><b>A local authority is unlikely to carry out an appropriate assessment of their own development as the competent authority in such instances is likely to be An Bord Pleanála. A local authority must screen</b></p>

<sup>15</sup> NPWS & Integrated Management Plans: Local authorities shall engage with the National Parks & Wildlife Service to ensure Integrated Management Plans are prepared for all Natura sites (or parts thereof) and ensure that plans are fully integrated with the Operational Programme and other plans and programmes, with the intention that such plans are practical, achievable and sustainable and have regard to all relevant ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations and with special regard to local communities.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
			<p><b>proposed developments for appropriate assessment to determine whether a Section 177AE application to An Bord Pleanála is required.</b></p> <p><b>If proposals are screened out then planning exemptions are not lost. If a Stage 2 AA is required then planning exemptions are lost and planning permission must be sought<sup>16</sup>. If a local authority is applying for the permission and Stage 2 AA is required, then the application must go to An Bord Pleanála.</b></p> <p><b>Developments or works by other groups or individuals may require planning permission or, if not, may require Ministerial consent in European sites. Local authorities are likely to be responsible for deciding whether there are restrictions on exemptions in the case of exempted development by a group or individual.</b></p> <p>---</p> <p>To add the following footnote to the 'Topic' column:</p> <p>The SEA Directive identifies a number of environmental topics which must be considered in the assessments being undertaken for plans and programmes. These topics are listed in this column and comprise biodiversity and flora and fauna, population and human health, soil, water, air and climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape.</p> <p>---</p> <p>To add the following footnote to the 'Requirement' column:</p> <p>The provisions listed under this column are the requirements which the local authorities and others will have to comply with in order to get funding.</p> <p>---</p> <p><b>NPWS &amp; Integrated Management Plans</b>                      Planning authorities shall engage with the National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service to ensure <b>Regarding, integrated management plans, Article 6(1) of the</b></p>

<sup>16</sup> As per Part I, Section 4 (4) of the Planning Act 2000 as amended states that [Notwithstanding paragraphs (a), (i), (ia) and (l) of subsection (1) and any regulations under subsection (2)]: development shall not be exempted development if an environmental impact assessment or an appropriate assessment of the development is required.

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
			<p><b>Habitats Directive requires that Member States establish the necessary conservation measures for Special Area of Conservation involving, if need be, appropriate management plans specifically designed for the sites or integrated into other development plans. The NPWS's current priority is to identify site specific conservation objectives; management plans may be considered after this is done.</b></p> <p><b>Where</b> Integrated Management Plans are <b>being</b> prepared for all Natura sites (or parts thereof), <b>Fáilte Ireland and local authorities shall engage with the National Parks and Wildlife Service in order to</b> ensure that plans are fully integrated with the Operational Programme and other plans and programmes, with the intention that such plans are practical, achievable and sustainable and have regard to all relevant ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations and with special regard to local communities.</p>
<b>4. NIS</b>			
f)	<p>The NIS comprises mainly screening and determines that a total of 389 European sites are at risk from the operational programme. It is considered, however, that, on the one hand, there is a lack of focus on the potential significant effects on the European sites that overlap with, or are close to, the WAW and the candidate discovery points and embarkation points. On the other hand, there is limited consideration of potential in combination effects of other plans, while other projects are not included in the analysis. NIS section 2.6 states that Table 7 lists the plans or projects that may interact with the operational programme to cause in-combination effects to Natura 2000 sites; in effect, Table 7 lists directives, legislation, strategies and plans, but not projects. The table also identifies potential negative in combination effects (e.g. National Cycle Network) but does not then address them further in the NIS or elsewhere, and does not specify mitigation.</p> <p>The Department has previously pointed out some inaccuracies in earlier programme documentation on the conservation objectives and qualifying interests of specific sites and advised that these should all be checked. Fáilte Ireland should note that the conservation objectives as listed in NIS section 3.3 are significantly out-of-date for SACs and should be re-examined; while changes to generic conservation objectives have occurred recently (in 2015), similar versions have been publicly available for a number of years. These generic</p>	<p>The Conservation Objectives in the NIR has been updated to include the current, most up to date versions that have been published by the Department.</p> <p>The AA has been updated to clarify what projects were considered.</p> <p>The assessment has considered available information on the condition of habitats which usually refers to the SAC / SPA as a whole and may not be relevant to the area in proximity to discovery points. The monitoring programme will provide more information on the condition of habitats. Data presented in the NIR include the recorded threats to individual sites (as described in previous versions of Natura Standard Data Forms), and also the various Qualifying Interest habitats and species.</p> <p>Attributes presented in the Site Specific Conservation Objectives have been used by the AA as indicators of the key sensitivities of particular habitats/species to assess certain potential effects.</p> <p>Response to areas of concern identified in this part of the submission:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research shows that at managed sites there is no direct link between increased visitor numbers and environmental loading. The NIR relies upon the Monitoring and Guidance aspects of the Operational</li> </ol>	<p>The Conservation Objectives in the NIR has been updated to include the current, most up to date versions that have been published by the Department.</p> <p>Table 7 of the NIR has been updated to include particular projects considered relevant to the WAW OP. Further discussions of potential in-combination / cumulative effects and mitigation of same has also been included.</p> <p>Parts of Section 4.1 have been rephrased to add clarity.</p>

