

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT SCOPING REPORT

FOR THE

WILD ATLANTIC WAY SIGNATURE TOURISM EXPERIENCE

for: Fáilte Ireland
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January 2014

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Section 1 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction and Terms of Reference

Fáilte Ireland is developing a tourism sector initiative entitled the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW). The initiative has two parts; the first consists of the branding and linking of a series of existing separate touring routes as a single experience. The second part consists of the implementation of this concept by planning and implementing new signage, interpretation and marketing projects to create a consistent and coherent visitor experience.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is being undertaken on the implementation stages of the WAW initiative as it has been determined that these parts of the WAW have the potential, if unmitigated, to result in environmental effects.

It is intended that this scoping report will help communicate and define the scope of the environmental issues which are to be dealt with by the SEA together with the level of detail to which it is intended to address these issues.

This report has been prepared by CAAS (Environmental Services) Ltd., the parent company of AOS Planning.

1.2 The Wild Atlantic Way

The Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) will be Ireland's first long-distance touring route, stretching approximately 2,500km along the Atlantic coast from Donegal to West Cork.

The WAW comprises coordinated re-branding and linking of a number of existing touring routes that will lead the visitor along Ireland's Atlantic coast, and will allow travellers to see and be introduced to many outstanding aspects of the Atlantic coastline.

1.2.1 Aims and Objectives

The WAW is one of Fáilte Ireland signature propositions to rejuvenate Irish tourism. The overall aim is to create an overarching tourism brand for the west coast that will achieve greater visibility for the west coast of Ireland in overseas tourist markets. This overarching brand will consolidate a number of existing touring routes and existing roads into a single long-distance touring route. Once fully-realised, the project will:

- create a single west coast of Ireland tourism brand and signature tourism experience that will motivate visitors to travel to Ireland;
- assist in increasing visitor numbers, dwell time, spend and satisfaction in destinations along and close to the west coast of Ireland;
- re-package the west of Ireland as a destination to overseas and domestic visitors;
- highlight and promote existing visitor experiences that accord with the WAW proposition;
- improve on-road interpretation, infrastructure and signage along and around the route;
- direct visitors to less-visited areas; and
- assist businesses, agencies, local groups and other stakeholders along the area to work together under a single, unifying tourism proposition.

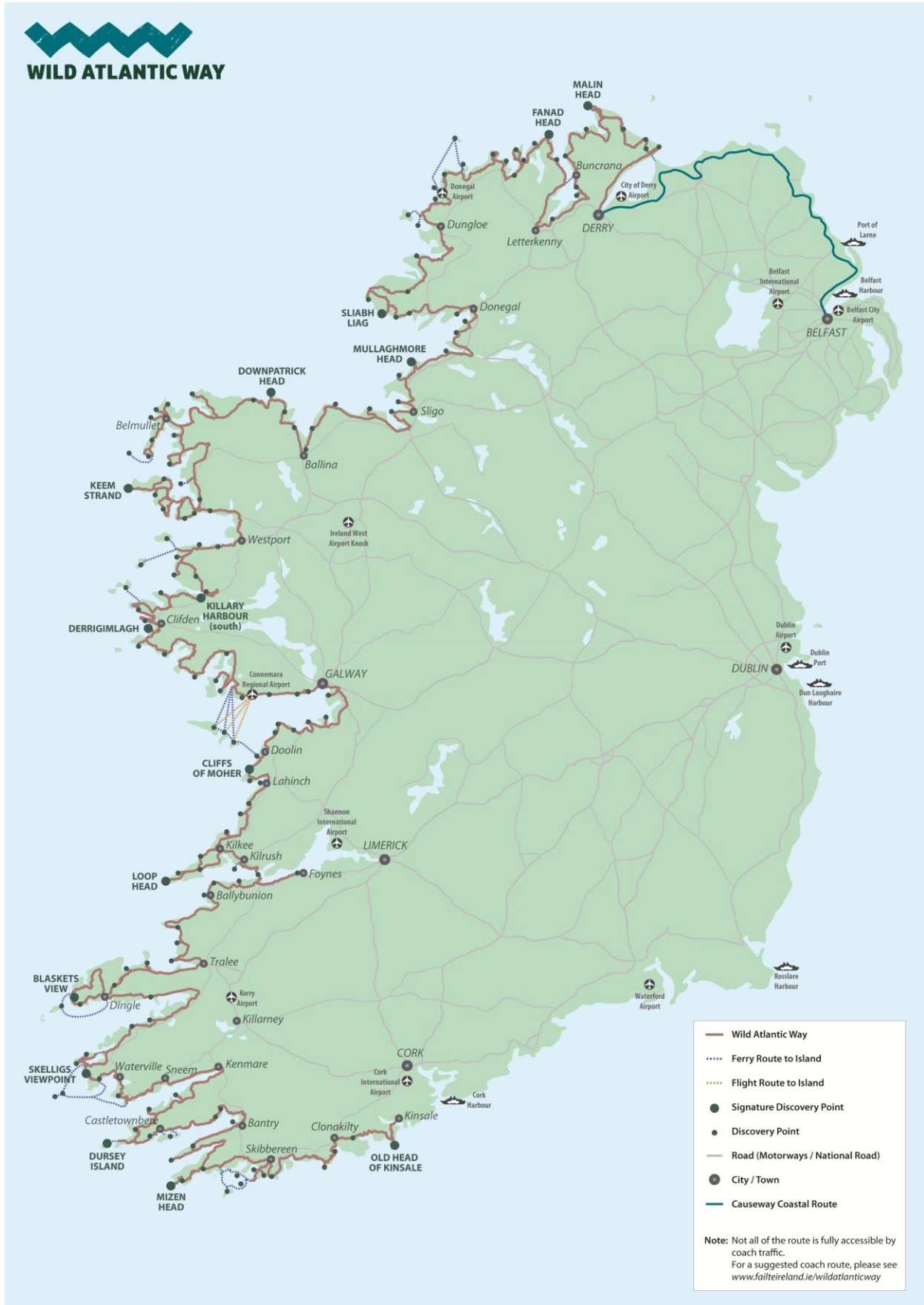


Figure 1.1 Wild Atlantic Way - Branded Route

1.3 Progress to Date

The Wild Atlantic Way Signature Tourism Experience comprises six stages from inception through to implementation, namely:

1. Proposition and Brand Development
2. Identification of Route
3. Way-finding Strategy
4. Delivery of Discovery Points
5. Selling WAW Experiences
6. Marketing and Communications



Figure 1.2 Stages of the Wild Atlantic Way Signature Tourism Experience

There are three overarching elements of the WAW Signature Tourism Experience, specifically:

- A Branding Exercise [comprising Stages 1 – 3];
- A Plan for Interpretation and Infrastructure – and associated implementation measures [comprising Stage 4]; and
- Selling WAW visitor experiences and marketing of the WAW [comprising Stages 5 and 6].

1.3.1 The Branding Exercise (Stages 1 to 3)

The Branding Exercise articulates the concept and identifies which existing roads and touring routes should be jointly identified and branded as a tourism experience. Stage 1 articulated the overall proposition for the Wild Atlantic Way, undertook the market research and developed the brand identity. The core brand proposition is *'where the land meets the sea, shaped by the wild Atlantic'*. Stage 2 identified the route for the WAW based upon the core brand proposition. Route identification criteria were devised which were applied in order to identify the route (Route Identification Report available to view at www.failteireland.ie/wildatlanticway). Stage 3 involves the branding of the WAW through the provision of directional signage along the route.

The outcome of this exercise is the publication of mapping and an associated signage plan, as Fáilte Ireland routinely does annually for all other destinations, attractions and activities (see www.discoverireland.ie/places-to-go).

1.3.2 WAW Plan for Interpretation and Infrastructure - Design and Implementation (Stage 4)

Separately, the WAW *Plan for Interpretation and Infrastructure - Design and Implementation* ('the WAW Plan') will identify and design locations and themes for the proposed new **'Discovery Points'**.

Discovery Points will be specific locations along the main existing route spine that provide new and exceptional Wild Atlantic experiences. These 'Discovery Points' relate directly to the coast and possess an immediate thematic relevance to the overall brand and essence of the project. In the main, Discovery Points are sites which will provide exceptional views and at which there is an opportunity to provide some interpretation for the visitor. Many of the proposed sites are well known as existing viewing points, and some are already well developed, while others are lesser known but offer significant potential. In general, they are located in remote coastal areas outside of the main settlements. As such, they are intended to entice visitors to enjoy managed experiences in more remote and peripheral areas of the coast, thus potentially extending dwell times in a sustainable manner.

This Plan will form the basis for specific works and to liaise with Local Authorities on the implementation of these projects and proposals. The output of this Plan will be a series of projects – some of which will require future development consent and some of which have the potential to give rise to environmental effects. A first phase of works will involve maintenance and repair work to the 'arrival points' (car parks) of the 'Discovery Points', all of which are existing structures. This stage will not include any physical extension of these car parks. Further works to the Discovery points may include the installation of interpretative panels, the provision of paths, viewing areas or additional car parking spaces, for example.

1.3.3 Sales and Marketing (Stages 5 and 6)

The sales element of the initiative involves liaising with tourism attractions and business providers along the route, to help them to align their offering to the core proposition of the Wild Atlantic Way, to ensure that visitors have great Wild Atlantic Way experiences to choose from. Through a targeted sales programme, Fáilte Ireland will work closely with those tourism businesses that are best positioned to sell

their Wild Atlantic Way experiences into the four main overseas markets of Great Britain, France, Germany and the USA.

