

SEA STATEMENT

FOR THE

SLIGO **DESTINATION EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

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Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Legislative Context

This is the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Statement for the SEA Statement for the Sligo Destination Experience Development Plan (hereafter referred to as 'the Plan' or 'DEDP').

SEA is a systematic process of predicting and evaluating the likely environmental effects of implementing a plan, or other strategic action, in order to ensure that these effects are appropriately addressed at the earliest appropriate stage of decision-making on a par with economic and social considerations.

Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers, of 27th June 2001, on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment, referred to hereafter as the SEA Directive, introduced the requirement that SEA be carried out on plans and programmes that 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 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No. 436 of 2004). Both sets of Regulations became operational on 21st July 2004. The Regulations have been amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200 of 2011) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 201 of 2011).

1.2 Content of the SEA Statement

Where SEA is undertaken, the Regulations require that "information on the decision" is made available to the public and the competent environmental authorities after the finalisation of the Plan (referred to as an SEA Statement).

The SEA Statement is required to include information summarising:

- a) how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan;
- b) how the following have been taken into account during the preparation of the Plan:
 - o the environmental report,
 - o submissions and observations made on the Draft Plan and Environmental Report, and
 - o any transboundary consultations.
- c) the reasons for choosing the Plan in the light of the other reasonable alternatives dealt with; and
- d) the measures decided upon to monitor the significant environmental effects of implementation of the Plan.

1.3 Implications of SEA for the Plan

SEA has been undertaken on the Plan and the findings of the SEA are expressed in an Environmental Report, the first published version of which accompanied the Draft Plan on public display. The Environmental Report was updated in order to take account of non-material changes that were made to the original Draft Plan on foot of submissions following public display.

Fáilte Ireland have taken into account the findings of the SEA Environmental Report and other related SEA output during their consideration of the Draft Plan and before its adoption. This SEA Statement, summarising how environmental considerations have been integrated into the Plan, has been prepared at the end of the process.

Section 2 How Environmental Considerations were integrated into the Plan

2.1 Introduction

Environmental considerations were integrated into the Plan through:

1. Establishing the status of the Plan and its interrelationship with the Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework;
2. Consultations;
3. Consideration of alternatives;
4. Communication of environmental sensitivities throughout the SEA process;
5. Integrating Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management into the Plan.

2.2 Establishing the status of the Plan and its interrelationship with the Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework

The SEA team worked with the Plan-preparation team at Fáilte Ireland in order to help establish the status of the Plan and its interrelationship with the Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework.

Implementing the Plan will involve Fáilte Ireland helping to facilitate, promote, support and coordinate stakeholders (including local authorities, other government agencies, tourism operators, communities and visitors) in their activities in a way that is consistent with existing and emerging plans that have been subject to environmental assessment. **The Plan does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent.**

The Plan is situated alongside a hierarchy of statutory documents setting out public policy for, among other things, land use development, tourism, infrastructure, sustainable development, environmental protection and

environmental management. These other existing policies, plans etc. have been subject to their own environmental assessment processes, as relevant, and form the decision-making and consent-granting framework.

The National Planning Framework (NPF) sets out Ireland's planning policy direction up to 2040. The NPF is to be implemented through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) and lower tier Development Plans and Local Area Plans. The RSESs for the Western Region (the area to which the Plan relates is located within this Region) sets out objectives relating tourism development, that have been subject to environmental assessment, including those relating to: enhancing provision of tourism and leisure amenity; promoting tourism activity; developing a road network and public transport services, facilitating improved visitor access and longer dwell times; developing walking and cycling trails, opening greater accessibility to the marine and countryside environment by sustainable modes; and facilitating appropriate tourism development, including that relating to greenways, blueways and peatlands. The RSES will inform the review of existing, assessed lower-tier Development Plans and Local Area Plans, which already include various provisions relating to land use, tourism and infrastructure. Such reviews will also be subject to environmental assessments.

Implementation of the Plan shall be consistent with and conform with the NPF, RSES and lower-tier land use plans, including provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management that have been integrated into these documents including through SEA and AA processes. In order to be realised, projects included in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the Plan is not part and does not contribute towards.

Figure 2.1 provides a schematic of the relationship between the Plan and the existing Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework. Also indicated is the hierarchy of accompanying environmental assessment in force.

