

GSPD

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday 31 May 2021 17:35
To: GSPD
Subject: Response to Consultation on Scoping Report on Draft Mineral Policy
Attachments: Draft Mineral Policy_May 2021_Scoping Statement_comments 31May2021.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Questions on the Scoping Report include:	My comments
1. Based on the plans, policies and programmes outlined in the SEA Scoping Report, are there any other key relevant international, national or regional plans, policies or programmes that should be considered in the SEA Environmental Report on the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining?	<p>There is no mention of the Minerals Development Act 2017 throughout the document</p> <p>There is no mention of relevant corresponding legislation & policies in Northern Ireland, given the potential transboundary effects.</p> <p>Some issues may require to be related to EU Nitrates and soils protection issues</p> <p>Landscape may also need to be addressed in the context of international law & frameworks</p>
2. Based on the likely significant impacts outlined above, are there any other effects or impacts that should be considered in the SEA Environmental Report on the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining?	<p>It strikes me that the Likely Significant Effects all pertain to Mining. I feel Exploration and Mining should be treated separately as the likely effects of each stage of the Mining Cycle are very different both temporally and spatially.</p>
3. Do you have any comments regarding the draft SEA Objectives presented in the Scoping Report?	<p>The Objectives fail to address the issue of critical supply of minerals and metals to the Irish economy. If we do not mine/ extract any minerals here, import all, then we are highly vulnerable to externalities.</p>
4. Do you have any suggestions or comments in relation to the overall approach to alternatives?	<p>The 'alternative' issue of indigenous, 'sustainable' /responsible mining is not addressed – it is surely better to mine our own resources than transporting them from overseas 'unsustainable' or irresponsible mining jurisdictions where possible. The transport and carbon footprint of same is also larger – a global perspective needs to be taken in looking at internationally traded commodities.</p>
Other	<p>Please see specific comments as yellow 'stickies' on the attached pdf. The use of the word 'sustainable' exploration and mining is questionable when dealing with finite resources – responsible may be a better word.</p>

Your sincerely
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

DRAFT POLICY STATEMENT FOR MINERAL EXPLORATION AND MINING IN IRELAND

SEA Scoping Report

				12	13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl
	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br		
	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I		
	79 Au	80 Hg	81 Tl	82 Pb	83 Bi	84 Po	85 At	86 Rn	
Mt	Ds	Rg	Cn	Nh	Fl	Mc	Lv	Ts	Og
63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb	71 Lu	
95 Am	96 Cm	97 Bk	98 Cf	99 Es	100 Fm	101 Md	102 No	103 Lr	

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SEA SCOPING REPORT

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Prepared by:

RPS

Prepared for:

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC) is currently preparing Ireland's first Policy Statement for Mineral Exploration and Mining in Ireland which seeks to underline the importance of mineral exploration and mining and the role that the sector can play in:

- Ireland's and the European Union's transition to the circular economy and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions;
- Supporting primary and secondary economic activity and associated jobs creation; and
- Progressing a number of national, European and international policies and commitments.

A draft Policy Statement is expected to be published in July 2021 and the Statement will then be finalised and adopted later in 2021 following the statutory SEA consultation period.

This document is the SEA Scoping Report for the Policy Statement for Mineral Exploration and Mining in Ireland. The purpose of this document is to provide preliminary information on the Policy Statement and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) with a view to establishing the scope, level of detail and approach required for the SEA. It is intended that the information contained in the report will enable meaningful consultation and engagement as part of the formal statutory consultation required in relation to SEA Scoping. This Scoping Report has been prepared by RPS on behalf of DECC.

The objective of SEA is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development. SEA is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental consequences of the implementing policy initiatives prior to adoption. The SEA process also gives interested parties an opportunity to comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed Policy Statement and to be kept informed during the decision-making process.

The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004), as amended, and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004), as amended.