The marketing element of the initiative involves the development of a marketing strategy for the Wild Atlantic Way. A full range of marketing collateral and digital content will also be developed for the initiative which will be rolled out in time for the launch of the route in March 2014.

1.3.4 Current Status

The first two stages of the project are complete, and the next four stages are being undertaken as parallel work streams.

The proposition and brand identity for the WAW have been developed and the first iteration¹ of the route of the WAW has been identified. The route and location of Discovery Points as identified are subject to change depending on the findings of the SEA and AA.

The next stages of the project have commenced and these involve:

- Signing the route;
- Delivering the 'Discovery Points' (to commence following the completion of the SEA & AA);
- Selling great Wild Atlantic Way experiences; and
- Marketing the Wild Atlantic Way.

It is expected that the project will be launched in March 2014.

1.3.5 Decision to Undertake SEA

Arising from Article 9 of the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended, there is a requirement to carry out environmental assessment of certain types of plans. This includes plans and programmes for the tourism sector which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any such site.

It is noted that it is Stage 4 of the WAW that provides a decision-making framework for future works and actions. This is the part of the initiative where the development of a decision-making process occurs. Fáilte Ireland have, as a competent authority, determined that the implementation of Stage 4 of the WAW has the potential, if unmitigated, to result in environmental effects, including on European sites and have, accordingly commenced the preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment

The preceding Branding Stages (Stages 1 to 3) do not provide such a framework and will not give rise to works or physical effects that could impact on the environment because these are existing, long established touring routes and other roads with established patterns of use and renewal. Unlike Stage 4, these stages will not give rise to the need for other permits, permissions or assessments and are therefore outside the scope of this assessment. Likewise, it has been determined that Stages 5 and 6 will not give rise to works or physical effects that could impact on the environment.

Depending on the outcome of this SEA, changes may have to be made to the location of some of the Discovery Points, which may in turn affect the line of the route. If this is the case, the line of the route will be altered accordingly.

¹ Details of the branding/signage are expected to evolve in response to a number of factors including ex-ante assessment of environmental effects and ex-post monitoring of effects in practice.

Section 2 The Assessment Process

2.1 Legislative Context for SEA

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme, or variation to a plan or programme, before a decision is made to adopt it. The SEA Directive² requires, inter alia, that SEA is undertaken for certain plans and programmes which are prepared for a number of sectors, including tourism.

The SEA Directive was transposed into Irish Law through the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument Number (SI No. 435 of 2004) and the Planning and Development (SEA) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004). Both sets of Regulations became operational on 21 July 2004. SI No. 435 of 2004 relates to the tourism sector and was amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 200 of 2011).

2.2 Appropriate Assessment - A Parallel Assessment

Appropriate Assessment (AA) screening is currently being undertaken on the WAW. AA is an impact assessment process concerning *Natura 2000*, or *European*, sites - these sites have been designated or proposed for designation by virtue of their ecological importance.

The Habitats Directive³ requires, inter alia, that plans and programmes undergo AA screening to establish the likely or potential effects arising from implementation of the WAW. If the effects are deemed to be *significant, potentially significant or uncertain* then the WAW must undergo Stage 2 AA.

The preparation of the WAW Plan, SEA and AA are taking place concurrently and the findings of the AA will inform both the SEA and the WAW Plan. The SEA will follow elements of Integrated Biodiversity Assessment⁴.

Submissions/parts of submissions on AA made during the SEA Scoping process will be taken into account while undertaking the AA as relevant.

2.3 Expected outcomes of the SEA (and AA)

Expected outcomes of the SEA (and AA) process will include:

- The refinement (by possibly omission or adjustment) of the current list of Discovery Points by the findings and mitigation measures arising from the SEA (and AA);
- The guiding of the designs for works (if any) at Discovery Points by the findings and mitigation measures arising from the SEA (and AA);
- The provision of criteria to be taken into account in the undertaking of any lower-tier AA for individual Discovery Points; and
- The setting up of a monitoring programme by Fáilte Ireland to provide new spatial data on visitor numbers and environmental quality, as monitored by environmental authorities.

² Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment

³ Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

⁴ As detailed in the EPA's 2013 *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment - Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner's Manual*.

2.4 Consultation with environmental authorities

As part of the scoping process, environmental authorities⁵ were notified that a submission or observation in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report may be made to Fáilte Ireland. The following scoping questions for environmental authorities were included in an earlier version of this report which accompanied the notice in order to facilitate submissions from the authorities.

1. Are there any additional best practice actions, to those detailed in this report, which should be considered by the SEA?
2. Are there any additional scoping issues, to those detailed in this report, which should be considered by the SEA?
3. Are there any additional potential interactions with plans or projects that could be relevant?
4. Are there any suggestions for relevant SEOs, indicators and targets that might be used for the assessment?
5. Is new data for any of the environmental components expected to be published later in 2013 or in 2014? If so, when is it expected that this data will be published?
6. Is there information available on the zone of influence of designated ecological sites including Natura 2000 sites?
7. Have any Conservation Management Plans for SACs or SPAs along the WAW route been prepared or is there any currently in preparation?

Submissions were made by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht which have resulted in various updates being made to the original version of this report, which was sent to the authorities with the SEA scoping notices. This final, revised report now sets out the scope of the assessment to be undertaken.

2.5 What happens next?

Taking into account the content of this SEA Scoping Report and continuous scoping of the SEA, an SEA Environmental Report will be prepared and will accompany the draft WAW *Plan for Interpretation and Infrastructure - Design and Implementation* on public display.

⁵ The following authorities have been notified: Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Section 3 Actions for SEA Best Practice

In order to contribute towards achieving SEA Best Practice for the SEA of the WAW, 'SEA Strengths/Best Practice Examples' and 'Limits of SEA Effectiveness' as identified in the Environmental Protection Agency's *Review of Effectiveness of SEA in Ireland 2012 - Key Findings and Recommendations Report* (2012) were examined.

The output of this examination is a list of actions for the WAW SEA as detailed on Table 3.1 below. Progress on achieving the actions on this list will be updated throughout the SEA process and updated versions of the list will be included in both the SEA Environmental Report that is placed on display alongside the Draft Plan and the SEA Statement which is produced at the end of the process.

SEA Stage	No.	Actions	Status/ Comments
1. Influence of SEA, Integration with Plan-Making	1a	Ensure that the SEA process begins early in order to allow issues to be identified and appropriately addressed early in the preparation of the WAW Plan.	Achieved. Pre-scoping consultations with environmental authorities (EPA, NPWS) held.
	1b	Maximise buy-in to the SEA process from senior managers and decision-makers by communicating, at an early stage, the role and importance of SEA and integrating into the preparation of the WAW Plan and its adoption.	Achieved. Role and importance of SEA communicated to senior managers.
	1c	The SEA process should be highly integrated with both the preparation of the WAW Plan and the AA process.	Ongoing. Environmental considerations have been integrated into the preliminary consideration of WAW and will be continued throughout process.
2. Scoping	2a	SEA scoping should focus sufficiently on the critical issues and key likely significant effects - guided by environmental authority consultation.	Ongoing. - This Report has been updated to take account of the submissions made by the environmental authorities. - Pre-scoping consultations with environmental authorities (EPA, NPWS) have been held on both SEA and AA issues. - Key Scoping Issues are identified in Section 4 of this report.
	2b	Integrate available AA findings into SEA scoping process.	Ongoing - see Sections 2.2, 4.1 and 5.2. The SEA will follow elements of Integrated Biodiversity Assessment.
	2c	Make reference as appropriate to the potential for cumulative/ in combination effects (taking into account other relevant plans, programmes and projects).	Ongoing - see Sections 4.5 and 4.7.