2.3 Consultations

Relevant environmental authorities identified under the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes), as amended, were sent SEA scoping notices by Fáilte Ireland indicating that submissions or observations in relation to the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the environmental report could be made.

Further detail on submissions made on foot of the SEA scoping notice is provided under Section 3.2.

Furthermore, submissions were made on the Draft Plan and SEA Environmental Report while they were on public display and these resulted in updates being made to the SEA documents (see Section 3.3).

2.4 Consideration of alternatives

As part of the Plan-preparation/SEA process, Fáilte Ireland considered three alternatives for the Plan. Taking into account, inter alia, the environmental effects identified by the SEA, Fáilte Ireland proceeded with one of the alternatives (see Section 4 of this SEA Statement).

2.5 Communication of environmental sensitivities throughout the SEA process

2.5.1 Individual Environmental Sensitivities

Environmental considerations were integrated into the Draft Plan before it was placed on public display. Individual sensitivities which were

mapped by the SEA and considered by the Team preparing the Plan included the following:

- European sites
- Other ecological designations
- WFD surface water status
- Groundwater vulnerability
- WFD Register of Protected Areas
- Land cover mapping
- Infrastructure capacity
- Green infrastructure and ecosystem services
- Archaeological and architectural heritage
- Landscape designations

2.5.2 Appropriate Assessment

Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been undertaken alongside preparation of the Plan. The requirement for AA is provided under the EU Habitats Directive (Directive 1992/43/EEC).

The conclusion of the AA is that the Plan will not affect the integrity of the European sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

The preparation of the Plan, SEA and AA has taken place concurrently and the findings of the AA have informed the SEA. Various content has been integrated into the Plan through the SEA and AA processes.

2.6 Integrating Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management into the Plan

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

In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for land use or infrastructural development or land use activities from Fáilte Ireland, Fáilte Ireland's stakeholders shall be

required to demonstrate compliance¹ with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management contained within the following Fáilte Ireland published documents:

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

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

- Requirements for lower-tier environmental assessment, including EIA and AA;
- Statutory land use plans that form part of the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework (e.g. Development Plans, such as the existing Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied and extended) and the new upcoming Sligo CDP 2024-2030 [in preparation] and any Local Area Plans currently in force in County Sligo) that have undergone environmental assessment, as appropriate, including various provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management²; and
- The Climate Action Plan 2023 (and emerging Climate Action Plan 2024) and the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions)³.

Infrastructure Capacity⁴

With respect to infrastructural capacity (including drinking water, wastewater,

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

Visitor Management⁵

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

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

Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services⁶

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

¹ Demonstration of compliance may be supported by monitoring undertaken by the beneficiary.

² For more information please refer to Appendix III of this report or the website of the relevant public authority.

³ For more information please refer to Section 4.10 and/or Appendix III of this report or the website of the relevant public authority.

⁴ This requirement has arisen through the SEA and/or AA processes.

⁵ This requirement has arisen through the SEA and/or AA processes.

⁶ This requirement has arisen through the SEA and/or AA processes.

Climate Change

Various provisions relating to climate change have been integrated into the Plan, compliance with which will need to be demonstrated by those seeking or maintaining funding from Fáilte Ireland. Such measures include those relating to:

- **Walking and cycling;** and
- Contribution towards European and national objectives for **climate mitigation and adaptation**, taking into account a wide range of detailed measures including those relating to resilience.

Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework

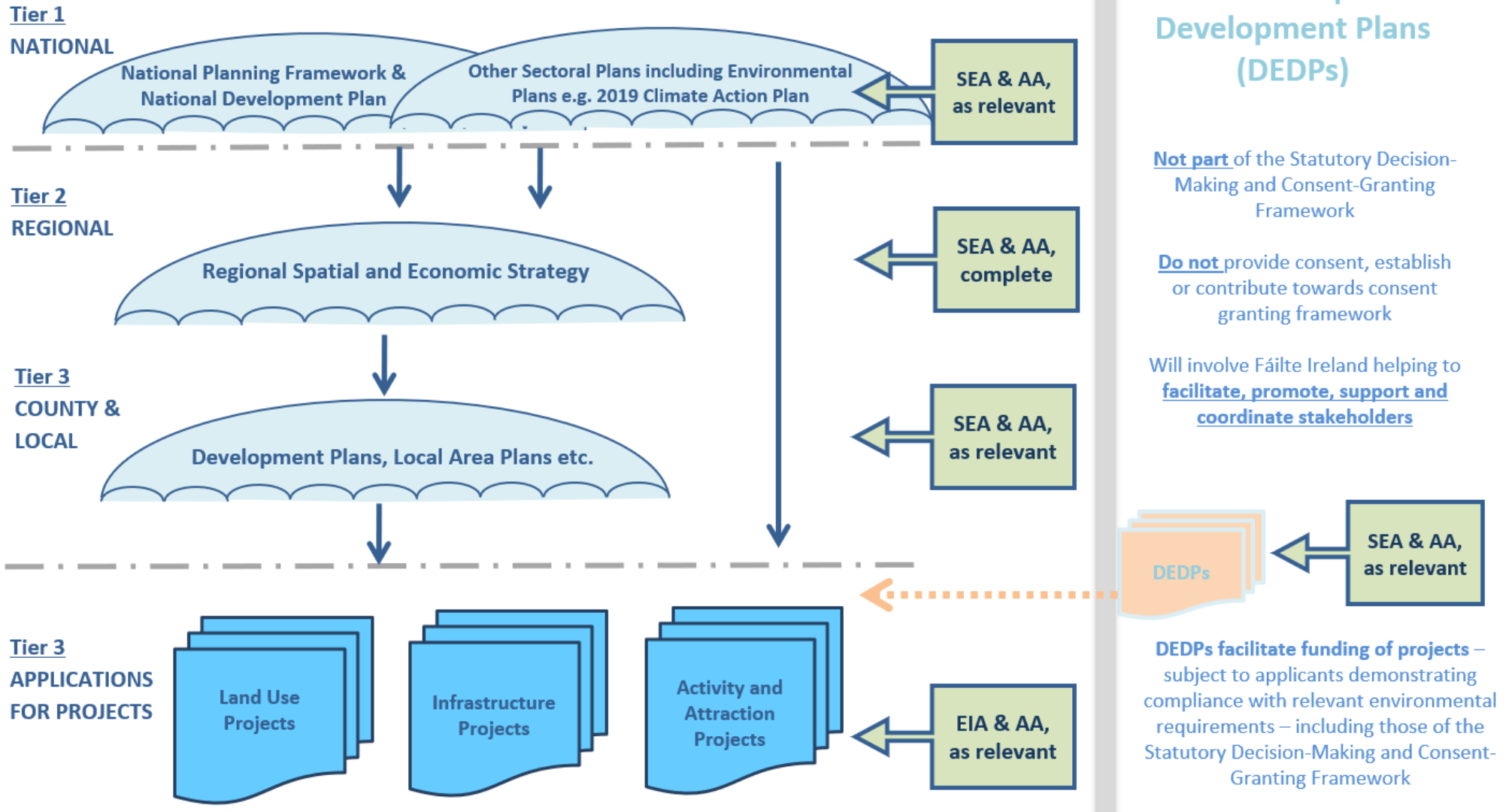


Figure 2.1 Statutory Decision-Making and Consent-Granting Framework, Sligo DEDP and Environmental Assessment Requirements

Section 3 Environmental Report and Submissions/ Observations

3.1 Introduction

This section details how both the Environmental Report and submissions and observations made to Fáilte Ireland on the Environmental Report and SEA process have been taken into account during the preparation of the Plan and the SEA.

3.2 SEA Scoping Submissions

One submission was made during the SEA Scoping process by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA's submission provided information under the headings below that were addressed in the SEA/AA and/or the Plan, including:

- Sustainable Development Goals & Key Actions for Ireland
- Scope of the SEA
- Data and Knowledge Gaps
- Community Engagement
- Climate Action
- Traffic Management
- Water Quality
- Infrastructure-related Considerations
- Biodiversity
- Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure
- Invasive Alien Species Control and Management
- Landscape
- Assessment of Environmental Effects
- Alternatives
- Monitoring, Review and Reporting
- Integration with other key Plans and Programmes
- Available Guidance & Resources
- Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Webtool
- EPA SEA WebGIS Tool
- EPA WFD Application
- EPA AA GeoTool
- State of the Environment Report – Ireland's Environment 2016
- Environmental Authorities

3.3 Submissions on the Environmental Report and Draft Plan

Various submissions were made on the Draft Plan and/or associated environmental assessment documents while these documents were on public display.

