

By email to: environmentalplanning@housing.gov.ie

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17th December 2019

Our Ref: SCP171203.4

Re. SEA Screening for the Proposed Ministerial Direction in relation to the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019–2031

Dear Mr Scott,

We acknowledge your Department's Notice, dated 12th December 2019, concerning the proposed Ministerial Direction in relation to the Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019–2031 (the 'RSES') and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening.

The EPA is one of five statutory environmental authorities under the SEA Regulations. In our role as an SEA environmental authority, we have engaged extensively with the EMRA throughout the RSES process and made submissions at the SEA Scoping and Environmental Report / Draft Plan. These submissions focused on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into the RSES and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the RSES. Our functions as an SEA environmental authority do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans.

Proposed SEA Screening Determination

We note that the proposed Ministerial Direction concerns proposed amendments to the text in section 5.6 *Integrated Land Use and Transportation* of the RSES, specifically the section on 'Key transport infrastructure in the metropolitan areas...' (p. 108) and *Table 8.2: Rail Projects for the Region* (p. 190). We also note that that these amendments were previously requested by DHPLG in an earlier submission made to the EMRA.

We note your proposed determination regarding the need for SEA of the Direction, as set out in the SEA Screening Report accompanying the Notice, having regard to the criteria in Schedule 1 of S.I. 435 of 2004.

Sustainable Development

In proposing and in implementing the Direction, you should ensure that the Direction is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. It should align with national commitments on climate action, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation and mitigation plans.

Available Guidance & Resources

Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

- SEA process guidance and checklists
- Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA
- topic specific SEA guidance (including *Integrating climatic factors into SEA* (EPA, 2019), *Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA* (EPA, 2015), and *Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment* (EPA, 2012))

You can access these resources at: www.epa.ie/monitoringassessment/assessment/sea/

Future modifications to the RSES

Where further changes to the RSES are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in the SEA Regulations.

Environmental Authorities

Under the SEA Regulations, prior to making your SEA determination you should also consult with:

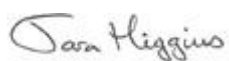
- The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, where it appears that the plan or programme, or modification of the plan or programme, might have significant effects on fisheries or the marine environment
- where it appears to the competent authority that the plan or programme, or amendment to a plan or programme, might have significant effects in relation to the architectural or archaeological heritage or to nature conservation, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

SEA Determination

As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, as appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

If you have any queries or need further information in relation to this submission, please contact me directly. I would be grateful if you could send an email confirming receipt of this submission to: sea@epa.ie.

Yours sincerely,



Tara Higgins
SEA Section
Office of Evidence and Assessment