SEA Stage	No.	Actions	Status/ Comments
	2d	Include Environmental Sensitivity Mapping in the scoping report.	Ongoing. Overall ecological and landscape sensitivity mapping has been provided in this report (see Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.7)
	2e	Use website to display scoping documents.	Final Scoping Report to be placed on website.
	2f	Detail how assessment (including that of the alternatives) will be undertaken and what further, if any, baseline data, analysis of the policy context, etc. are to be included	Provided in Sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.5 and 4.8
3. Existing Environment	3a	Take account of existing environment by making changes to the WAW Plan where necessary.	Apply after Scoping
	3b	Use Environmental Sensitivity Mapping.	Currently being prepared (see Section 5.10).
	3c	Identify gaps in baseline data.	Ongoing. See Section 5.
4. Plan Description & Review of Other Plans	4a	Use environmental protection objectives.	Ongoing. See Section 4.4.
	4b	Summarise other relevant plans/programmes /projects and how they will be taken into account, where relevant, by the WAW Plan.	Ongoing. See Section 4.3.
5. Objectives, Indicators and Targets	5a	Identify relevant objectives, indicators and targets.	Ongoing. See Section 4.4.
	5b	Ensure good linkages between objectives, indicators and targets.	Ongoing. See Section 4.4.
	5c	Link indicators to existing/proposed data sources.	Ongoing. See Section 4.4.
6. Alternatives	6a	Identify and evaluate alternatives that are realistic and capable of implementation, taking into account the objectives and geographical limits of the WAW Plan.	Ongoing. See Section 4.8.
7. Likely Significant Effects	7a	Use Environmental Sensitivity Mapping where relevant for assessing significant effects.	Apply after Scoping
	7b	Use environmental objectives in order to assess plan policies and objectives and assist in identifying significant effects.	Apply after Scoping
8. Mitigation Measures	8a	Link potential effects to proposed mitigation measures.	Apply after Scoping
	8b	Refine (by possibly omission or adjustment) the current list of Discovery Points by the findings and mitigation measures arising from the SEA (and AA);	Apply after Scoping
	8c	Guide the designs for works (if any) at Discovery Points by the findings and mitigation measures arising from the SEA (and AA);	Apply after Scoping
	8d	Provide criteria to be taken into account in the undertaking of any lower-tier AA for individual Discovery Points; and	Apply after Scoping
9. Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary	9a	Highlight areas of constraints and opportunities in the SEA ER by using maps.	Apply after Scoping
	9b	Ensure NTS is concise and to the point and ensure that it makes decision-makers and non-environmental stakeholders aware of SEA findings.	Apply after Scoping
	9c	Document how the SEA and plan-making processes have been integrated and what changes have occurred as a result of the SEA.	Apply after Scoping
	9d	Assess the full range of environmental effects including, in particular cumulative/ in combination effects associated with other relevant Plan, Programmes and Projects.	Apply after Scoping
	9e	Link potential effects to proposed monitoring and mitigation measures.	Apply after Scoping
	9f	Integrate AA findings into the SEA Environmental Report.	Apply after Scoping

SEA Stage	No.	Actions	Status/ Comments
10. Consultation on Draft WAW Plan and Environmental Report	10a	Take into account SEA related feedback from submissions and in particular those from environmental or other statutory authorities.	Apply after Scoping
11. Amendments to the WAW Following Integration	11a	Ensure that material alterations are screened in terms of SEA and AA and that full SEA and AA are undertaken where relevant.	Apply after Scoping
12. SEA Statement	12a	Ensure transparency of SEA process by ensuring that SEA Statement is correctly prepared.	Apply after Scoping
	12b	Include information summarising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. how environmental considerations have been integrated into the WAW Plan, ii. how the SEA Environmental Report and submissions and observations on the SEA have been taken into account during the preparation of the WAW Plan. iii. the reasons for choosing the WAW Plan, as adopted, in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and iv. monitoring measures. 	Apply after Scoping
13. Post-WAW Plan Adoption Including Monitoring		Set up a monitoring programme by Fáilte Ireland to provide new spatial data on visitor numbers and environmental quality, as monitored by environmental authorities. Ensure monitoring reports are prepared during implementation of the WAW Plan in order to determine whether SEA is having the desired outcomes of environmental protection, and whether intervention is required due to thresholds having been exceeded.	Apply after Scoping

Table 3.1 Best Practice Actions for the SEA

Section 4 Key Scoping Issues

4.1 Legislation and Guidelines

The SEA (and AA) will ensure compliance with the following legislation:

- The SEA Directive and the Habitats and Birds Directives;
- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (Statutory Instrument Number (SI No. 435 of 2004));
- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 200 of 2011);
- The Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2011; and
- The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

In addition to complying with the legislation, the processes will be undertaken taking into account the following guidance and associated documents:

- *Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities*. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2004;
- *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland. Guidance for Planning Authorities*. Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009;
- *Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*, European Commission Environment DG, 2000;
- *Managing Natura 2000 sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC*: European Commission, 2000;
- *Guidance on Integrating Climate Change and Biodiversity into Strategic Environmental Assessment*, European Commission, 2013;
- *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment – Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner’s Manual*, Environment Protection Agency, 2013⁷;
- *EPA GISEA Manual: Current Practice and Potential on the Application of Geographical Information Systems as a Support Tool in Strategic Environmental Assessment of Irish Land Use Plans*, Environment Protection Agency, 2009⁸;
- Emerging Guidance on Alternatives, Environment Protection Agency, ongoing⁹; and
- Relevant European Court of Justice judgements.

⁷ Prepared by CAAS GIS Specialist Ainhoa González & Containing CAAS SEA Case Studies

⁸ Prepared by CAAS GIS Specialist Ainhoa González & Containing CAAS SEA Case Studies

⁹ Currently being prepared by CAAS GIS Specialist Ainhoa González

4.2 Environmental Sensitivities

A preliminary list of sensitivities for each environmental component (biodiversity and flora and fauna, population and human health, soil, water, material assets, air and climatic factors, cultural heritage and landscape) is provided on Table 4.1.

Further information on the content of the environmental baseline with regard to these issues is provided in Section 5 (the SEA Environmental Report will provide additional detail for the issues raised below and in Section 5).

The SEA will consider interrelationships between the various environmental components and, in addition to being identified under each environmental topic in the SEA Environmental Report, interrelationships will be given a specific sub-section and an interrelationships matrix will be included.

Environmental Component	Key Sensitivities
Biodiversity and flora and fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated sites including Natura 2000 Sites, National Parks, Ramsar Sites, Salmonid Waters, Shellfish Waters, Freshwater Pearl Mussel Catchments and Wildlife Sites (including Nature Reserves, Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas) and all protected habitats and species including those listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended • Ecological connectivity; stepping stones and ecological corridors • Non-designated biodiversity
Population and human health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and Visitor Trends
Soil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource
Air and climatic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable transport
Cultural Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record of Monuments and Places
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 most important water bodies for tourism • Landscape Constraints and Opportunities Mapping which takes into account visual sensitivity mapping and topographical mapping
Population and human health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with air, water or soil
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bathing water quality • Entries to the Registers of Protected Areas • Status and quality of rivers, lakes, transitional, coastal and ground waters (including interactions with increased demands on water supply and increased loadings to existing waste water treatment facilities)
Material Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with archaeological and architectural heritage and natural resources of economic value and non-renewable resources • Waste • Water services infrastructure
Air and climatic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy usage and emissions to air including noise and greenhouse gases arising from transport
Cultural Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record of Protected Structures and Areas of Architectural Conservation

Table 4.1 Environmental Sensitivities

4.3 Likely Interactions with Other Plans, Programmes and Projects

In considering the likely interactions with other Plans, Programmes and projects it is important to note that the WAW will be implemented within areas that have a wide range of existing plans and programmes [relevant local, county, regional development plans] that are already subject to more specific higher and lower tier SEA that includes consideration of demographic and economic growth and development [including transport, provision of water or waste services etc.]. Thus the higher level and lower level potential effects have already been considered at different and more levels. Thus a series of more specific SEA already exist that assesses lower tier implementation of Community legislation on the environment. Furthermore, project level planning permission involving, – where relevant, SEA and/or AA are specifically structured to implement Community legislation on environment – such as habitats and water protection] – while higher level issues – such as waste management and water projection – are assessed in relevant sectoral SEA [for Regional River Basin Management or Regional Waste Management – for example].

These are relevant considerations because Article 5 of the Directive (transposed through Article 12 of the Regulations) specifically provides guidance about the stage at which to carry out SEA namely be having regard to 'the extent to which certain matters are more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process in order to avoid duplication of the assessment.'

The following is a preliminary list of other plans, programmes and projects that could potentially interact with the WAW Plan. Further detail on these interactions will be provided in the SEA Environmental Report.

European

- SEA Directive;
- Habitats Directive;
- Birds Directive;
- The EU climate and energy package;
- Water Framework Directive;
- Freshwater Fish Directive;
- Shellfish Waters Directive;
- Groundwater Directive;
- Floods Directive;
- Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- Drinking Water Directive;
- Bathing Water Directive; and
- EIA Directive.

National

- National Development Plan;
- National Spatial Strategy;
- National Climate Change Strategy;
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan;
- National Rural Development Programme;
- Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan;
- Grid25 Implementation Programme;
- Transport 21;
- Our Sustainable Future – a Framework for Sustainable Development in Ireland;
- Actions for Biodiversity 2011-2016 – Irelands National Biodiversity Plan; and
- National Heritage Plan 2002.

Regional

- River Basin Management Plans;
- Regional Planning Guidelines;

- Flood Risk Management Plans;
- Regional Waste Management Plans;
- Groundwater Protection Schemes; and
- Water Services Strategic Plans.

Sub-Regional

- County and Town Development Plans;
- Local Area Plans;
- Economic development plans for rural and urban areas;
- Shannon Estuary Strategic Implementation Framework Plan;
- Biodiversity Action Plans;
- Heritage Plans;
- County Landscape Character Assessments;
- County Renewable Energy Strategies;
- Offshore and onshore energy generation projects;
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel Sub-Basin Management Plans;
- Shellfish Pollution Reduction Programmes; and
- Existing and permitted infrastructure etc.

4.4 Strategic Environmental Objectives, Indicators and Targets

Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs), indicators and targets, which will focus on the Key Scoping Issues detailed on Table 4.1, will be used by the SEA in order to: describe the environmental baseline contained in the SEA Environmental Report; evaluate WAW provisions; and inform the setting up of a WAW monitoring programme (see also Section 4.7 below).