Updates to the SEA and AA documents did not materially change the Plan⁷ and consequently did not necessitate further, detailed SEA consideration.

Updates to the Draft Plan did not provide for any uses, works or activities additional to those already provided for by the original Draft Plan that would present additional sources. Consequently, they did not require further, detailed SEA or AA consideration.

Additional text/non-material changes added to the Plan on foot of submissions includes the following:

Add cross-referencing in the Plan to SEA and AA documents for details of biodiversity considerations taken into account in the SEA/AA and Plan preparation process.

The SEA Environmental Report was updated by:

Adding a reference to the *Good practice guidance on SEA for the tourism sector* (EPA, 2023), and also to *Good practice guidance on SEA and landscape* (EPA, 2023) and EPA Guidance on the *Tiering of environmental assessments – The influence of Strategic Environmental Assessment on Project level Environmental Impact Assessment* (EPA, 2021).

3.4 SEA documents including the SEA Environmental Report

The Draft Plan and accompanying documents (including SEA Environmental Report and AA Natura Impact Statement) were placed on public display, having integrated all recommendations arising from the SEA and AA processes.

The SEA Environmental Report was updated in order to take account of non-material changes to the Draft Plan that were made on foot of submissions.

⁷ The Plan for adoption that encompasses the original Draft Plan that was placed on public display and minor modifications following public display. Minor modifications to the original Draft Plan following public display were subject to Screening for AA.

Fáilte Ireland have taken into account the findings of all relevant SEA output during their consideration of the Draft Plan and before the Plan was adopted.

Section 4 Reasons for choosing the selected alternative in light of other alternatives considered

As per the requirements of the SEA Directive, the SEA considers reasonable alternatives, which are capable of being implemented for the Plan, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the Plan.

4.1 Description of Alternatives

Alternative 1: Current Situation (Business as Usual)

As identified in the Plan, there are various **opportunities** associated with the current tourism development situation include:

- Year round experience development based on the extensive outdoor adventure product base of the county.
- Cluster approach to experience development leveraging world class experiences such as surfing, mountain biking and golf.
- Revitalisation of urban areas and small towns as tourism destinations through public realm enhancement projects.
- Building on the water heritage of Sligo by raising the profile of the Garvogue River corridor from Lough Gill to the ocean through the core of Sligo.
- Development of greenways and related walking infrastructure, including the 'joining-up' and repositioning of existing assets.
- Development of cultural experiences and evening economy opportunities around music and heritage of traditional music in Sligo.
- Regional linkages through product development that can influence new visitors flows into the county such as greenways, Lough Gill links to Parkes Castle, coastal trails.
- Potential of the Neolithic landscapes as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Water based tourism experience development from coastal tourism to future Blueway development.
- Developing niche business tourism opportunities.
- Linking tourism industry development through digital capability building and Sligo's economic ambition around technology.
- Development of a Sligo Wellbeing experience base approach linked to food, place, community and culture.
- Building on the county's portfolio of iconic natural and cultural heritage such as Ben Bulbin.
- Elevate the food and drink opportunity for Sligo arising from new large scale investment in Lough Gill.

However, there are a number of **challenges** associated with this situation, including:

- Fragmented industry approach with limited levels of networking or collaboration to grow the appeal of the destination.
- Significant level of seasonality associated with Sligo tourism economy.
- Visitor dispersion across the county and reducing transient nature of destination with visitors associating it as a 'pass' through destination.
- Lack of coherent destination narrative and messaging in the marketplace.
- Limited destination 'cut through' in the international marketplace with significant dependency on the domestic market.
- No flagship visitor attraction associated with Sligo.
- Limited range and choice of accommodation options outside of Sligo town.
- Gaps in accommodation stock ranging from hotels to alternative sources of visitor accommodation across the county.
- Pace of delivery of large scale capital projects that have the scope to transform the tourism experience base.
- Low engagement with tourism opportunity outside of a number of core areas in the county.
- Key cultural assets and heritage not accessible to visitors due to limited number of experiences i.e. music.
- The need to balance environmental objectives versus creating new visitor experiences linked to the activity sector and meeting visitor expectations around sustainable tourism practice.
- Current levels of online and digital marketing among the tourism industry making it difficult for visitors to engage with the destination from pre visit information to booking experiences.
- Issue of insurance limiting the growth of outdoor activity providers in the destination.
- Ability to attract and retain staff into tourism and hospitality careers affecting ability to operate in off peak seasons.
- Reinvigorating the existing visitor attraction base to develop new visitor.

