

# National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme Lisfannon Beach 2024



**Fáilte  
Ireland**

Turasóireacht Náisiúnta  
An tÚdara Eorbartha  
National Tourism  
Development Authority

# National Tourism and Environmental Monitoring Programme

## Report for Lisfannon Beach 2024

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## LISFANNON BEACH – INTERESTING FINDS

### Interesting Finds

Lisfannon Beach is within the Lough Swilly Special Protection Area. Oystercatcher, which is a Qualifying Interest of this site was recorded during the ecological survey. Lugworms, which were recorded in the muddy sands on the beach, are a valuable food source for Oystercatchers and other species of waders.



### Habitats

The following habitats were recorded on site:

- Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)
- Embryonic dunes (CD1)
- Marram dunes (CD2)
- Fixed dunes (CD3)
- Dune scrub and woodland (CD4)
- Upper salt marsh (CM2)
- Spoil and bare ground (ED2)
- Recolonising bare ground (ED3)
- Wet grassland (GS4)
- Moderately exposed rocky shores (LR2)
- Shingle and gravel shores (LS1)
- Muddy sand shores (LS3)
- Mixed sediment shores (LS5)

### Features of the Site

- Vehicle and bicycle parking, benches, lifebuoys, and dog waste bins are available at this site.
- Signage regarding water safety, history, ecology, and beach preservation is present on the site.
- Lough Swilly Marina is directly south of the site.

### Key Recommendations

- Signage advising visitors to stay on the beach and avoid the dunes and salt marsh habitats should be considered, along with signage indicating that dogs should remain on a lead.
- Fáilte Ireland along with Donegal County Council should consider developing a masterplan for Lisfannon Beach and relocating the existing beach carpark and WAW Discovery Point further inland.
- Damaged signage and fencing should be repaired or replaced.
- The fallen lifebuoy stand should be repaired or replaced.
- Donegal County Council should consider providing rubbish bins, other than for dog waste, throughout the site, along with instructional signage, to reduce littering.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) was appointed by Fáilte Ireland to conduct Visitor and Environmental Surveys as part of the National Environmental Surveying & Monitoring Programme. Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of recreation on the receiving environment.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. This 2024 National Monitoring report builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015. To date (excluding 2024 data), these surveys have monitored a total of 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 30,000 visitors at a range of popular sites including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points.

The environmental surveys and monitoring in 2023 followed the methodologies used in previous years. Following the completion of the 2023 surveys, a review of the methodology was undertaken. In developing the 2024 survey methodology, ROD considered the methodology for gathering the data, the presentation of the data, and the usefulness of the data gathered. The review also considered the time required to gather the data.

Ten sites were surveyed in 2024. The site locations are presented in Figure 1.1 below. This report is for Lisfannon Beach, Co. Donegal.

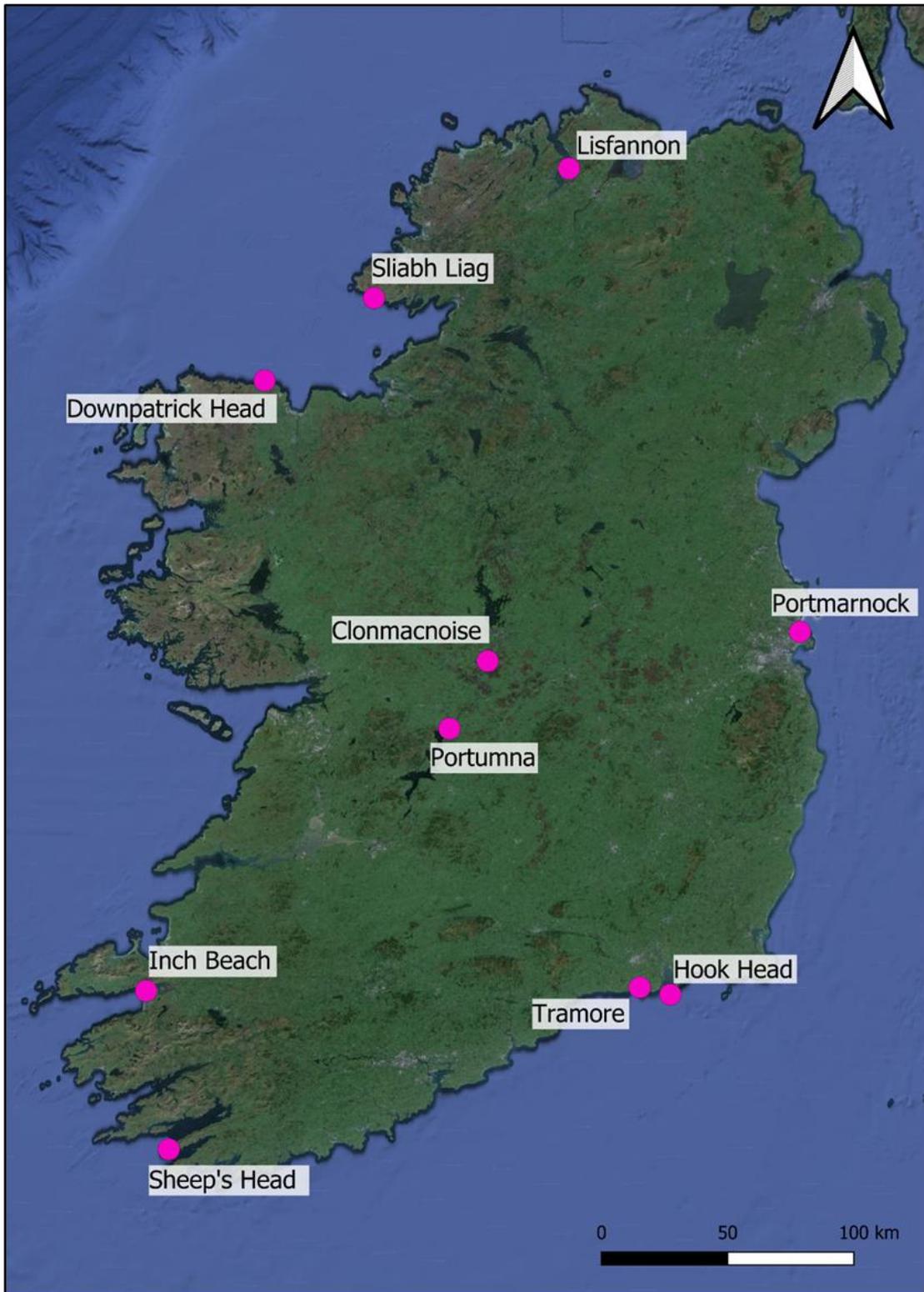


Figure 1.1 Environmental Monitoring Programme 2024 locations. Basemap provided by Google

## 1.2 Aim of the Report

The purpose of the monitoring programme is as follows:

- To gain insight from an environmental perspective at amenity and recreation sites across Ireland;
- To obtain data on path and trail conditions etc. for each site;
- To obtain data relating to habitats, flora, and fauna for each site;
- To identify observable trends or variations among the sites;
- To make recommendations where appropriate for site management for the benefit of the site, the visitor, and the natural environment.