4.5 Potential Environmental Effects

Potential significant environmental effects, if unmitigated, and likely significant environmental effects, if any, will be identified by the SEA and assessed. Such effects will include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

Construction and operational impacts will be considered. Where appropriate, seasonality will be considered in determining relevant effects. When assessing cumulative effects consideration will be given to any outputs from national studies on cumulative effects in SEA.

Potentially significant environmental effects, if unmitigated, of implementing the WAW Plan, are expected to include those listed on Table 4.2 below.

Environmental Component	Potentially Significant Effect, if unmitigated, that are not already anticipated and assessed by the SEA/AA of existing interacting programmes, plans and policies
Biodiversity and flora and fauna	Loss of biodiversity with regard to designated sites and species (including Natura 2000 Sites, Wildlife Sites and species listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended)
	Loss of biodiversity with regard to ecological connectivity
	Loss of non-designated habitats
	Disturbance to biodiversity and flora and fauna
Population and human health	Spatially concentrated deterioration in human health
Soil	Adverse impacts on the hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource
Water	Adverse impacts upon the status of water bodies (including interactions with increased demands on water supply and increased loadings to existing waste water treatment facilities)
	Adverse impacts upon bathing water quality

Material Assets	Failure to provide adequate and appropriate waste water treatment
	Failure to comply with drinking water regulations and serve new development with adequate drinking water that is both wholesome and clean
	Increases in waste levels
Air and climatic factors	Construction Traffic Operation traffic and failure to contribute towards sustainable transport and associated impacts (energy usage and emissions to air including noise and greenhouse gases)
Cultural Heritage	Effects on entries to the Record of Monuments and Places and other archaeological heritage
	Effects on entries to the Records of Protected Structures and other architectural heritage
Landscape	Occurrence of adverse visual impacts

Table 4.2 Environmental Components and Potential Effects

The assessment of likely significant environmental effects, if unmitigated, arising from the WAW Plan and the alternatives will be undertaken using the mapping and description of the existing environment and Strategic Environmental Objectives.

4.6 Mitigation

Route selection and classification criteria have been a key consideration in the identification of the route of the WAW to date and the manner in which existing tourist routes have been linked up, which has been primarily influenced by road width and proximity to the coastline.

By avoiding roads that are not suited to certain traffic and keeping visitors on the main roads, the route mitigates by avoidance and contributes towards the protection of roadside habitats.

The SEA and AA processes will inform a refinement (by possibly omission or adjustment) of the current list of Discovery Points, allowing for the integration of environmental considerations. The assessments will also guide designs for works (if any) at Discovery Points.

4.7 Monitoring

By facilitating visitors, intensification - and associated cumulative effects - has the potential to occur. In order to anticipate and avoid the emergence of significant adverse effects occurring and to provide early identification of areas where detailed management of visitor numbers may be required, a monitoring programme is being set up by Fáilte Ireland to provide new spatial data on visitor numbers and environmental quality, as currently monitored by environmental authorities. In addition to a general Monitoring Programme, which will be established through close consultation with the EPA and the NPWS, a more detailed pilot monitoring programme is also being set up in collaboration with the existing GeoparkLIFE Project in the Burren and will utilise, inter alia, indicators developed by the GeoparkLIFE Project, EU Sustainable Tourism Indicators and NRA & Local Authority Traffic Counts.

4.8 Alternatives

The primary objective of the WAW is to identify existing smaller touring routes and linkage roads between them that can be branded as a single larger route that will lead the visitor along Ireland's Atlantic coast, extending between County Cork in the South West and County Donegal in the North West.

The SEA Directive requires that reasonable alternatives (taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme) are identified described and evaluated for their likely

significant effects on the environment. These alternative scenarios should be realistic and capable of implementation.

Alternatives for the WAW are therefore limited by its primary objective which includes use of existing touring routes and proximity the coastline as a key criterion (the primary objective seeks to identify the existing routes that lead the visitor *along* the coast). It does not provide for the construction of new routes closer to the coastline (the primary objective only seeks to identify existing routes). It is noted, however, that the WAW route identification takes into account other criteria including an anticipation of the capacity of the road and road safety having regard to the potential for such roads to absorb existing or likely future traffic without the need for upgrades or works likely to give rise to environmental effects.

Alternatives will therefore centre on the selection of Discovery Points and will be supplemented by a consideration of alternatives for the WAW as follows:

- A WAW route which takes into account both the capacity of the roads and road safety;
- A WAW route which takes into account the capacity of the roads but not road safety;
- A WAW route which takes into account road safety but not the capacity of the roads; and
- A WAW route which does not take into account the capacity of the roads or road safety.

The assessment of likely significant environmental effects, if unmitigated, arising from the alternatives will be undertaken using the mapping and description of the existing environment and Strategic Environmental Objectives.

Section 5 Preliminary Identification of Environmental Baseline Content¹⁰

5.1 Introduction

This section provides a preliminary identification of the content of the environmental baseline that will be used by the SEA. The environmental baseline, including descriptions and mapping will be updated throughout the SEA process.

5.2 Biodiversity and Flora and Fauna

The SEA will consider available information on designated ecological sites and protected species, ecological connectivity and non-designated habitats. Ecological designations include:

- Special Areas of Conservation¹¹ (SACs) and Special Protection Areas¹² (SPAs);
- UNESCO World Heritage and UNESCO Biosphere sites;
- Areas Special Scientific Interest¹³;
- Ramsar Sites¹⁴;
- Salmonid Waters;
- Shellfish Waters;
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel catchments;
- Flora Protection Order sites; and
- Wildlife Sites (including Natural Heritage Areas¹⁵ and Nature Reserves).

The SEA will make use of available data sources including those from the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the EPA's Framework National Ecological Network for Ireland and CORINE land cover mapping.

The SEA will be informed by the findings of the AA and will follow elements of Integrated Biodiversity Assessment with reference made to the EPA's 2013 *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment - Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner's Manual*.

Route selection and classification criteria have been a key consideration in the development of the WAW to date which has been primarily influenced by road width and proximity to the coastline. By avoiding roads that are not suited to certain traffic and keeping visitors on the main roads, the route mitigates by avoidance and contributes towards the protection of roadside habitats.

As indicated by Figure 5.1, much of the Atlantic coastal area along which the WAW route traverses is located within or close to Natura 2000 sites.

Figure 5.2 maps a National Ecological Constraints Rating¹⁶ which provides an indication of the areas that are most ecologically sensitive development and is based on biodiversity designations, with the greatest weighting allocated to designations of European and international importance. Ecological constraints are indicated by colours which range from most likely sensitivity (red) to likely sensitivity (yellow). In general, and on a national level, ecological constraints occur in greatest concentrations in the western half of the

¹⁰ Mapping in this section will be updated and added to in advance of the finalisation of the Scoping Report.

¹¹ designated under the Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora).

¹² designated under the Birds Directive (EC Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds)

¹³ designated under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002

¹⁴ designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

¹⁵ designated under the Wildlife Act;

¹⁶ A weighting system applied through Geographical Information System (GIS) software was used in order to calculate the sensitivities of each area. A higher score for the European and international designations (SAC, SPA and Ramsar) reflects the greater significance of these designations when considering infrastructure development. Three factors were attributed a rating of 10 points: Ramsar Sites; SACs; and SPAs.

Three factors were attributed a weighting of 5 points: NHAs; Proposed NHAs; and areas likely to contain a habitat listed in annex 1 of the Habitats Directive that have been deduced from the CORINE land cover dataset.

country and in particular along the western seaboard (including north-western and south-western coasts).

The following datasets will be considered while compiling data on the baseline environment:

- Nature conservation designations;
- Available information on habitats, rare and protected species and their habitats;
- Watercourses and associated wetlands; and
- Other sites of high biodiversity value or ecological importance, e.g. BirdWatch Ireland's 'Important Bird Areas' (Crowe *et al.*, 2009) and sites identified as a result of local authority Heritage Plans or Biodiversity Plans.