There are also various policies and plans that are already in place relating to the development of tourism, including:

- People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025 Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

- Fáilte Ireland Corporate Plan
- Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021–2025
- Tourism Action Plan 2019–2021
- Actions to Promote Sustainable Tourism Practices 2021–2023
- Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways
- County Sligo Tourism Strategy (2018–2023)
- Tourism Development and Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, Fáilte Ireland
- Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme 2015-2019, Fáilte Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland’s Regional Tourism Development Strategies 2023-2027 for Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, Ireland’s Ancient East and Dublin
- Sligo County Development Plan 2017-2023 (as varied and extended) and the new upcoming Sligo CDP 2024-2030 [in preparation] and any Local Area Plans currently in force in County Sligo

This current situation presents **Alternative 1 (Business as Usual)** to be considered by the SEA. Overtime, numbers of visitors would continue to increase under this scenario – consistent with the development of tourism over many decades.

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

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

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

- Grow the year-round appeal of the Wild Atlantic Way domestically and internationally ensuring the area attracts and disperses high value visitors into and throughout the region.
- Raise the international profile of the Northern half of the Wild Atlantic Way to increase visitation and revenue.
- Increase tourism revenue, visitor dispersion and season extension across the Southern half of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Protect the authenticity and “wildness” of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- Enable and assist the industry to grow its capacity and capability so that it can thrive over the period of this plan.
- Foster strong coalitions of industry and stakeholders with a common purpose in creating flourishing destinations and thriving communities.

Fáilte Ireland will track progress through a series of performance indicators that will be monitored annually. The existence of compelling and saleable visitor experiences is the vehicle for:

- Increase bed-nights by 2% year over year ahead of national average from year 3 of implementation of this Destination and Experience Development Plan.
- Increase revenue to attractions by 2% ahead of the national average from implementation.
- Increase length of stay.
- Increase in the saleable product (5 new saleable experiences), improved experiences and better distribution.
- Season extension: extend opening hours annually by 5% annually.
- Increased visitor satisfaction – benchmarked through measures such as Net Promoter Score.

Under Alternative 2 there are two separate alternatives:

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

Fáilte Ireland provides funding sustainable tourism projects including land use and infrastructural development and land use activities. In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for land use or infrastructural development or land use activities from Fáilte Ireland, **Alternative 2A** would require Fáilte Ireland’s stakeholders to demonstrate compliance with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management contained within the following Fáilte Ireland published documents:

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

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

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

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

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

4.2 Detailed Consideration of Alternatives

Alternative 1: Business as Usual

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

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

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

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

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

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

In addition to the measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection, environmental management which are provided under all alternatives, and measures relating to seasonality and regionality, provided for by this alternative and Alternative 2B, this alternative would provide additional requirements for environmental protection and management, including those taken

from the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme and those relating to infrastructure capacity, visitor management and green infrastructure and ecosystem services. In order to be realised, projects included in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) would have to demonstrate compliance, as relevant, with various provisions of legislation, policies, plans and programmes that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework, of which the Plan is not part and does not contribute towards.

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

Although a Plan would help to improve the seasonal and geographic spread of visitors, a Plan's objective would be to increase the number of visitors to the Sligo DEDP area. Although this would be likely to happen without a Plan, a Plan would have the potential to increase numbers of tourists – and associated potential adverse effects – to a greater degree than would be the case if there was no Plan. This would be likely to contribute towards an increase in travel-related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air, including from aviation. These increases will be mitigated by provisions that have been integrated into the Plan, including those relating to sustainable mobility and compliance with the Climate Action Plan 2023 (and emerging Climate Action plan 2024), the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018 and any subsequent versions).