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>conservation objectives specify maintaining or restoring the favourable conservation condition, and are limited to maintaining favourable conservation condition (see NIS section 2.2). This may be significant in the case of sites where deterioration, disturbance or unsustainable loadings are already in evidence. In the case of site-specific conservation objectives, which are available for some sites, particularly coastal and marine sites, objectives to either maintain or restore favourable conservation condition are specified (<i>e.g.</i> in the case of Kilkieran Bay and Islands cSAC (site code 002111), the objective is to restore the Annex I priority habitat, Machair). It should be noted also that, as further information and data are gathered for habitats and species in these sites, the objectives may change from maintain to restore, or vice versa. There is no exploration of whether there is existing damage, deterioration of habitats or significant disturbance of species at sites as a result of existing amenity and recreation pressures, or lack of management, and this may require further consideration, particularly in the context of signature discovery points.</p> <p>The NIS would benefit from revision and further analysis to explore the potential significant effects that could arise, or may exist, and to show that there are effective mitigation measures at programme level to prevent adverse effects on European sites arising from the WAW and the operational programme, alone and in combination with other plans and projects. Some key areas of concern are outlined below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visitor numbers are predicted to increase as a result of the WAW, including at many sensitive coastal sites linked to the WAW. The NIS should consider operational effects, including the likely increase in pressures on sites, and on their sensitive habitats and species, near the route, and near or served by the candidate discovery points in particular;</li> <li>2. It is a stated objective of this operational programme to work with local authorities and other relevant stakeholders to further improve the infrastructure and facilities for walking, cycling and water-based trails over the terms of this and subsequent operational programmes. There is no assessment or examination of the potential effects that could arise, and targeted mitigation measures at the programme level are lacking. For example, it is noted in the Strategy for "Wild Atlantic Route and Candidate Discovery Points" (page 26) that "Each local authority will be encouraged to adopt appropriate policies and objectives in their Development Plans relating to the goals and objectives contained in this Operational Programme". However this is not specifically supported in</li> </ol>	<p>Programme to identify and improve existing conditions – including any additionally attributable to the WAW. Also, at a high level the NIR assesses the various Qualifying Interests of all sites in relation to their sensitivity to effects of increased visitor numbers.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Fáilte Ireland is an active Statutory Consultee – with a specific remit to protect tourism assets. Fáilte Ireland will continue to use this role to ensure that Development Plan preparation – and mid-term review - adopt appropriate policies and objectives in their Development Plans relating to the goals and objectives contained in this Operational Programme</li> <li>3. As stated the activities along the WAW already exist and are long established and in most areas have previously had higher levels of use in the recent past. The adoption of the Operational Programme will not give rise to significant new direct and indirect environmental effects. The OP provides a robust framework to mitigate and improve management of existing effects. The principle uncertainty is how the environmental management objectives would be achieved without the WAW Operational Programme.</li> <li>4. As stated in the NIR, it is foreseen that these provisions could lead to adverse effects on European sites. The AA provides assessment of effects appropriate to the high level nature of the Programme which covers a broad geographical area.</li> <li>5. Fáilte Ireland believe that the monitoring data will be able to provide significant and site-specific support to the preparation of site-specific conservation objectives for all relevant SACs and SPAs and to NPWS and the development of integrated management plans for all relevant sites. Fáilte Ireland would be pleased to commit to contribute to this process – both by the provision of data and expertise – but also as a key facilitator for other parties through the Monitoring Group.</li> <li>6. FI are not consent authorities or landowners and have no specific role in these matters – other than to act as a key facilitator for other parties through the Monitoring Group.</li> <li>7. The Wild Atlantic Way already exists and are long established and in most areas have previously had higher levels of use in the recent past. The adoption of the Operational Programme will not give rise to significant new direct and indirect environmental effects. The Operational Programme provides a robust framework to mitigate and improve management of existing effects.</li> </ol>	