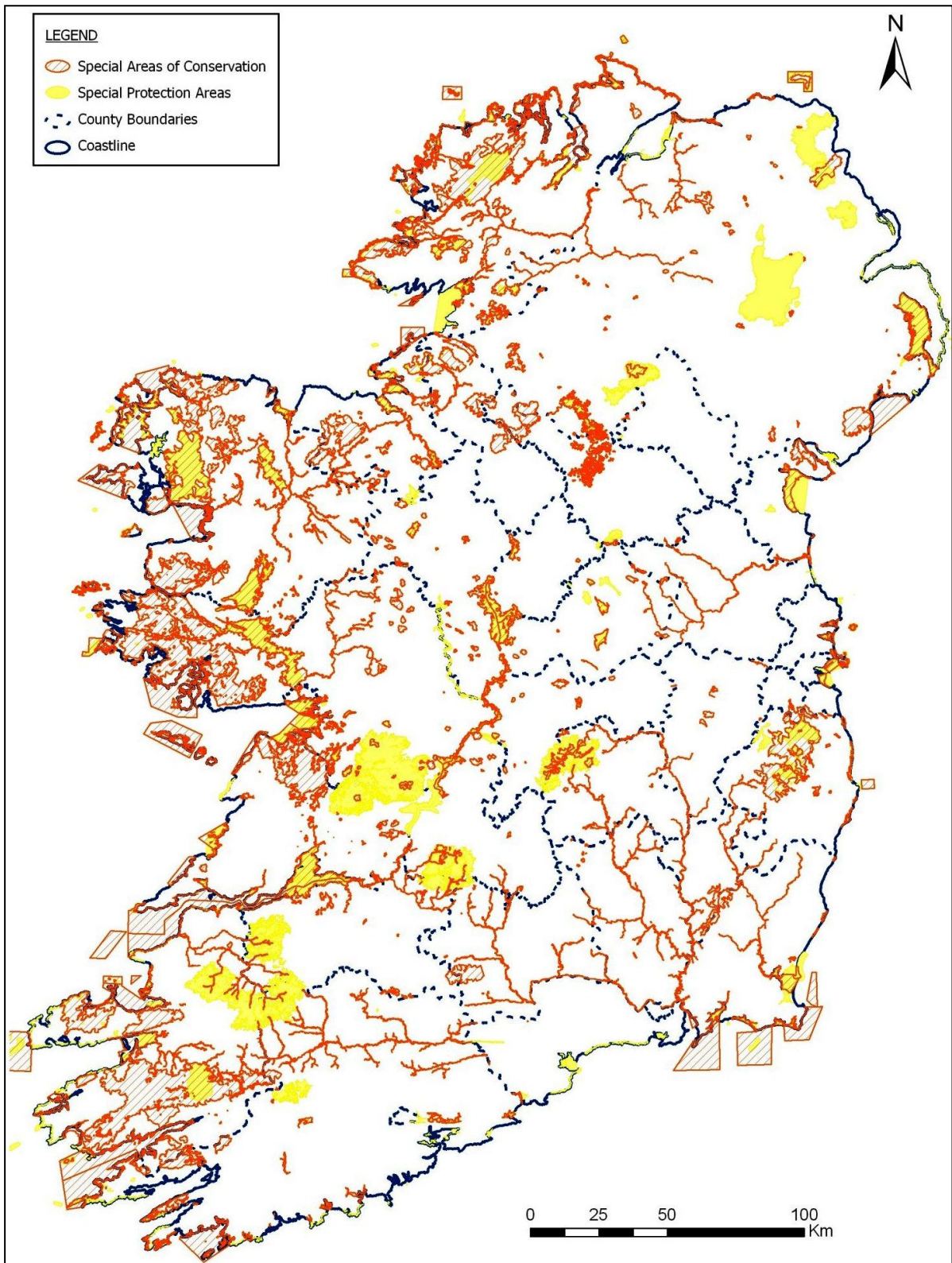


Figure 5.1 Natura 2000 Sites

Source: Reproduced with kind permission from EirGrid

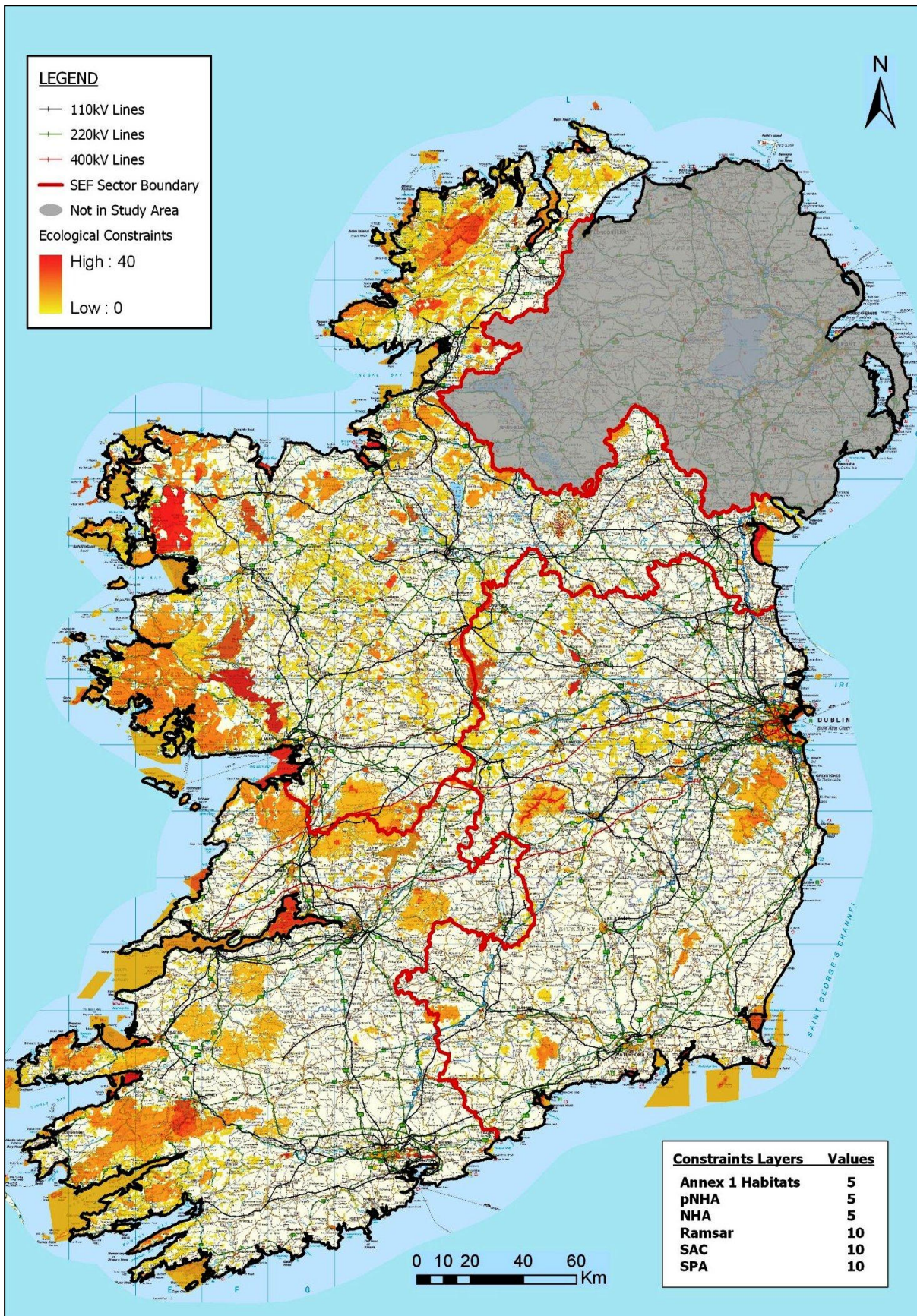


Figure 5.2 National Ecological Constraints Rating

Source: Reproduced with kind permission from EirGrid

5.3 Population and Human Health

Available information on visitor numbers to the West (which incorporates the Fáilte Ireland tourism regions of North West, West, Shannon and South West) between 1999 and 2011 show that the average number of visitors amounted to 3,066,000, with visitor numbers peaking in 2007 (3,638,000).

Visitor numbers have generally declined since 2007. In 2011, the most recent year for which data is available, there were 2,841,000 visitors.

With regard to human health, impacts relevant to the SEA are those which arise as a result of interactions with environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent landuses, for example.

5.4 Soil

To date, there is no legislation which is specific to the protection of soil resources. However, there is currently an EU Thematic Strategy on the protection of soil which includes a proposal for a Soil Framework Directive, including the proposal of common principles for protecting soils across the EU.

Peat soils generally provide the least amount of physical support for built development and are found in various areas along the Atlantic coastline. The spatial spread of various types of peat soils is mapped on Figure 5.3.

In addition to soils, the SEA will consider published national data on important geological features. The GSI and the DAHG are currently identifying sites of geological interest across the Country that will be proposed as Natural Heritage Areas.