## 1.3 Site Description of Lisfannon Beach

Lisfannon Beach is located in Co. Donegal, northwest of Fahan. Lisfannon Beach is accessible by vehicle via the Railway Road (R238) or by walking approximately 20 minutes via a footpath from Fahan. The area being surveyed for this report (“the site”) consists of the lands at Lisfannon Beach and the Lough Swilly Marina. The site boundary is presented in Figure 1.2 below. Informative signage, dog waste bins, and car and bike parking facilities are available on site. Lisfannon Beach has previously held a Blue Flag award but has not retain it in recent years due to water quality issues.

Fahan is recognised in the Donegal County Development Plan (2018-2024), as an important site for marine leisure and infrastructure.

The site is within Lough Swilly SAC (Special Area of Conservation) and Lough Swilly SPA (Special Protection Area).



Figure 1.2 Site boundary outlined in red. Basemap provided by Bing.

## 1.4 Critical Infrastructure

Table 1.1 to Table 1.3 below provide information on the infrastructure at Lisfannon Beach. Uisce Éireann's website was used to access information on the Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment Capacity Registers for County Donegal (Uisce Éireann, 2023a,b).

**Table 1.1 Lisfannon Beach Wastewater Infrastructure**

Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toilet facilities were not recorded on site.</li> <li>The nearest wastewater treatment facility is located at Fahan WWTP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fahan WWTP has no spare capacity available at present.</li> </ul>

**Table 1.2 Summary of Drinking Water Infrastructure at Lisfannon Beach**

Drinking Water	Water Resource Name (WRZ)	Uisce Éireann Indication of Capacity
The nearest settlement to Lisfannon Beach is Fahan	Letterkenny & Inishowen East & Pollan Dam	Potential capacity available (Level of service improvement required).

**Table 1.3 Summary of Transport Infrastructure at Lisfannon Beach**

Nearest Settlement	Current Transport Infrastructure	Comment
Fahan	Lisfannon Beach is accessed by the R238. There are two car parks on site.	The 933 and 976 buses stop in Fahan, which is approximately a 20-minute walk to the site.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

The following surveys were undertaken:

- Habitat Condition Surveys
- Pathway Condition Surveys
- Survey of the features, signage and hazards

The survey at Lisfannon Beach was undertaken on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 2024 during high tide. The weather conditions were clear and with some light rain. The sub-sections below present the methodology used at each site.

### 2.1 Habitat Condition Assessment Methodology

The habitats within the site were classified and mapped in accordance with *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and *Best Practice Guidance for Habitat Surveying and Mapping* (Smith et al. 2011). Notes were taken on species composition and habitat condition. Fossitt habitats corresponding to Annex I habitats were noted using the *Interpretation Manual of European Union Habitats* (EC, 2013). A desktop study was also undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of each site. Incidental sightings of birds, mammals, reptiles, etc. were also recorded during the site surveys.

The condition of the habitat in each polygon or line was noted, including any damage and the likely cause of the damage. The areas along the paths are described in the pathway condition assessment in Section 2.2 below. The following criteria were used to assess habitat condition:

- Extent of habitat degradation;
- Impact of habitat degradation (localised or widespread);
- Potential for the habitat to recover; and
- Whether or not intervention is required.

### 2.2 Pathway Condition Assessment Methodology

The main paths were defined during the site visit and a desk study which included a review of the Strava heat maps ([www.strava.com/heatmap](http://www.strava.com/heatmap)), and a review of the previous site monitoring reports, if available. Typically, the main paths are formalised waymarked trails or heavily trafficked paths that are not formalised. These paths usually link the site entry points and carparks to a destination or feature of interest. The paths were categorised into sections by type and composition. The different types of path are described in Table 2.1 below.



Visitor Characterisation Surveys were undertaken by Fáilte Ireland and are presented in Appendix A. Each path section is described as 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory' based on the condition of the path and whether or not it could accommodate the current levels of use. Indicators that a path was not suitable for the current levels of use included the presence of wet areas, erosion, trip hazards, damaged pavement, braiding, path widening and habitat loss along the path. Paths that generally facilitated unobstructed movement between locations were deemed as 'satisfactory'.

**Table 2.1 Pathway Types**

<b>Pathway Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Paved Carpark	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is paved, usually with tarmacadam.
Gravel Carpark	An area used for parking, wider than the road, that is gravel or crushed stone.
Paved Road	A road that is paved with tarmacadam or similar hard material.
Gravel Road	A road consisting of gravel or crushed stone, with no grass in the middle.
Gravel Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. Tracks are normally paved with gravel and can have grass in the middle
Grassy Track	A single vehicle pathway used by small numbers of vehicles. These tracks are not paved and are used primarily by tractors, quads or small numbers of private vehicles.
Paved Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic. Paved paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Gravel Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Gravel paths are found in more developed areas, to cater for higher levels of traffic.
Grassy Path	A path is primarily for foot traffic and can be a single track or a track wide enough for several people to walk abreast. Grassy paths are found in less developed areas, often beyond feature of interest, and are used less frequently.
Bare Ground Path	These paths occur where the vegetation had been eroded by foot traffic and is bare ground, or damages vegetation. These paths are often widespread on sites where formal waymarked trails are not provided.

### 2.3 Features, Signage and Hazards

Signage, features of interest, and hazards were recorded, photographed and mapped. Features includes built heritage, sculptures as well as toilets and bins. Examples of hazards include unstable walls or broken fences.

## 3.0 RESULTS

### 3.1 Habitat Condition Assessment

Habitats were surveyed during the optimum habitat survey season i.e., April to September (Smith et al., 2011). Habitats were classified according to *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000). Table 3.1 lists the habitats identified at Lisfannon Beach along with their corresponding Annex I habitats. A habitat map is presented in Figure 3.1. It should be noted that having a corresponding Annex I habitat does not indicate the Annex I habitat is automatically present.

**Table 3.1 Fossitt (2000) habitats and links to Annex I habitats**

Fossitt 2000 Habitat	Corresponding Annex I habitats (Natura 2000 code) <sup>1</sup>
Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)	None
Embryonic dunes (CD1)	Embryonic shifting dunes (2110)
Marram dunes (CD2)	Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ("white dunes") (2120)
Fixed dunes (CD3)	Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes") (2130)* Decalcified fixed dunes with <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> (2140)* Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes ( <i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i> ) (2150)* Dunes with <i>Salix repens</i> ssp. <i>argentea</i> ( <i>Salicion arenariae</i> ) (2170)
Dune scrub and woodland (CD4)	None
Upper salt marsh (CM2)	Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> ) (1330) Mediterranean salt meadows ( <i>Juncetalia maritimi</i> ) (1410)
Spoil and bare ground (ED2)	None
Recolonising bare ground (ED3)	None
Wet grassland (GS4)	Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils ( <i>Molinion caeruleae</i> ) (6410)
Moderately exposed rocky shores (LR2)	Reefs (1170)
Shingle and gravel shores (LS1)	Annual vegetation of drift lines (1210)
Muddy sand shores (LS3)	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide (1140)
Mixed sediment shores (LS5)	None
Mixed broadleaved woodland (WD1)	None
Scrub (WS1)	<i>Juniperus communis</i> formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands (5130)

<sup>1</sup> \* Indicates priority habitat

### Dune Habitats (CD1, CD2 & CD3)

Fixed dunes (CD3) are the dominant dune habitat type on the site, with Marram dunes (CD2) and Embryonic dunes (CD1) present in narrow stretches along the shoreside of this habitat. Marram (*Ammophila arenaria*) and other grasses such as Smooth Meadow Grass (*Poa pratensis*), Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) were the dominant species recorded. Other species including Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), White Clover (*Trifolium repens*), Black Medick (*Medicago lupulina*), Ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), *Sphagnum*, Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), and Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*) were also recorded.