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, SEA Environmental Report and/or AA Natura Impact Report
	<p>the supporting actions, and it is unclear how this may occur in practice, particularly for those Local Authorities that have recently adopted their Development Plans.</p> <p>3. It is an objective of the programme to make sure that 100% of the direct and indirect environmental effects of Wild Atlantic Way initiatives and actions are fully assessed to the satisfaction of competent authorities/agencies, the public and visitors. The risks of adopting the operational programme where uncertainties regarding compliance currently exist should be given further consideration by Fáilte Ireland in the context of the appropriate assessment that has yet to be carried out. Other uncertainties have been raised above;</p> <p>4. The NIS deems that nine provisions of the plan have the potential to cause adverse impacts on European sites (NIS section 2.3.2); whether these are potential adverse effects on the conservation objectives and site integrity is not examined;</p> <p>5. Fáilte Ireland should note that that this Department is currently implementing a programme of work to set site-specific conservation objectives for all SACs and SPAs. The Department would welcome a commitment from those responsible for adopting and implementing the Operational Programme to integrate the conservation objectives into forthcoming plans, policies etc. The Department would welcome clarification and discussion with Fáilte Ireland on the reference to NPWS and the development of integrated management plans for all relevant sites as this has not been discussed with or programmed by the Department in the manner in which it is presented.</p> <p>6. There is no consideration in the operational programme or NIS of the effects, in some locations, of coastal erosion and storm damage, or of coastal squeeze. Fáilte Ireland will be aware that some major rehabilitation and repair works took place in coastal sites in response to the damage caused by winter storms in 2013/14, and that storms and associated changes to sites/damage to infrastructure could happen again in the life of the operational programme;</p> <p>7. Where specified mitigation measures in the NIS are used as the basis for concluding there will be no adverse effects on European sites, a precautionary approach should be</p>	<p>8. These measures will be clarified in the AA.</p> <p>9. The conclusion is that having incorporated suggested mitigation measures; it is considered that the Operational Programme will not impact on the Natura 2000 network of sites<sup>17</sup>. Article 6(4) is not foreseen as being necessitated with the implementation of the Operational Programme however projects will still need to undergo relevant stages of Appropriate Assessment.</p>	

<sup>17</sup> Except as provided for in Section 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.

SEA Statement Appendix I: SEA and AA Report on Submissions

No.	Relevant Submission Text	Response	Updates to Operational Programme, Environmental and/or AA Report SEA Natura Impact Report
	<p>adopted in assuming their effectiveness in all circumstances, particularly in the absence of detailed site-specific assessment of the measures in the context of the specific conservation objectives that apply. At plan stage, it would be preferable if the wording of the plan was tightened to avoid impacts, and reassessed, rather than relying on general mitigation lists;</p> <p>8. NIS (p. 49): Section 4 mitigation measures (Visitor management): point 1 is unclear; point 2 refers to mitigating peak visitor levels, but the mitigation proposed (extending the tourist season) could have significant effects itself;</p> <p>9. The footnote to the conclusion of the NIS is suggesting that adverse effects on the integrity of European sites may result from the implementation of the programme, or that such cases will be facilitated under the programme if they arise. This appears to be contrary to the narrative in Section 5 that "Having incorporated these suggested mitigation measures, it is considered that the Operational Programme will not impact on the Natura 2000 network of sites". The Department advises that Fáilte Ireland's appropriate assessment requires a precise conclusion, which needs to be informed by whether the Operational Programme will support or lead to development or activities that may need to be considered under Article 6 (4) of the Habitats Directive.</p>		