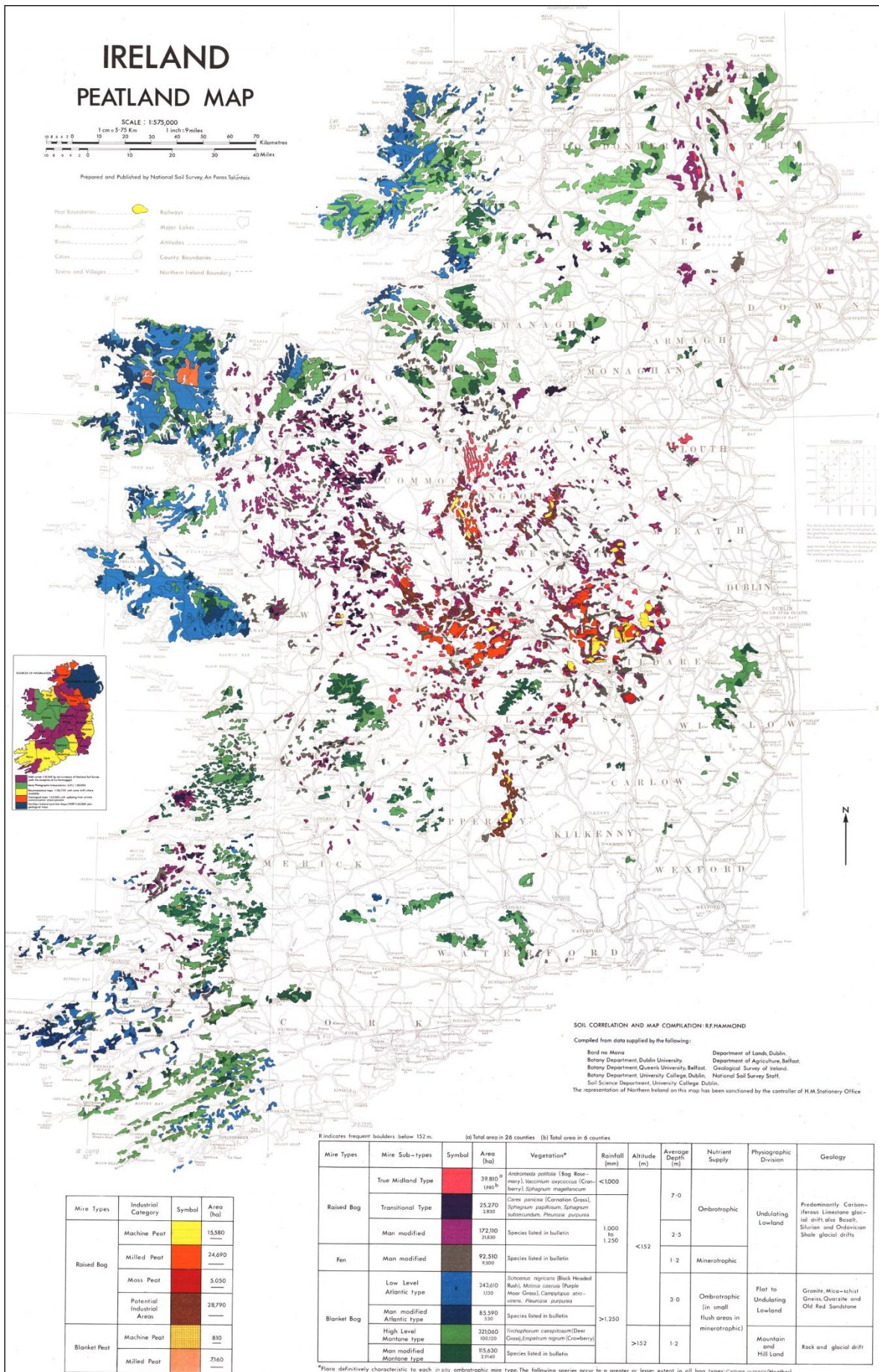


Figure 5.3 Soils
Source: An Teagasc

5.5 Water

The WAW traverses across 4 of the 8 Water Framework Directive (WFD) River Basin Districts (RBDs) on the island of Ireland; the North Western International RBD, the Western RBD, the Shannon International RBD and the South Western RBD (see Figure 5.4).

The WFD requires that all Member States implement the necessary measures to prevent deterioration of the status of all waters - surface, ground, estuarine and coastal - and protect, enhance and restore all waters with the aim of achieving *good status* by 2015. All public bodies are required to coordinate their policies and operations so as to maintain the good status of water bodies which are currently unpolluted and improve polluted water bodies to good status by 2015.

The SEA will be informed by, inter alia, the information contained in available EPA Integrated Water Quality Reports on the status of water bodies including river, lake, estuarine, coastal and ground waters. The current available status of coastal and estuarine waters on the island of Ireland, which are a mixture of high, good and moderate status along the WAW route, are mapped on Figure 5.5. Additional mapping of surface and ground waters will be used by the SEA.

Currently available data bathing water quality is mapped on Figure 5.6. Most bathing water locations along the WAW route are identified as being of either good (compliant with EU Guide and Mandatory values) or sufficient (compliant with EU Mandatory values only) quality. Only 2 locations along the WAW route, Ballyheigue (County Kerry) and Clifden (County Galway), are identified as having poor water quality (non-compliant with EU Mandatory values).

Entries to the WFD Register of Protected Areas (RPAs) will be considered by the SEA. These include:

- SAC and SPA Rivers and Waterbodies;
- Shellfish Areas and Water Bodies;
- Salmonid Rivers and Lakes;
- Nutrient Sensitive Water Bodies;
- Bathing Water Areas; and
- Drinking Water Rivers, Lakes and Groundwater.

In addition to considering relevant water bodies on the RPAs, the SEA will consider relevant water bodies identified in Fáilte Ireland's (2009) report *Determination of Waters of National Tourism Significance and Associated Water Quality Status*. Over 70 of 104 water bodies identified by this report are located within counties through which the WAW traverses.