### Upper salt marsh (CM2)

This was one of the most prevalent habitats on the site (Plate 3.1). Trampling and erosion was widespread in this habitat, which is discussed in further detail in Section 3.2. Despite signage requesting that dogs be kept on leads on the site, dogs were seen free roaming in this habitat during the survey. The upper salt marsh habitat is dominated by Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and grasses, with rushes present further away from the sea. Sea-milkwort (*Lysimachia maritima*), Common Scurvygrass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), Sea Plantain (*Plantago maritima*) and Birds-foot Trefoil were also recorded.



Plate 3.1 Fixed dunes (CD3) and upper salt marsh (CM2) habitats at Lisfannon Beach

### **Muddy sand shores (LS3)**

This habitat was present along the shore in the west of the site. Evidence of Lugworms (*Arenicola* sp.) was recorded in this habitat (Plate 3.2). Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) and Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) were recorded feeding in this habitat.



**Plate 3.2** Lugworm (*Arenicola* sp.) casts in the Muddy sand shore habitat

### **Wet grassland (GS4)**

A small area of wet grassland is present north of the beach carpark (Plate 3.3). The dominant species in this habitat were Deergass (*Trichophorum germanicum*), Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*), and Yellow Flag Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*).



**Plate 3.3** Wet grassland (GS4) habitat at Lisfannon Beach.

### **Scrub (WS1)**

This habitat is present along much of the eastern site boundary adjacent to the Railway Road. The area of scrub north of the beach carpark is dominated by Willow (*Salix sp.*). The stretch of scrub of the beach carpark includes species such as Willow (*Salix sp.*), Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and Hedge Bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*).

### **Moderately exposed rocky shores (LR2)**

Two pockets of this habitat are present in the north of the site on the beach beyond the main entrance. Barnacles and limpets were recorded in this habitat, along with Bladderwrack (*Fucus vesiculosus*), kelp, and filamentous algae.

### **Mixed broadleaved woodland (WD1)**

This habitat is present in the southeast of the site and borders the Railway Road. Species recorded in this habitat include Sycamore, Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and Willows and Ivy (*Hedera helix*).

### **Shingle and gravel shores (LS1) and mixed sediment shores (LS5)**

These habitats overlap, forming a small pocket in the southern portion of the site between the dunes and the shore. Shell fragments along with other sediments comprise this habitat. Vegetation was not recorded here.

### **Dune scrub and woodland (CD4)**

A small pocket of this habitat is present in the northern portion of the study area, in the north of the wet grassland habitat. Willow is the dominant tree species, with shrubs also present. The undergrowth is dominated by Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and grass species, with Smooth Meadow Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*), Ribwort Plantain, Birds-Foot Trefoil, Meadowsweet, Bindweed (*Convolvulus sp.*), Yellow Flag Iris, Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*), and Sphagnum moss also present.

### **Recolonising bare ground (ED3)**

This habitat is present at the marina carpark. Species present include White Clover, Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*), Daisy, Black Medick, Ribwort Plantain, Perennial Ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), Yorkshire Fog, Cock's Foot, Kidney Vetch and Cat's-Ear.

### **Spoil and bare ground (ED2)**

This habitat is present at the marina carpark. Species present here include White Clover, Daisy, Black Medick, Ribwort Plantain, Perennial Ryegrass, and Kidney Vetch.

### **Buildings and artificial surfaces (BL3)**

This habitat is present in the form of the beach carpark and the marina car and caravan park. This habitat is not of biodiversity value.



Figure 3.1 Habitat map of Lisfannon Beach. Basemap provided by Bing.

### 3.2 Pathway Condition Assessment

The tarmac road from the main Lisfannon Beach entrance to the carpark is in an unsatisfactory condition, with potholes and a large amount of sand on the road, making it uneven and difficult to traverse. This is presented in the top left corner of **Plate 3.14** and discussed further in Section 3.3.2 below. South of the carpark, a grassy path has been created, heading south of the carpark towards the salt marsh habitat. The condition of the pathway is satisfactory at the carpark, but it gradually deteriorates with widening, braiding and erosion evident further south. The path runs along the western side of the salt marsh habitat (top right corner of **Plate 3.14**). There is also a bare ground pathway through the dunes between the main beach and the saltmarsh habitat. This pathway is in unsatisfactory condition, with trampling and erosion leading to braiding and widening of the pathway, particularly where visitors are accessing the beach. The erosion is particularly prevalent in the southwest corner of the dunes.

The recently constructed road from the entrance of the marina to the carpark is paved and in satisfactory condition (bottom of **Plate 3.14**). The paved section becomes a gravel track, which is also in satisfactory condition. A gravel path diverts from the paved section close to the marina carpark entrance and leads north towards the beach. This pathway becomes a bare path, which braids into a number of smaller paths leading to the beach, and are considered unsatisfactory, due to their braiding nature and their potential to encroach further on the surrounding habitat. A small grassy path leads from this area, but loops back into it, and is considered satisfactory. An additional unsatisfactory bare ground pathways leads northeast off of this pathway. This transitions into a grassy path, which is relatively uniform and satisfactory, however as it proceeds north, it widens in places, and as such is unsatisfactory in these areas. A satisfactory bare ground path runs perpendicular to this pathway. The pathway condition assessment map is presented in Figure 3.3 below. **Plate 3.14** displays some of the pathways encountered at Lisfannon Beach.

Figure 3.2 presents a Strava heat map for the site. Strava aggregates data from users on its app who opt-in to share their activities and locations.



Figure 3.2 Heat map of visitor movements at Lisfannon Beach (Strava, 2024).