Screening of the Policy Statement for SEA was undertaken in April 2021 and it has been determined by the DECC that the Policy Statement will be subject to full SEA.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 Background to the Sector

For the purposes of this Policy Statement, 'minerals' are those materials that meet the definition as presented in the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999. This includes *all substances in, on, or under land, whether obtainable by underground or by surface working* but excludes the following:

- The agricultural surface of the ground;
- Turf or peat;
- Stone, sand, gravel or clay, (quarries are regulated through the planning process by local authorities);
- There is a Ministerial ban on uranium exploration since 2007;
- Primary mercury mining is prohibited under the Minamata Convention on Mercury, was ratified by Ireland in March 2019; and
- Oil and gas (which is regulated under the Petroleum and Other Minerals Development Act, 1960) and the Government plans to introduce legislation to ban new oil and natural gas exploration and extraction under this Act.

It is also noted that while the Schedule to the Act defines coal, lignite and oil shale as 'minerals', it is anticipated that the Policy Statement will exclude exploration and mining of these minerals in line with Circular Economy and Green Deal principles.

Ireland has a diverse geology and a range of rich mineral deposits including zinc, lead, copper and gold-bearing quartz veins. Recent exploration has also been carried out for Platinum Group Metal (PGM) mineralization, Rare Earth Element, technology metals (for example, lithium, tantalum, tungsten and tin), nickel and chromite, diamonds and other gem minerals. There is also significant potential across Ireland for industrial minerals. In recent years, gypsum, dolomite, silica sand, brick shale and fireclay have all been mined.

There are two operating mines in Ireland, the Boliden Tara lead-zinc mine in Co Meath and the Irish Gypsum Ltd. gypsum mine in Co. Monaghan. In recent years, two other lead-zinc mines have ceased production; Galmoy Mine (Co. Kilkenny) in 2012 and Lisheen Mine (Co. Tipperary) in 2015. Both mines are now at an advanced stage of rehabilitation.

In 2020, Tara Mine milled 2.32Mt of ore grading 5.76% Zn and 1.03% Pb and Irish Gypsum Ltd. produced 150,000 tonnes of gypsum from an open pit and from an adjacent underground mine in Co Monaghan¹. From data published by International Lead and Zinc Study Group, Ireland produced 11.3% of European zinc mine output (4th in Europe) and 2.8% of European lead mine output (9th in Europe).

2.2 Regulation of the Sector

Under the provisions of the Minerals Development Acts 1940-1999, DECC is the competent authority for issuing Prospecting Licences for exploration and subsequently, when an economic deposit has been defined, a State Mining Facility (SMF) with a lease or licence.

As of May 2021, there are approximately 430 Prospecting Licences (PL) in Ireland. Applicants for Prospecting Licences must provide an appropriate exploration programme for the minerals of interest, demonstrate their technical and financial capabilities and agree to licence terms, which includes a condition of undertaking work with due regard for the environment. A PL allows the holder to prospect for specified minerals in a defined geographic area referred to as a Prospecting Licence Area.

¹ Source: Prospecting Licence Areas Open for Application Under Competition and Industry News 1 May 2021

For any intrusive investigations, such as exploration drilling or trenching associated with a PL, these must be undertaken in line with the following DECC Guidance:

- Exploration Drilling - Guidance on Discharge to Surface and Groundwater (August 2019); and
- **Guidance for Good Environmental Practice in Mineral Exploration (August 2019).**

In addition, DECC undertake an Environmental Screening Determinations, including Screening for Appropriate Assessment for all mineral exploration activities and Environmental Impact Assessment for drilling activities.

A State Mining Lease is issued under the Minerals Development Act 1940-1999 for minerals in State ownership and a State Mining Licence is issued under the 1979 Act for privately owned minerals. As per the latest DECC data², there are currently six active State Mining Licences and a further ten State Mining Leases currently active as set out in **Table 2-1** and mapped in **Figure 2.1**. The larger of these facilities (highlighted in grey) require an Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) / Industrial Emissions (IE) licence from the EPA and are heavily regulated both in terms of operation and subsequent aftercare.

For the other operators, any applicant for a SMF must hold a valid PL first and provide a detailed, costed closure plan as part of their application. SMFs are only issued to applicants who have planning permission and can adhere to best practice and environmental guidelines to ensure full extraction of the minerals while preventing subsidence and guaranteeing proper rehabilitation of the mineral workings.