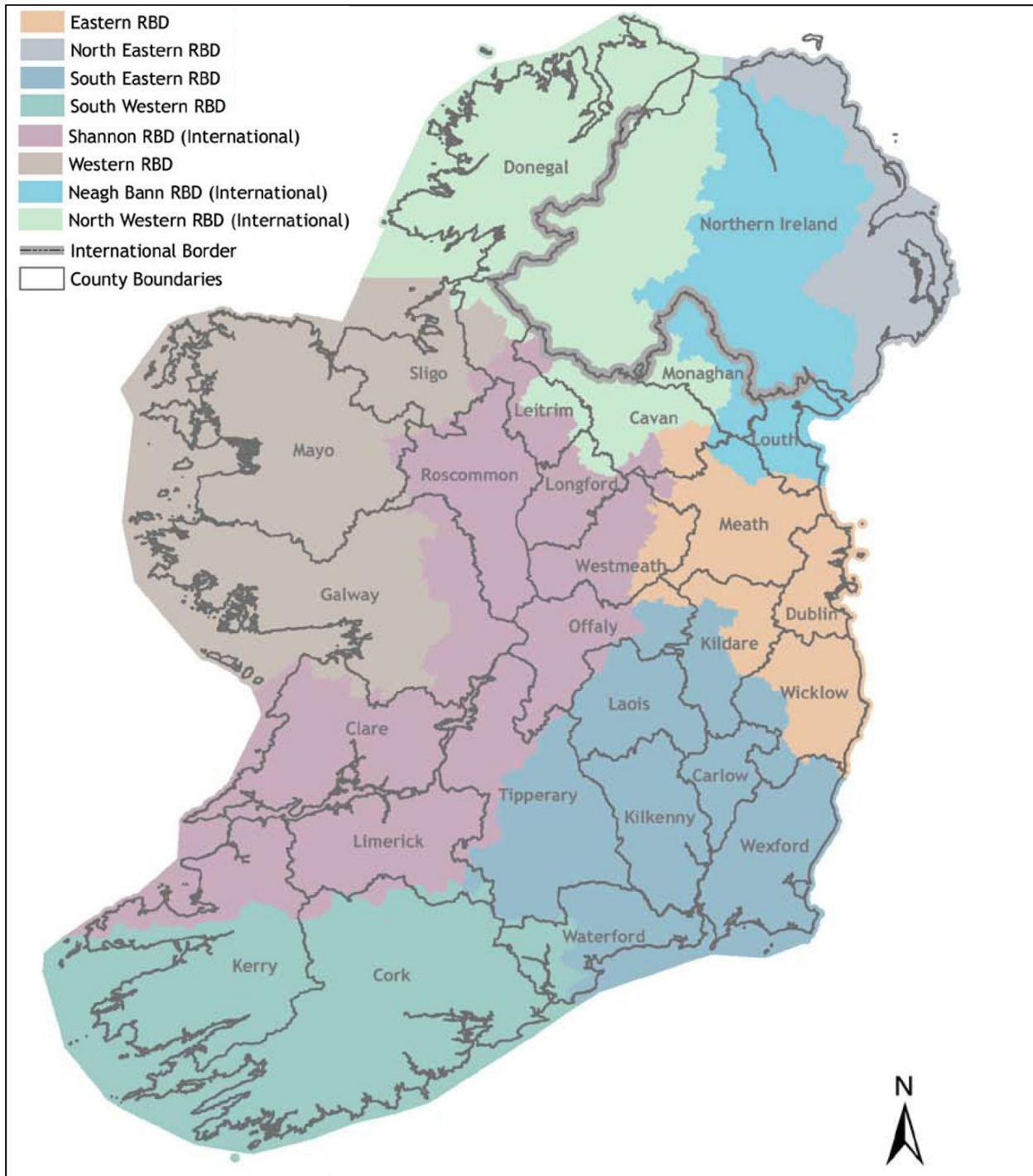


Figure 5.4 River Basin Districts on the island of Ireland

Source: EPA (2008) *Ireland's Environment 2008*

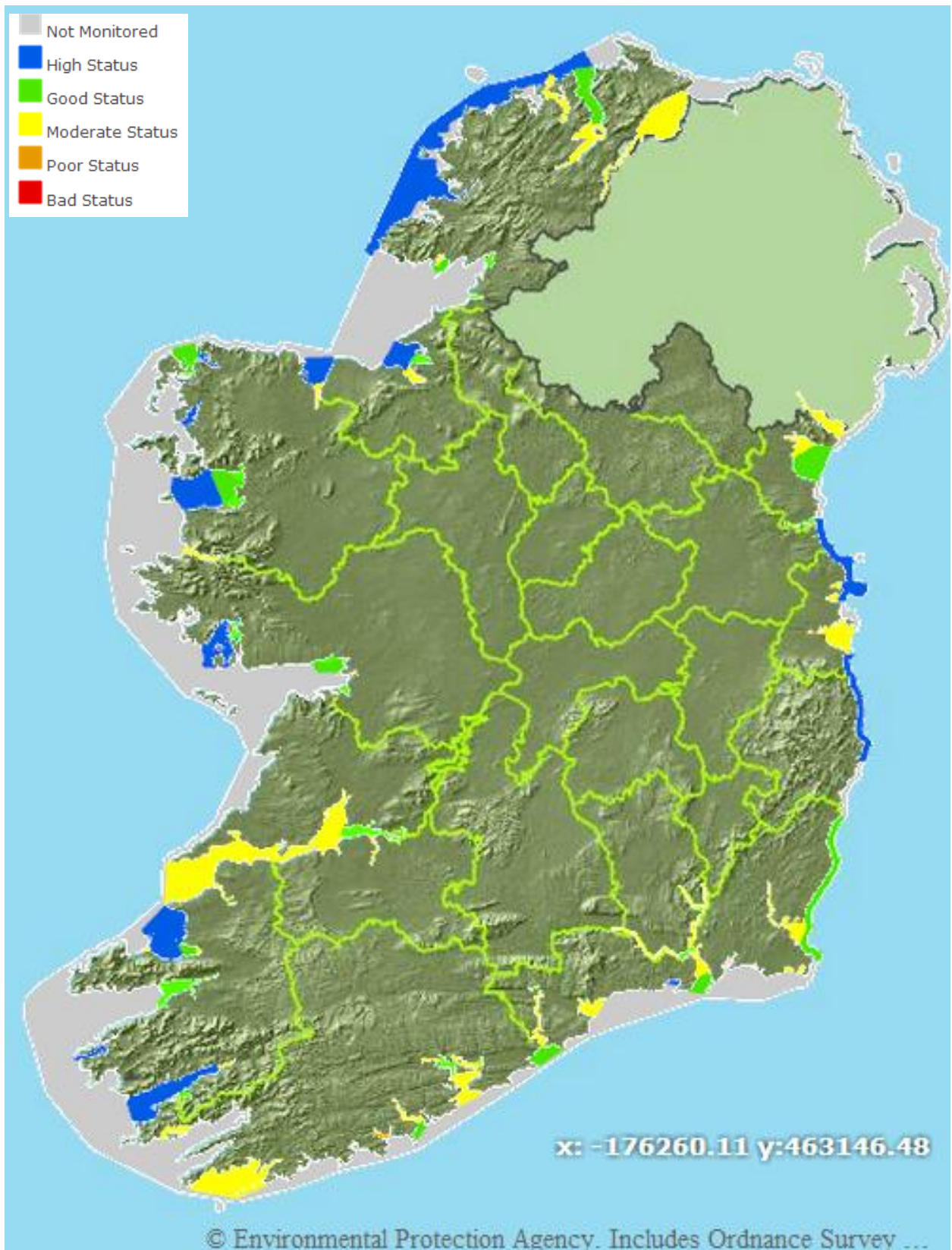


Figure 5.5 Status of Coastal and Estuarine Waters 2009-2011

Source: EPA Data from 2009-2011, downloaded from <http://gis.epa.ie/Envision/> in October 2013

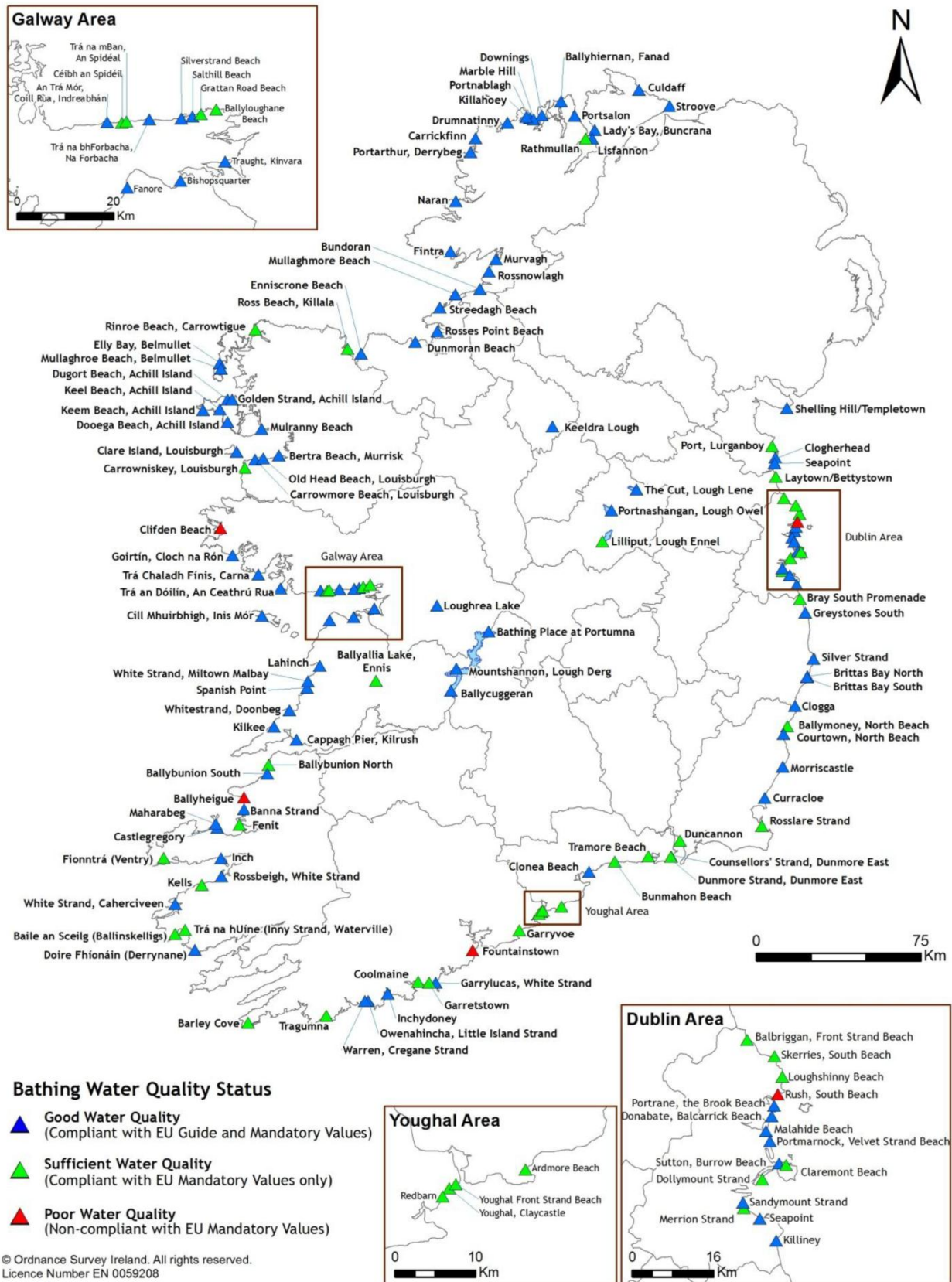


Figure 5.6 Bathing Water Quality 2012

Source: EPA (2013) *The Quality of Bathing Water in Ireland - An Overview for the Year 2012*

5.6 Air and Climatic Factors

5.6.1 Air

Air Quality

In order to comply with European Directives relating to air quality, the EPA measures the levels of a number of atmospheric pollutants. For the purposes of monitoring in Ireland, four zones are defined in the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2002 (SI No. 271 of 2002). The main areas defined in each zone are:

- Zone A: Dublin Conurbation.
- Zone B: Cork Conurbation.
- Zone C: Other cities and large towns comprising Galway, Limerick, Waterford, Clonmel, Kilkenny, Sligo, Drogheda, Wexford, Athlone, Ennis, Bray, Naas, Carlow, Tralee, Dundalk, Navan, Letterkenny, Celbridge, Newbridge, Mullingar, Balbriggan, Greystones, Leixlip and Portlaoise.
- Zone D: Rural Ireland, i.e. the remainder of the State - small towns and rural areas of the country - excluding Zones A, B and C.

Air quality in all of these zones is currently "good". The EPA's (EPA, 2013) *Air Quality in Ireland 2012* identifies that air quality in Ireland continues to be good and is among the best in Europe.

Noise

Noise is unwanted sound. The Environmental Noise Regulations (SI No. 140 of 2006) transpose into Irish law the EU Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise, which is commonly referred to as the Environmental Noise Directive or END. The END defines a common approach intended to avoid, prevent or reduce on a prioritised basis the harmful effects, including annoyance, due to exposure to environmental noise. The END does not set any limit value, nor does it prescribe the measures to be used in the action plans, which remain at the discretion of the competent authorities. Limit values are left to each member state. At this point in time, Ireland does not have any statutory noise limit values.

5.6.2 Climatic Factors

The key issue involving the assessment of the effects of implementing the WAW Plan on climatic factors relates to greenhouse gas emissions arising from transport.

The EPA 2013 publication *Ireland's Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections 2012-2030*, identifies that Ireland is on track to meet its commitment under the Kyoto Protocol, primarily, a direct result of the current economic recession and economic outlook for the future. However, the report also identifies that there continues to be a significant risk that Ireland will not meet its target for 2020 under the EU Effort Sharing Decision, with strong projected growth in emissions from transport and agriculture.

Transport is a source of:

1. Noise;
2. Air emissions; and
3. Energy use (39.9% of Total Final Consumption of Energy in Ireland in 2011 was taken up by transport, the largest take up of any sector¹⁷).

By providing more sustainable modes and levels of mobility, noise and other emissions to air and energy use can be minimised. Maximising sustainable mobility will also help Ireland meet its greenhouse gas emission target for 2020 under the EU Effort Sharing Decision which commits Ireland to reducing emissions from those sectors that are not covered by the Emissions Trading Scheme (e.g. transport, agriculture, residential) to 20% below 2005 levels.