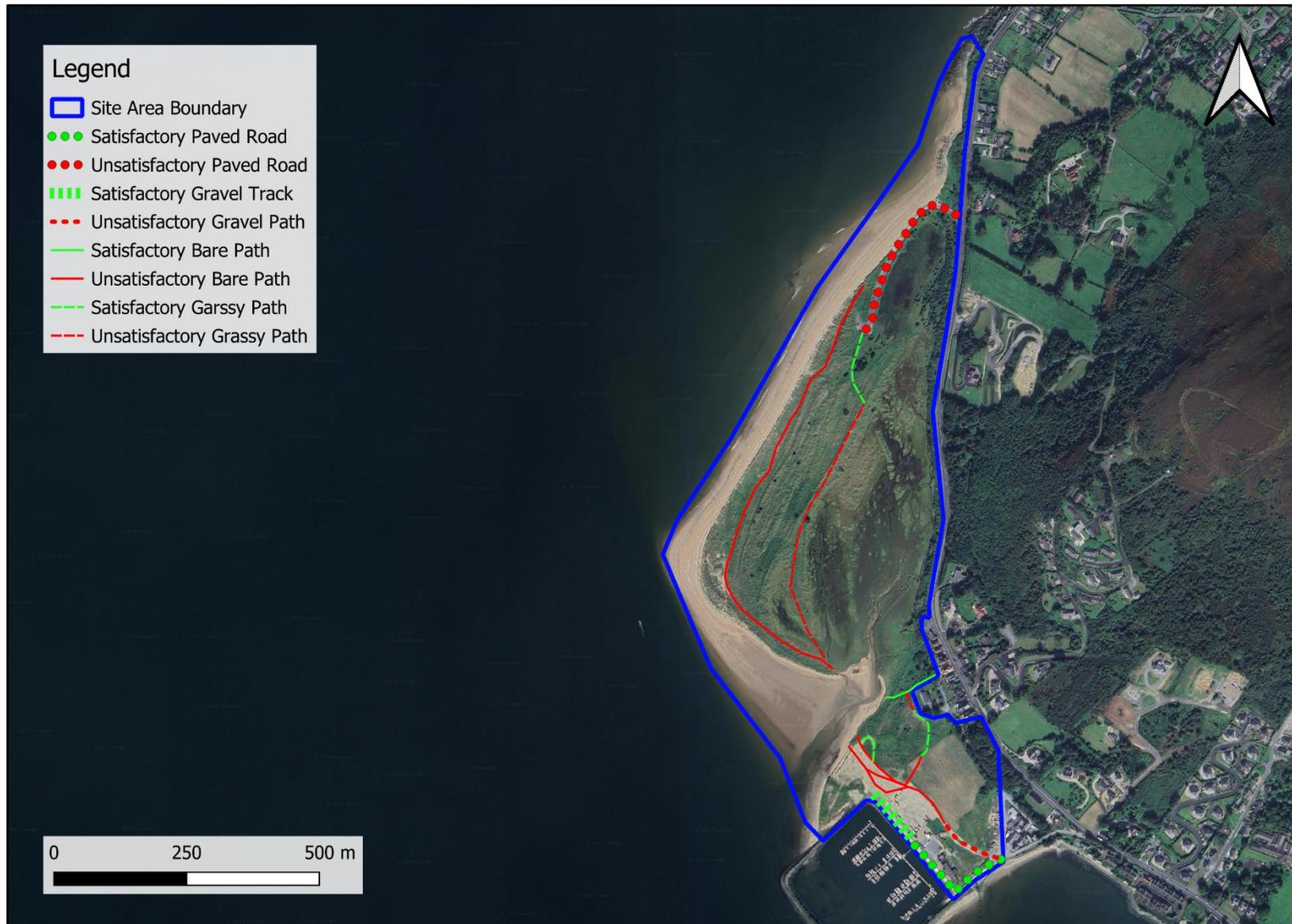


Figure 3.3 Pathway types and conditions present on the site. Basemap provided by Google.



**Tarmac Road to the beach carpark  
(Unsatisfactory)**



**Grassy Path (Unsatisfactory)**



**Paved Road near marina entrance (Satisfactory)**

**Plate 3.4 The main pathway types recorded at Lisfannon Beach**

### **3.3 Features, Signage and Hazards**

#### **3.3.1 Features and Signage**

Bicycle parking is provided on the site (Plate 3.5). Temporary toilet facilities have been provided in the past which are shown in older aerial imagery and as indicated on the Lough Swilly Marina website, but none were present on the site at the time of the survey. Chestnut fencing separating the beach carpark and road from the beach itself has collapsed – this is discussed further in Section 3.3.2 below. There are lifebuoys throughout the site. One of the lifebuoy posts has fallen over. This is also discussed further in Section 3.3.2 below. There are also benches at marina.

There are signs throughout the site relating to history, biodiversity, dune restoration, water safety, notices relating to dogs on lead and byelaws. The sign regarding dune restoration works provided by Donegal County Council (DCC) is deteriorated and difficult to read. There is also signage advising visitors to keep their dogs on leads is present on the site, along with signage which provides a map of the 'dog free zone' at Lisfannon Beach. This area is located in the northern section of the beach, and is implemented between 11:00am and 7:00pm from the 1<sup>st</sup> of June to the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. A Buncrana Tidy Towns sign was recorded on the site asking visitors to pick up their litter, however other than dog waste bins, no rubbish bins are provided on the site, resulting in littering and dumping due to the lack of suitable waste facilities. Images of the signage and features on the site are shown in Plate 3.5 below.



Plate 3.5 Decorative bicycle parking (top) and damaged dune restoration works signage (bottom)

### 3.3.2 Hazards

A lifebuoy stand at the beach carpark entrance has fallen over and the rope connected to it is tangled in the grass next to the lifebuoy. In an emergency situation, this could lead to a delay in reaching a person in distress. The chestnut fencing which separates the beach from the road and parking area has collapsed in places. Sand has blown out onto the roadway leading to the beach carpark. This, along with the poor condition of this roadway overall, and the fallen fencing makes the area unsafe for drivers and pedestrians. These hazards are displayed below in Plate 3.6 and in Figure 3.4.



**Plate 3.6** Fallen lifebuoy (top L), broken fencing (top R) and sand blowout (bottom) at Lisfannon Beach.

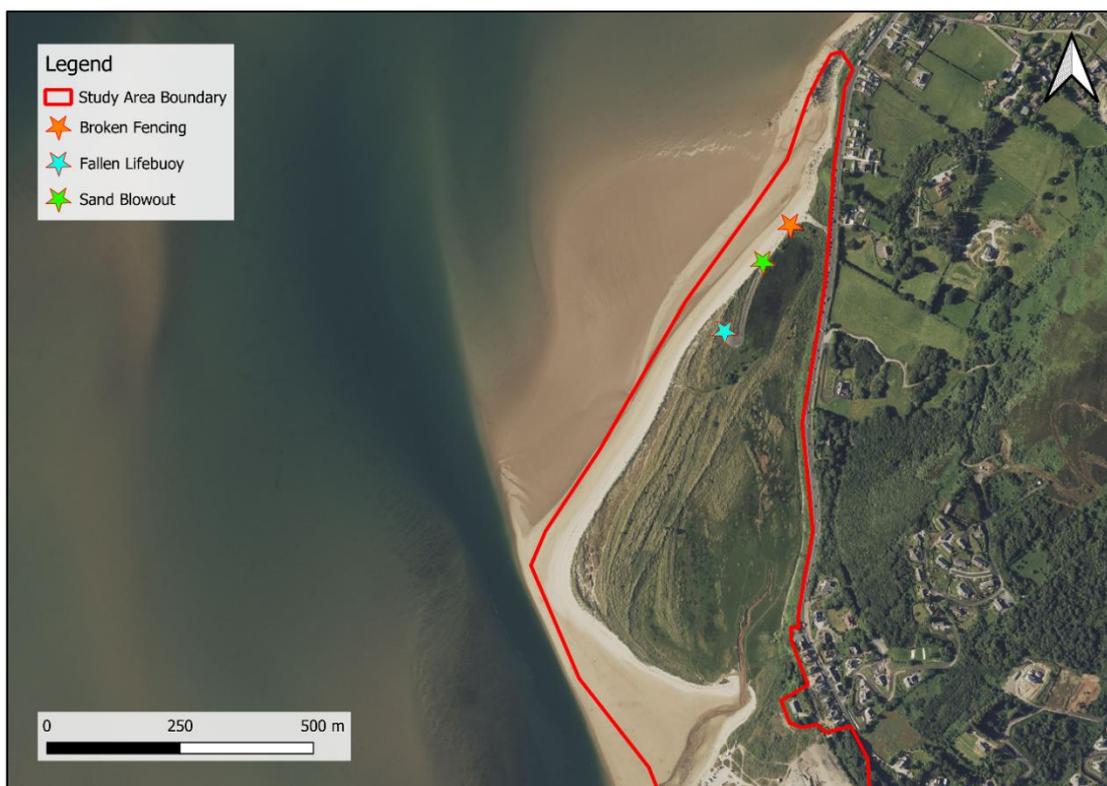


Figure 3.4 The location of hazards recorded at Lisfannon Beach. Basemap provided by Bing.