In short, the sector is currently heavily regulated with a focus on environmental protection built into both the consent process and also through operations in the case of the larger IPC/IE licenced facilities.

Table 2-1: Current State Mining Facilities in Ireland

SML No.	Type	SM Lease / Licence Holder	County	Mineral
2	Licence	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
3	Licence	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
4	Licence	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
5	Licence	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
11	Licence	(1) Vedanta Lisheen Mining Ltd, (2) Killoran Lisheen Mining Ltd. (3) Lisheen Milling Co	Tipperary	Lead, Zinc and other Minerals
12	Licence	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
17	Lease	Joyce's Marble Quarries Ltd	Galway	Marble and other Minerals
23	Lease	Fleming's Fireclays Ltd	Laois	Fireclay, Coal
30	Lease	Connemara Marble Products Ltd. G	Galway	Marble
37	Lease	Fleming's Fireclays Ltd.	Laois	Fireclay, Coal and other Minerals
79	Lease	Joyce's Marble Quarries Ltd.	Galway	Marble and other Minerals
139	Lease	Irish Gypsum Ltd	Monaghan	Gypsum, Anhydrite and other Minerals
140	Lease	(1) Vedanta Lisheen Mining Ltd, (2) Killoran Lisheen Mining Ltd. (3) Lisheen Milling Co	Tipperary	Lead, Zinc and other Minerals
144	Lease	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
146	Lease	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc
147	Lease	Boliden Tara Mines Ltd.	Meath	Lead and Zinc

² https://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWData/Library3/Documents%20Laid/pdf/CCAEdoclaid080720_080720_124847.pdf

State Mining and Prospecting Areas

1 May 2021



An Roinn Comhshaoil,
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide
Department of the Environment,
Climate and Communications

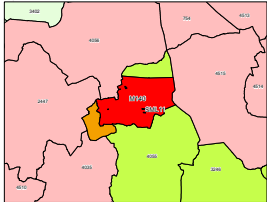
The area boundaries on this map are approximate.
Details are available from the Geoscience Regulation Office.

0 25 50 100 Km

Current Prospecting Licences	432
Current State Mining Licences	6
Current State Mining Leases	10

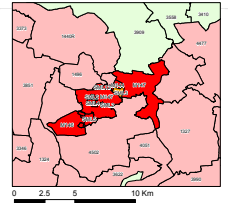


Lisheen Mine



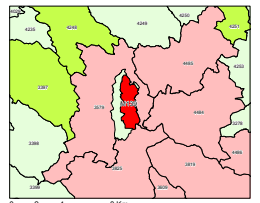
0 1.25 2.5 5 Km

Navan Mine



0 2.5 5 10 Km

Drummond / Knocknacran Mine



0 2 4 8 Km

Prepared by the Geoscience Regulation Office
Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0047221
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Available Ground

- Competition Area
- Open Area - No Incentives
- Open Area - Incentives

Unavailable Ground**

- Prospecting Licence Held
- State Mining Facility
- Licence Offered / Unavailable
- Competition Closed
- National Parks and other Excluded Areas