A Plan would also help to promote new experiences – including those relating to land use activities and developments. These would also have the potential to increase adverse effects. Notwithstanding this, there would be three layers of mitigation, through:

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

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

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

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

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

This would be likely to contribute towards an increase in travel related greenhouse gas and other emissions to air, including from aviation. These increases would be mitigated by the wider planning framework.

A Plan would also help to promote new experiences – including those relating to land use activities and developments. These would also have the potential to increase adverse effects. Notwithstanding this, there would be one layer of mitigation, through the existing statutory planning and consent framework.

Table 4.1 below provides a comparative evaluation of alternatives against SEOs.

Table 4.1 Comparative Evaluation of Alternatives against SEOs

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

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

Taking into account the environmental effects detailed above and the challenges and opportunities present for tourism across the Sligo DEDP area, Fáilte Ireland have proceeded with Alternative 2A "A Plan with Additional Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management".

Section 5 Monitoring Measures

5.1 Introduction

The SEA Directive requires that the significant environmental effects of the implementation of plans and programmes are monitored. This section details the measures that have been selected in order to monitor the likely significant effects of implementing relevant Fáilte Ireland Plans, Programmes, etc.

The monitoring programme is flexible to take account of specific environmental issues and unforeseen adverse impacts should they arise. It monitors all potential effects, including positive and negative ones (including cumulative effects). Monitoring can demonstrate the positive effects facilitated by the Plan and can enable, at an early stage, the identification of unforeseen adverse effects and the undertaking of appropriate remedial action.

The occurrence of persistent significant adverse environmental effects which are directly attributable to tourism would necessitate consideration of the effects in the context of the Plan and a possible review of part(s) of the Plan.

5.2 Indicators and Targets

Monitoring is based around indicators that allow quantitative measures of trends and progress over time relating to the Strategic Environmental Objectives identified in the SEA Environmental Report and used in the evaluation. Each indicator to be monitored is accompanied by the target(s) that were identified with regard to the relevant strategic actions.

Table 5.1 overleaf shows the current indicators and targets that have been selected for monitoring the likely significant environmental effects of implementing relevant Fáilte Ireland Plans, Programmes, etc. These monitoring measures are updated on an ongoing basis.

Monitoring is an ongoing process and the programme allows for flexibility and further refinement of indicators and targets.

5.3 Sources

Confirmation of compliance with relevant environmental measures integrated into the Plan will be a source of information for the Monitoring Programme. This documentation may include monitoring undertaken by beneficiaries to demonstrate compliance with the environmental requirements. Other existing monitoring sources will be used, including:

- Information gathered through existing Fáilte Ireland environmental monitoring programmes (and any subsequent replacements), including the Monitoring Programme for the Wild Atlantic Way, a sub-programme of which will be extended to/reported on for the Sligo DEDP area in order to monitor any effects of visitors (see Section 4.6.3);
- Sources maintained by Sligo County Council (such as those arising from the SEA of land use plans) and the relevant authorities e.g. the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Central Statistics Office; and
- Lower-tier environmental assessment and decision making – including a review of project approvals granted and associated documents – will also be utilised as a part of the Monitoring Programme.

5.4 Reporting and Responsibility

Reporting on environmental monitoring will address the indicators set out below. Fáilte Ireland is responsible for the ongoing review of indicators and targets, collating existing relevant monitored data, the preparation of monitoring evaluation report(s), the publication of these reports and, if necessary, the carrying out of corrective action, in combination with the relevant authorities.

Environmental monitoring for the Plan and other existing/future Fáilte Ireland plans, programmes, etc. may be undertaken and reported on at the same time. The findings of monitoring will be reported on periodically with frequencies to be determined during implementation.