### 3.4 Ecological Constraints

#### 3.4.1 Protected Sites

A desk study was undertaken to identify designated sites and rare and protected species in the vicinity of the site. There are two European (SACs and SPAs) and one nationally designated sites (NHAs and pNHAs) within or adjacent to Lisfannon Beach. Information on these sites was obtained from the NPWS website and the sites' respective Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms. These sites are described in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Designated sites within 2km of the Lisfannon Beach site.

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
<b>European Sites</b>			
Lough Swilly SPA [004075]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great Crested Grebe (<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>) [A005]</li> <li>Grey Heron (<i>Ardea cinerea</i>) [A028]</li> <li>Whooper Swan (<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>) [A038]</li> <li>Greylag Goose (<i>Anser anser</i>) [A043]</li> <li>Shelduck (<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>) [A048]</li> </ul>	Within the site boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fertilisation</li> <li>Intensive grazing</li> <li><b>Nautical sports</b></li> <li>Cultivation</li> <li><b>Leisure fishing</b></li> <li>Marine and freshwater aquaculture</li> <li><b>Urbanised areas, human habitation</b></li> </ul>

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wigeon (<i>Anas penelope</i>) [A050]</li> <li>• Teal (<i>Anas crecca</i>) [A052]</li> <li>• Mallard (<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>) [A053]</li> <li>• Shoveler (<i>Anas clypeata</i>) [A056]</li> <li>• Scaup (<i>Aythya marila</i>) [A062]</li> <li>• Goldeneye (<i>Bucephala clangula</i>) [A067]</li> <li>• Red-breasted Merganser (<i>Mergus serrator</i>) [A069]</li> <li>• Coot (<i>Fulica atra</i>) [A125]</li> <li>• Oystercatcher (<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>) [A130]</li> <li>• Knot (<i>Calidris canutus</i>) [A143]</li> <li>• Dunlin (<i>Calidris alpina</i>) [A149]</li> <li>• Curlew (<i>Numenius arquata</i>) [A160]</li> <li>• Redshank (<i>Tringa totanus</i>) [A162]</li> <li>• Greenshank (<i>Tringa nebularia</i>) [A164]</li> <li>• Black-headed Gull (<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>) [A179]</li> <li>• Common Gull (<i>Larus canus</i>) [A182]</li> <li>• Sandwich Tern (<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>) [A191]</li> <li>• Common Tern (<i>Sterna hirundo</i>) [A193]</li> <li>• Greenland White-fronted Goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>) [A395]</li> <li>• Wetland and Waterbirds [A999]</li> </ul>		
Lough Swilly SAC [002287]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estuaries [1130]</li> <li>• Coastal lagoons [1150]</li> <li>• Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) [1330]</li> <li>• Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or</li> </ul>	Within site boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fertilization</li> <li>• Grazing</li> <li>• <b>Nautical sports</b></li> <li>• Cultivation</li> <li>• <b>Leisure fishing</b></li> </ul>

Site Name [Site Code]	Qualifying Interests	Distance (km) from Site	Pressures and Threats (those related to recreation are in bold)
	clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caeruleae) [6410] • Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0] • <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> (Harbour Porpoise) [1351] • <i>Lutra lutra</i> (Otter) [1355]		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intensive fish farming, intensification</li> <li>Dispersed habitation</li> </ul>
<b>Nationally Designated Sites</b>			
Lough Swilly, including Big Isle, Blanket Nook & Inch Lake pNHA [000166]	No site description. Refer to Lough Swilly SAC and SPA.	Within the site boundary	n/a

### 3.4.2 Incidental Species Recorded

Lisfannon Beach supports a range of habitats and species. Table 3.3 below presents the bird species recorded during the ecological surveys at Lisfannon Beach, along with their Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCCI) status (2020–2026).

**Table 3.3 Incidental Species Records**

Scientific Name	Common Name
<b>Red Status</b>	
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow Pipit
<b>Amber</b>	
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Cormorant
<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	House Martin
<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Linnet
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark
<b>Green</b>	
<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Chaffinch
<i>Corvus corone</i>	Hooded Crow
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Jackdaw
<i>Pica pica</i>	Magpie
<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	Pied Wagtail
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Woodpigeon

### **3.4.3 Records of Rare, Protected and Invasive Species**

Records of rare, protected, and invasive species from Hectad C32I and C32J were obtained the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) online database. These records are presented in Table 3.4 below.

**Table 3.4 Rare, protected, and invasive species recorded from Hectads C32I and C32J from NBDC database.**

Scientific name	Common Name	Date of last record	Status*
<b>Marine Mammals</b>			
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Bottle-nosed Dolphin	14/08/2011	EU Habitats Directive: Annex II    Wildlife Acts
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Common Dolphin	23/01/2019	EU Habitats Directive: Annex IV    Wildlife Acts
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Grey Seal	14/08/2011	EU Habitats Directive: Annex II, V    Wildlife Acts
<b>Birds</b>			
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	08/07/2020	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Branta bernicla</i>	Brent Goose	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Common Tern	08/07/2020	EU Birds Directive: Annex I    Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Cormorant	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Curlew	31/12/2011	EU Birds Directive: Annex II    Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
<i>Calidris alpina</i>	Dunlin	31/12/2011	EU Birds Directive: Annex I    Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Greenshank	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring Gull	29/07/2022	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	Oystercatcher	29/07/2022	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Redshank	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Red List
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Shag	08/07/2020	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List
<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Twite	31/12/2011	Wildlife Acts    Birds of Conservation Concern - Amber List