¹⁷ Sustainable Energy Ireland (2012) *Energy in Ireland 1990-2011*

5.7 Material Assets

Resources that are valued and that are intrinsic to specific places are called 'material assets'. Material Assets that will be considered by the SEA include:

- Settlements
- Water services infrastructure
- Waste
- Archaeological and architectural heritage (see Section 5.8)
- Natural resources of economic value, such as air and water¹⁸ (see Sections 5.6 and 5.5) and non-renewable resources.

With regard to water services infrastructure and services, it is noted that these are planned and permitted through specific processes which are informed by, inter alia, the needs of land use plans including County Development Plans and Local Area Plans which are required to take into account fluctuating needs, such as those that may arise as a result of existing and future numbers of residents and tourists.

5.8 Cultural Heritage

With regard to cultural heritage, the SEA will consider archaeological and architectural heritage.

5.8.1 Archaeological Heritage

Archaeological sites and monuments vary greatly in form and date; examples include earthworks of different types and periods, (e.g. early historic ringforts and prehistoric burial mounds), megalithic tombs from the Prehistoric period, medieval buildings, urban archaeological deposits, and underwater features. Archaeological sites may have no visible surface features; the surface features of an archaeological site may have decayed completely or been deliberately removed but archaeological deposits and features may survive beneath the surface. Archaeological heritage is protected under the National Monuments Acts (1930-2004), Natural Cultural Institutions Act 1997, and the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010.

A primary source of information for known archaeological features is the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) which was established under the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2004. The RMP is an inventory, put on a statutory basis by amendment to the National Monuments Act 1994, of sites and areas of archaeological significance. It records known upstanding archaeological monuments, the original location of destroyed monuments, and the location of possible sites identified through documentary, cartographic and photographic research.

The term 'monument' includes all man-made structures of whatever form or date except buildings habitually used for ecclesiastical purposes. All monuments in existence before 1700 A.D. are automatically considered to be historic monuments within the meaning of the National Monuments Acts.

The likely significant effects of implementing the WAW Plan on environmental components including archaeology will be identified and evaluated in compliance with the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. The guidance provided on Archaeological Impact Assessment will be taken into account during the undertaking of the SEA, especially with regard to the setting of requirements for lower tier projects.

Consideration will be given to underwater archaeology including shipwrecks and the National Monuments Acts during the SEA process as appropriate. It is not expected at this stage that actual conflicts will arise between underwater archaeology such as shipwrecks and the WAW Plan.

¹⁸ Including water bodies identified in Fáilte Ireland's (2009) report *Determination of Waters of National Tourism Significance and Associated Water Quality Status*.

5.8.2 Architectural Heritage

The term architectural heritage is defined in the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Monuments (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1999 as meaning all structures and buildings together with their settings and attendant grounds, fixtures and fittings; groups of structures and buildings; and sites which are of technical, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social, or technical interest.

A primary source of information for known architectural heritage is the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) of every local authority which is legislated for under Section 51 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010. Inclusion of structures or parts of structures which form part of the architectural heritage and which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest, on these records contributes towards the protection of architectural heritage.

Protected structures are defined by Section 2 of the Planning and Development Acts to mean "(a) a structure, or (b) a specified part of a structure, which is included in a record of protected structures, and, where that record so indicates, includes any specified feature which is within the attendant grounds of the structure..."

In addition to Protected Structures, the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 provide the legislative basis for the protection of areas known as Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs). An ACA is a place, area or group of structures or townscape which is of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contributes to the appreciation of protected structures, whose character it is an objective to preserve in a Development Plan.

5.9 Landscape

The SEA will consider relevant water bodies identified in Fáilte Ireland's (2009) report *Determination of Waters of National Tourism Significance and Associated Water Quality Status*. Over 70 of 104 water bodies identified by this report are located within counties through which the WAW traverses.

Landscape designations, which can be inconsistent at county borders, including landscape sensitivity classifications and protected views and prospects will also be considered by the SEA.

Figure 5.7 maps a Landscape Constraints and Opportunities Rating which provides an indication of the areas that are most sensitive from a landscape perspective. In order to create this rating, various landscape factors were given a value and overlaid upon each other¹⁹. The mapping combines Visual Sensitivity Mapping (as identified from the natural land cover types in the CORINE land cover dataset) and Topographical Mapping (developed from a 50m digital terrain model and catchment watersheds).

Landscape Constraints are indicated by colours which range from most likely sensitivity (red) to likely sensitivity (lighter red) while Landscape Opportunities are shown in green. Landscape constraints occur at a number of locations along the WAW route and these will be taken into account by the SEA.

¹⁹ A weighting system applied through Geographical Information System (GIS) software was used in order to calculate the sensitivities of each area.

Three factors were attributed a rating of 10 points:

- Elevation >200m;
- Forestry Landcover Areas; and,
- Slope >30 Degrees).

Two factors were attributed a weighting of 5 points:

- Lakes and Estuaries; and,
- Other Natural Landcover Types.

One factor was attributed a weighting of minus 5 points:

- Areas of land within 3km of the 200km contour and under 200 metres and with a slope between 5 degrees and 30 degrees.

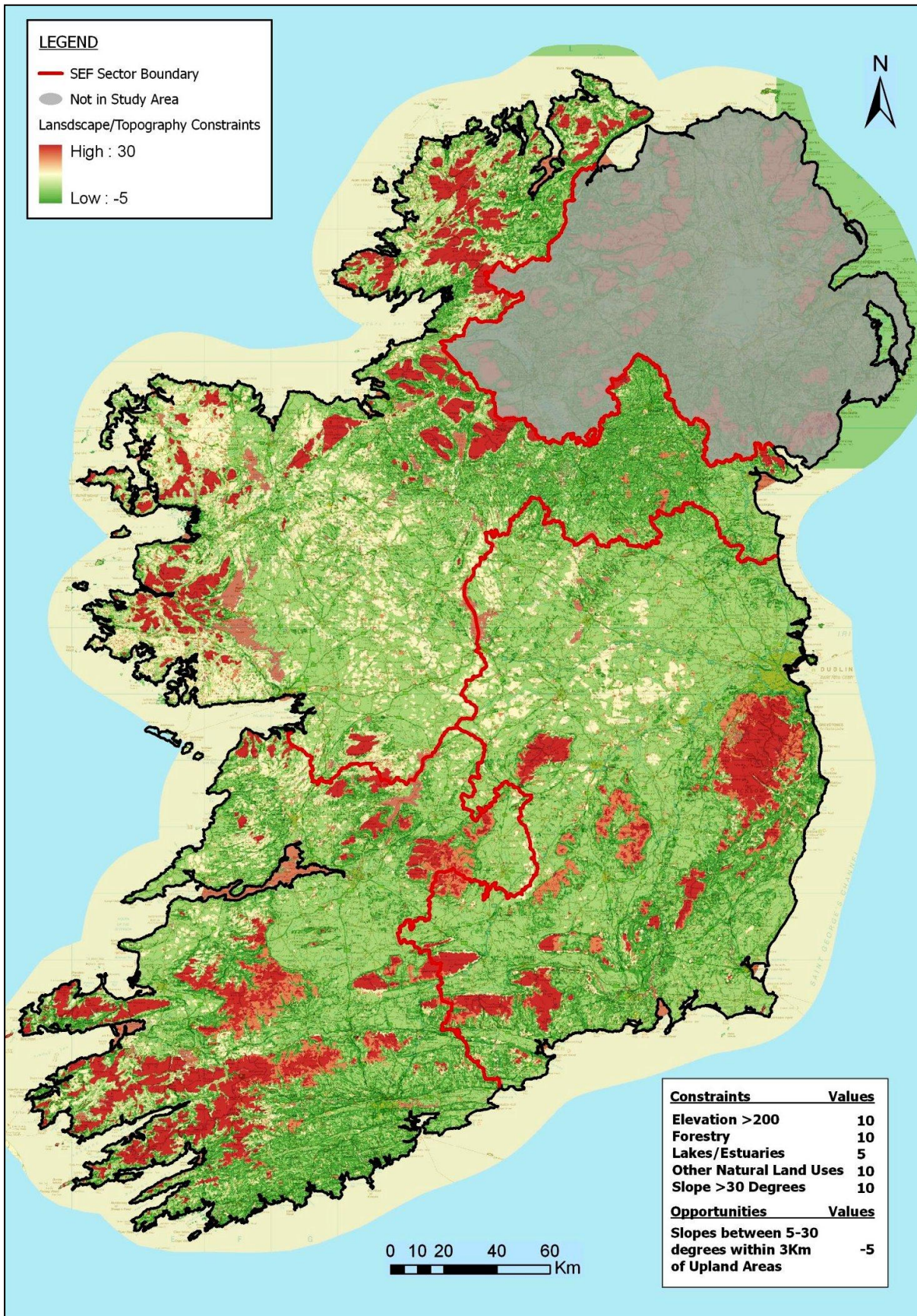


Figure 5.7 Landscape Constraints and Opportunities Rating

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5.10 Overlay Mapping of Environmental Sensitivities

Overlay mapping of environmental sensitivities will be prepared and used in subsequent SEA stages.