Table 5.1 Selected Indicators, Targets and Monitoring Sources

| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Source and (where available) Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna | B1: Conservation status of habitats and species as assessed under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive | B1: Maintenance of favourable conservation status for all habitats and species protected under National and International legislation to be unaffected by implementation of the Plan ⁸ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Government report of the implementation of the measures contained in the Habitats Directive - as required by Article 17 of the Directive (every 6 years) Government National Monitoring Report for the Birds Directive under Article 12 (every 3 years) Consultations with the NPWS CORINE mapping resurvey (every c. 5 years) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| | B2: Percentage loss of functional connectivity without remediation resulting from the Plan | B2: No significant ecological networks or parts thereof which provide functional connectivity to be lost without remediation resulting from the Plan | |
| | B3i: Number of significant impacts on relevant habitats, species, environmental features or other sustaining resources in designated sites including Wildlife Sites resulting from the Plan | B3i: Avoid significant impacts on relevant habitats, species, environmental features or other sustaining resources in designated sites including Wildlife Sites resulting from the Plan | |
| | B3ii: Number of significant impacts on the protection of listed species | B3ii: No significant impacts on the protection of listed species resulting from the Plan | |
| Population and Human Health | PHH1: Occurrence (any) of a spatially concentrated deterioration in human health arising from environmental factors resulting from the Plan, as identified by the Health Service Executive and Environmental Protection Agency | PHH1: No spatial concentrations of health problems arising from environmental factors as a result the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Consultations with the HSE and EPA Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| Soil | S1: Artificial surfaces land cover extent | S1: Contribute towards the target of the National Planning Framework's SEA (2018) to "Maintain built surface cover nationally to below the EU average of 4%." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) CORINE mapping resurvey (every c. 5 years) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| Water | W1i: Classification of Overall Status (comprised of ecological and chemical status) under the European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) Regulations 2009 (S.I. No. 272 of 2009) | W1i: No deterioration in the status of any surface water or adverse effect upon the ability of any surface water to achieve 'good status' as a result of the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities Data issued under the Water Framework Directive Monitoring Programme for Ireland (multi-annual) SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| | W2: Interactions with Groundwater Quality Standards and Threshold Values under Directive 2006/118/EC resulting from development adhering to the Plan | W2: Not to affect the ability of groundwaters to comply with Groundwater Quality Standards and Threshold Values under Directive 2006/118/EC, subject to exemptions provided for by Article 4 of the WFD | |
| | W3: Compliance of relevant lower tier assessments and decision making with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines | W3: For lower tier assessments and decision making to comply with the Flood Risk Management Guidelines | |

⁸ Except as provided for in Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, viz. There must be: (a) No alternative solution available; (b) Imperative reasons of overriding public interest for the programme to proceed; and (c) Adequate compensatory measures in place.

SEA Statement for the Sligo DEDP

| Environmental Component | Indicators | Targets | Source and (where available) Frequency |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Air and Climatic Factors | AC1: Demonstration of compliance with provisions relating to climate adaptation and mitigation have been integrated into the Plan | C1: To maximise the amount of measures relating to climate adaptation and mitigation being implemented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| Material Assets | M1: Number of instances whereby additional tourists are directed by beneficiaries of funding towards areas in the Plan area where adequate and appropriate critical infrastructure with sufficient capacity is unavailable | M1: No instances whereby additional tourists are directed by beneficiaries of funding towards areas in the Plan area where adequate and appropriate critical infrastructure with sufficient capacity that does not present a danger to human health are unavailable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Consultations with the partners such as the EPA, Uisce Éireann and/or Sligo County Council Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| | M2: Number of significant adverse effects on the use of or access to public assets and infrastructure | M2: No significant adverse effects on the use of or access to public assets and infrastructure | |
| | M3: Preparation and implementation of construction and environmental management plans | M3: For construction and environmental management plans to be prepared and implemented for relevant projects | |
| Cultural Heritage | CH1: Percentage of entries to the Record of Monuments and Places protected from significant adverse effects arising from the Plan | CH1: No unauthorised adverse effects on archaeological heritage resulting from implementation of the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| | CH2: Percentage of entries to the Records of Protected Structures and Architectural Conservation Areas and their context protected from significant adverse effects arising from the Plan | CH2: No unauthorised adverse effects on architectural heritage resulting from implementation of the Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |
| Landscape | L1: Number of unmitigated conflicts with the appropriate protection of statutory designations relating to the landscape, including those included in the Development Plans and other statutory land-use plans | L1: No unmitigated conflicts with the appropriate protection of statutory designations relating to the landscape, including those included in the Development Plans and other statutory land-use plans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with "Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management" Lower tier environmental assessment and decision making by local authorities SEA Monitoring Programme reports for the land use plans of relevant local authorities (as required, monitoring reports published on various timescales and frequencies) Input from any other existing or replacement Fáilte Ireland monitoring programmes |