Scientific name	Common Name	Date of last record	Status*
<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Wood Pigeon	31/12/2011	EU Birds Directive: Annex II, Annex III    Wildlife Acts
<b>Cartilaginous Fish</b>			
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	Basking Shark	23/07/2013	OSPAR Convention
<i>Raja clavata</i>	Thornback Ray	29/07/2022	OSPAR Convention
<b>Terrestrial Mammals</b>			
<i>Sorex minutus</i>	Eurasian Pygmy Shrew	02/07/2011	Wildlife Acts
<i>Martes martes</i>	Pine Marten	19/01/2023	EU Habitats Directive: Annex V    Wildlife Acts
<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Red Squirrel	14/02/2023	Wildlife Acts
<b>Invasive Species</b>			
<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	Eastern Grey Squirrel	22/06/2022	High Impact Invasive Species
<i>Crassostrea gigas</i>	Portuguese Oyster	07/09/2021	High Impact Invasive Species
<i>Lagarosiphon major</i>	Curly Waterweed	30/04/2007	High Impact Invasive Species
<i>Sargassum muticum</i>	Wireweed	29/07/2022	High Impact Invasive Species
<i>Cornu aspersum</i>	Common Garden Snail	07/08/2002	Medium Impact Invasive Species
<i>Potamopyrgus antipodarum</i>	Jenkins' Spire Snail	08/08/2016	Medium Impact Invasive Species
<i>Candidula intersecta</i>	Wrinkled Snail	07/08/2002	Medium Impact Invasive Species
<i>Buddleja davidii</i>	Butterfly-bush	08/07/2020	Medium Impact Invasive Species
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore	08/07/2020	Medium Impact Invasive Species

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information collected during the field survey and desk study, the following recommendations are made:

- Signage advising recreation and amenity users to stay on the beach and avoid the dune and salt marsh habitats should be considered. This would reduce habitat degradation as a result of visitor movements through these habitats. This measure should be accompanied by signage indicating that dogs should remain on a lead by the beach, salt marsh and dunes, given that these areas are of value to foraging and ground-nesting birds.
- The tarmacadam road between the main beach entrance and the car park is in poor condition. This is likely largely due to coastal erosion and storm surges. Potholes should be filled in and sand should be cleared as a temporary road improvement measure. Fáilte Ireland along with Donegal County Council should consider developing a masterplan for Lisfannon Beach to examine the requirements for a programme of coastal protection (including dune restoration) and visitor management requirements. Given the current issue of coastal erosion, Fáilte Ireland continue to support stakeholders NPWS and Donegal County Council to relocate the existing beach carpark and WAW Discovery Point further inland, away from dune and saltmarsh habitat.
- Damaged signage and fencing should be repaired or replaced.
- The fallen lifebuoy stand should be repaired or replaced.
- Donegal County Council should consider providing screened segregated public waste bins at sensitive locations. This should be supplemented with instructional signage, adopting the leave no trace principles to work towards reducing littering.
- Where instructional signage is being implemented, teleological signage (signage with instruction and justification for the instruction) should be used. An example of teleological signage is presented below.



## 5.0 REFERENCES

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Fáilte Ireland Visitor Characterisation Surveys**



**Lisfannon, Co. Donegal – Visitor Monitoring Assessment**

**August 2024**

## **Contents**

- **1.0 Introduction:**
- **2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:**
- **3.0 Results:**
  - **Prevalence of Group Type**
  - **Prevalence of Transport Type**
  - **Activity Levels**
- **4.0 Observations**

**Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes**

## 1.0 Introduction:

### Background

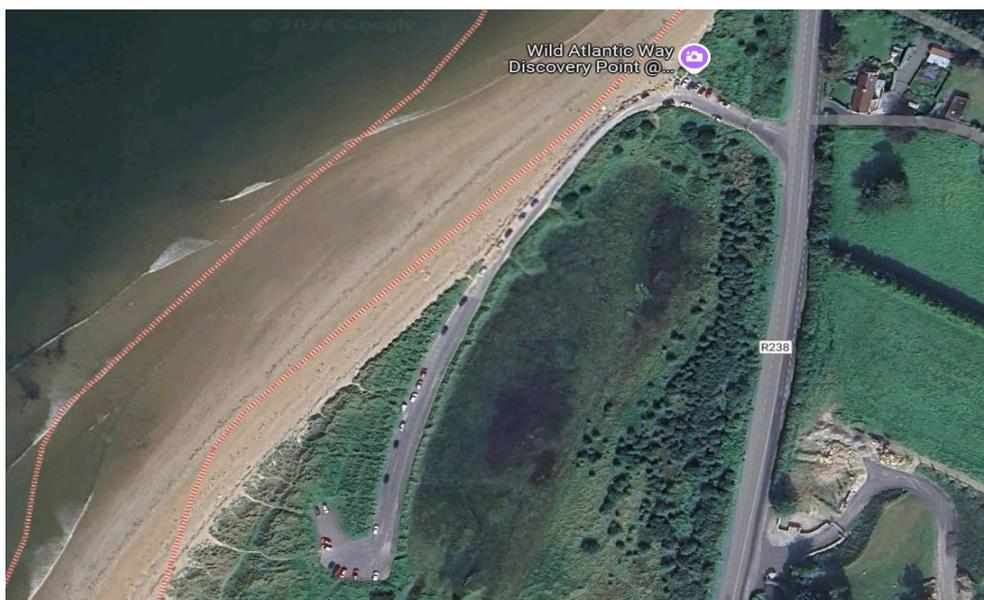
Fáilte Ireland regularly engages with environmental research that is used to make informed management decisions and produce robust guidelines to facilitate the protection of the environment. From its inception in 2014, the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) Operational Monitoring Programme has been conducting research into the impacts of tourism on the receiving environment. These surveys have been monitoring 57 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 26,000 visitors to WAW discovery points.

Building on the success of the WAW environmental monitoring programme which ran from 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland expanded the programme to a national level. From 2021 to 2022 the programme monitored 19 individual sites located in all of Fáilte Ireland's regional areas: The Wild Atlantic Way, Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East, and Dublin. The environmental monitoring builds on environmental surveying and monitoring undertaken on behalf of Fáilte Ireland as far back as 2015, and to date (excluding the 2024 data), the surveys have monitored a total of 66 sites and recorded the activities and effects of over 30,000 visitors at a range of tourism sites (including inland, urban, coastal and WAW discovery points).

### 2.0 Visitor Characterisation Survey Methodology:

- Visitor Characterisation Surveys

The visitor characterisation survey was undertaken by the Fáilte Ireland Planning and Environmental team at Clonmacnoise to supplement and be appended to the National Environmental Monitoring Programme 2024 Report undertaken by Roughan O'Donovan Consulting Engineers. The survey was undertaken on the 15th of August 2024 from 2.00-4.00pm on a bright, dry Thursday afternoon. The survey was undertaken in Lisfannon beach at the Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Point (See Map 1 below) popular for walking with excellent views over Lough Swilly, Inch Island, and Rathmullan across the lough.



**Map 1:** Survey undertaken at Lisfannon beach – Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Point

For the purposes of this assessment a 'visitor' refers to an individual, couple or group who arrive together. The following variables were recorded for each visitor:

- Activity Type
- Group Type
- Transport Type
- Activity Levels; and
- Impact Severity Levels.

### 3.0 Results:

#### 3.1 Visitor Characterization Survey:

The visitor monitoring survey undertaken on the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2024 from 2.00-4.00pm on a bright and dry afternoon. A total of 83 No. visitor groups comprising 188 No. Individuals were recorded. This site during the survey period was most popular amongst the 'small adult' group closely followed by the 'individual adult' and 'couple' groups. The following activities undertaken by groups during the survey are listed in order of occurrence rate below:

- Walking, running or cycling on mown grass, managed grassland or level sand

#### 3.2 Prevalence of Group Type

Figure 1 presents the prevalence of group types observed visiting the site, either without a dog or with a dog. 'Individual Adult' made up the largest proportion of group type with 26% of visitor groups observed. The second largest group type was 'small adult' group with 25%. The third largest was the 'couple' group type with 22%. The remaining group types observed in order of prevalence were 'family', 'Individual elderly' and 'Under 18'. All group type were observed with a dog (to varying degrees) and all were observed 'on lead' apart from one no. under the 'couple' category.

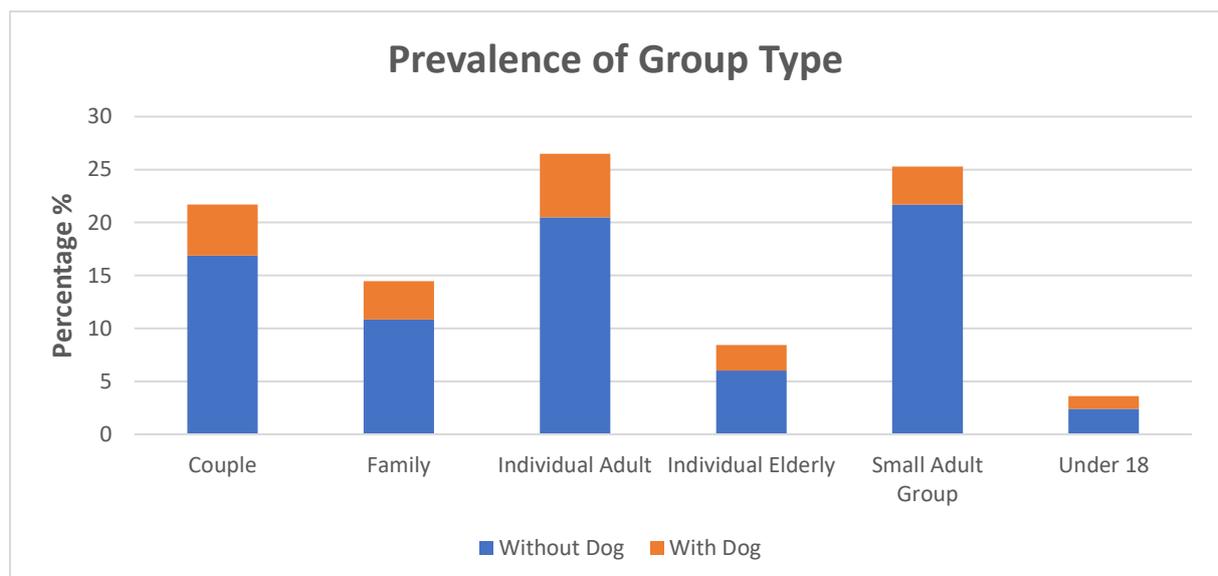
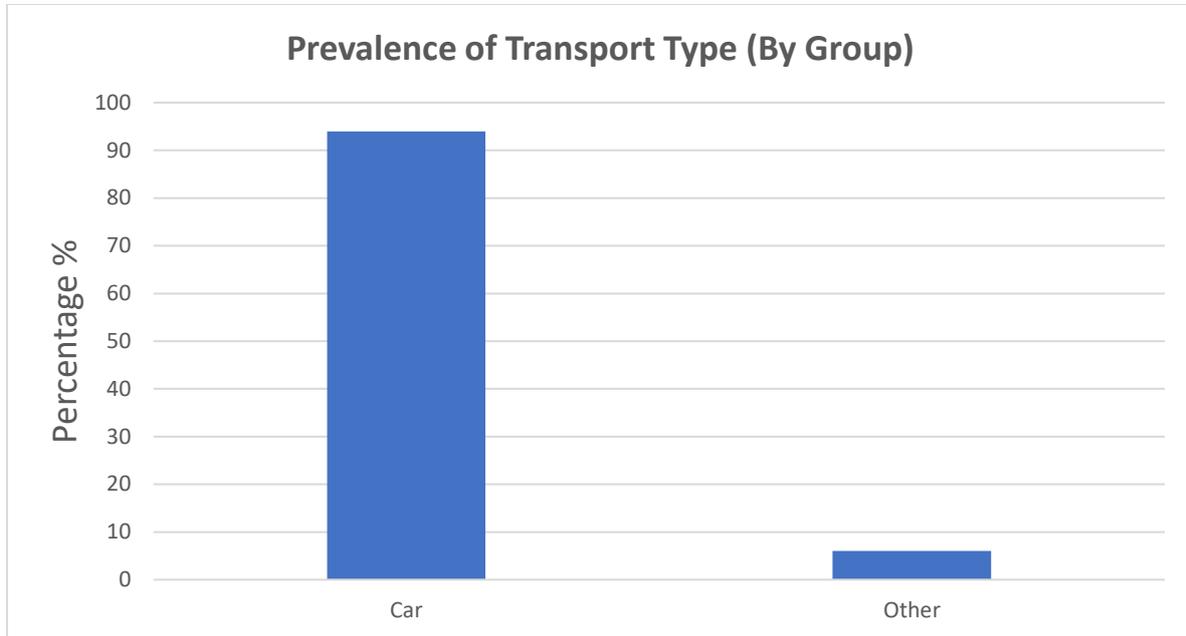


Figure 1: Prevalence of Group Type

### 3.3 Prevalence of Transport Type

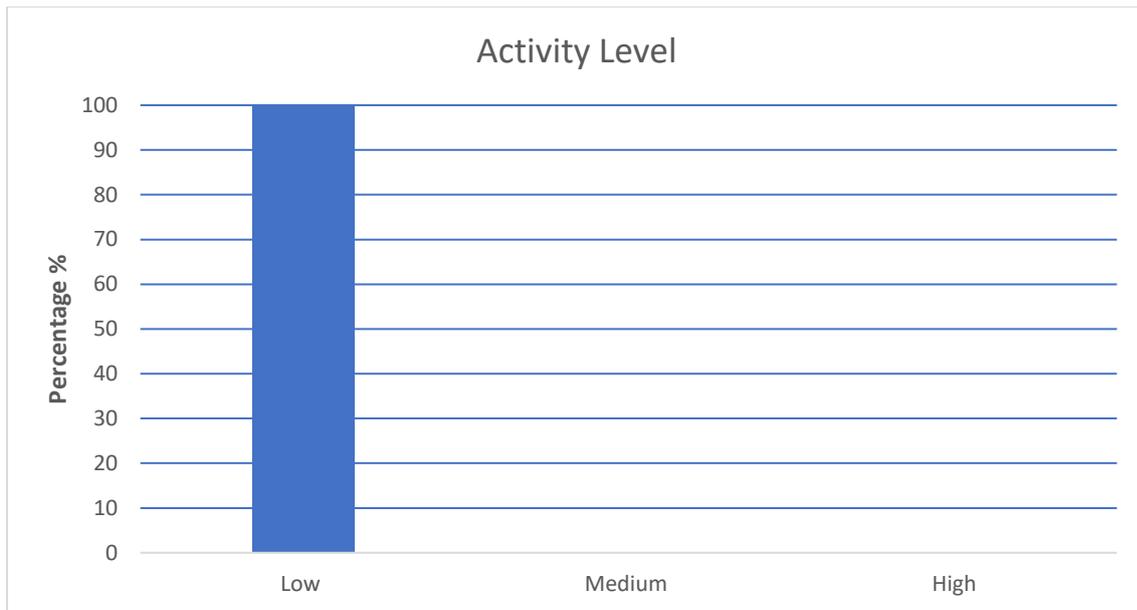
As detailed below in Figure 2, the Car was the main mode of transport observed, accounting for 94% of visitor groups observed visiting the site. The remaining 6% of visitor groups (5 No.) arrived by bike and on foot.



**Figure 2:** Prevalence of Transport Type (By Group)

### 3.4 Activity Levels

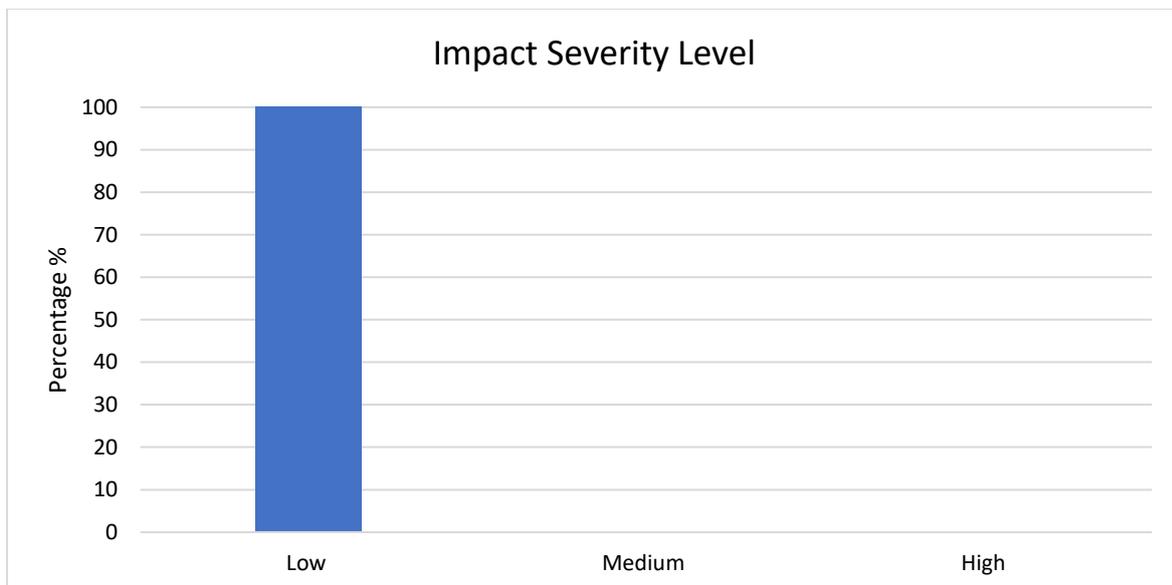
Figure 3 below presents the activity levels at Lisfannon. A sample of 83 visitor groups' activities were observed. The results from this are shown below in Figure 2. Activity categories are detailed in Appendix I. Activities such as Walking, running or playing on level sands is a low-level activity, whereas disturbing wildlife and picking herbaceous vegetation are considered high level activities. 100% of the activities observed at Lisfannon beach were considered low level activities.



**Figure 3: Activity Level**

### 3.5 Impact Severity Levels

Figure 4 presents the impact severity level observed at the site. A sample of 83 No. visitor groups' activities were observed. Impact severity level relates to the damage of an activity on the site. The levels of impact severity are detailed in Appendix I. Similar to the impact type above, the survey found that 100% of the activities observed had low level impact severity on the site. Low level includes no effects, desire lines on grassy and leafy vegetation and temporary disturbance of wildlife.



**Figure 4: Impact Severity Levels**

## 4.0 Observations

**Dog walking:** Popular dog walking area with signage provided outlining a map of the 'dog free zone' at Lisfannon Beach. All walkers were observed having their dog on a lead (apart from one couple) during the survey period, and they remained in the car park.

**Parking:** The car park was at full capacity (18 cars). Additional vehicles were parked in laybys and other gaps along the road leading to the beach.

**Public Transport:** The nearest bus stop to Lisfannon Beach is Luddan however everyone observed travelled in their cars. Generally an even split of traffic from Buncrana and Fahan observed

**Facilities:** No toilets were available in the area which visitors were being observed (Signature Discovery Point).

**Behaviour:** No dangerous or antisocial behaviour was observed.

**Accessibility:** No pushchairs were observed, and no wheelchair users were present.

## **Appendix 1 – Activity & Impact Codes**

Activities		
<b>Category 1 Low Level</b>		
Walking, running or cycling on paths, marked trails or hard surfaces		LA 1
Walking, running, cycling or playing in mown grass, managed grassland or level sand		LA 2
Sitting on benches, walls, mown grass, sand		LA 3
Swimming, sailing, surfing, kayaking in water		LA 4
Resting, reading, looking, picnicking, sightseeing, painting, photographing		LA 5
Vehicular movement on roads and parking areas		LA 6
Watching nature in hedges, woods, streams, pools and intertidal areas		LA 7
<b>Category 2 Medium Level</b>		
Powered movement through water		MA 1
Any movement leaving an existing trail or marked path		MA 2
Any movement leaving a trail through leafy vegetation		MA 3
Any movement leaving a trail through woody vegetation		MA 4
Climbing on walls, loose stones, sand, soil etc.		MA 5
Fishing		MA 6
<b>Category 3 High Level</b>		
Walking through wet/muddy soil		HA 1
Scrambling on steep or loose slopes		HA 2
Off road vehicular movement		HA 3
Disturbance of wildlife		HA 4
Deliberate building or moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand etc.		HA 5
Picking herbaceous vegetation		HA 6

Impacts		
<b>Category 1 Low Impact</b>		
No identifiable effect		LIE 1
Desire lines or trails visible on grass and leafy vegetation		LIE 2
Temporary disturbance (including chasing and feeding) of insects, fish, amphibian, reptiles, insects, birds and mammals		LIE 3
Temporary change of character - due to the appearance or nature of activities (noise, crowds, etc.)		LIE 4
General/light littering		LIE 5
<b>Category 2 Medium Impact</b>		
Desire lines or tracks visible outside of existing trail or marked path		MIE 1
Trampling of herbaceous vegetation		MIE 2
Damage to woody vegetation		MIE 3
Incidentally moving or knocking site materials - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		MIE 4
Addition/alteration of site features, transient emissions, noise		MIE 5
Transient disturbance, emissions, noise		MIE 6
Disturbance of wildlife		MIE 7
<b>Category 3 Severe Impact</b>		
Direct interference with site material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 1
Removal of material - parts of monuments, walls, stones, sand, rooted vegetation, flora, fauna etc.		SIE 2
Vandalism or graffiti		SIE 3
Destruction of structures, vegetation or fauna		SIE 4
Heavy littering or dumping quantities of waste		SIE 5
Burning materials or lighting a fire		SIE 6
Injuring, killing or taking wildlife		SIE 7