Geography

- Lake
- Urban Area

Licence Holders

- Adventus Exploration Ltd. (15)
- Adventus Zinc Ireland Ltd. (35)
- Aurum Mineral Resources Ltd. (1)
- BMEx Pty. Ltd. (4)
- Ballinalack Resources Ltd. (5)
- Beal Na Blath Resources Ltd. (11)
- Blackstairs Lithium Ltd. (11)
- Bolden Tara Mines Ltd. (52)
- Centenary Resources Ltd. (3)
- Connemara Granite Teo (1)
- Connemara Mining Co., Ltd. (4)
- Conroy Gold Ltd. (1)
- Conroy Gold and Natural Resources Plc. (10)
- Dan Morrissey Ireland Ltd. (2)
- Diversified Asset Holdings Pty. Ltd. (3)
- Eriss Zinc Ltd. (5)
- Firecrest Resources Ltd. (3)
- ForeSight Exploration Ltd. (6)
- Glencore Zinc Ireland Ltd. (10)
- Gold Note Minerals Ltd. (3)
- Great Glen Resources Ltd. (7)
- Group Eleven Mining and Exploration Ltd. (33)
- Hannan Metals Ireland Ltd. (7)
- Hendrick Resources (Ireland) Ltd. (3)
- IMC Exploration Ltd. (6)
- Irish Marine Oil Ltd. (2)
- Irish Resource Exploration Ltd. (3)
- LRH Resources Ltd. (15)
- Longford Zinc Mining Ltd. (6)
- Minco Ireland Ltd. (2)
- Minerex Ltd. (5)
- Omagh Minerals Ltd. (3)
- Oriel Selection Trust Ltd. (10)
- Raptor Resources Ltd. (65)
- Renicks and Bennett Ltd. (1)
- Shannon Resources Ltd. (4)
- TILZ Minerals Ltd. (49)
- Teck Ireland Ltd. (2)
- Trove Metals Ltd. (2)
- Tullyduff Explorations (1)
- Unicom Mineral Resources Ltd. (15)
- Viridian Metals Ireland Ltd. (1)
- Westland Exploration Ltd. (1)

**Unavailable ground may be available for application for certain minerals. Please see the Competition Booklet for further information.

Figure 2.1: State Mining and Prospecting Licence Areas (May 2021)

2.3 Scope and Content of the Policy Statement

While Ireland has a strong legislative regime for mining and mineral exploration (under the Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999 and supporting Regulations), there is currently no overarching policy document for the sector. While there was some policy consideration for the sector in the 1990s, the proposed Policy Statement for Mineral Exploration and Mining in Ireland, will be the first Policy Statement to set out the framework for future decision making on mineral exploration and mining within the State. It also seeks to put in place a clear and sustainable policy framework that supports communities, the environment, the climate and the mineral exploration and mining sector.

Minerals have a critical role to play in realising national ambitions such as the Climate Action Plan and the transition to a circular and resource efficient economy. The circular economy concept advocates a significantly reduced primary resource extraction (i.e. mining of primary metals and minerals) in favour of secondary material (recycled metals and minerals) flowing through internal loops. However, even such a circular system may still need raw material resources to facilitate the green economy. For example to achieve the national target of one million electric vehicles by 2030 will require a significant increase in availability of base metals to allow for the manufacture of batteries and other components. The International Energy Agency estimates that the amount of copper needed to supply electric vehicles will increase by almost two million tonnes by 2030 and there are also projected demand surges for nickel, cobalt, lithium, aluminium, manganese and other minerals.

Similar demands are projected on other metals and minerals to meet the requirements of the growing green technology sector and these demands cannot be met through recycling alone in a circular system. The promotion of environmentally sustainable exploration and mineral extraction will be an important element of the transition to a green economy to support the changes required in transport and energy to meet Ireland's environmental and climate commitments.

Based on the current status for the sector and the growing need for sustainable resources, the Policy Statement for Mineral Exploration and Mining sets out to achieve the following:

- Ensure a robust and transparent regulatory framework that supports environmentally sustainable mineral exploration and mining; and
- Maximise the contribution that the sustainable exploration and mining sector makes to society, economic development and the transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through the supply of the raw materials necessary for the State's sustainable development.

This policy will be implemented through a series of five key principles which will be clarified in the Policy Statement:

- Robust Regulation – to maintain and improve the robust regulatory regime for mineral exploration activity and mining;
- Increasing awareness and participation – to support public awareness, engagement and transparency around the importance of minerals, mineral exploration and mining at national, regional and local level;
- Sustainable development - maintain and improve the sustainability of mineral exploration and mining, integrating consideration of its employment, social, climate, economic and environmental impacts;
- Building capacity and access to knowledge - ensure that Ireland has the necessary mineral exploration and mining personnel, skills, education, knowledge and mineral data to fully realise the State's mineral potential; and
- International co-operation - promote Irish industry abroad as world class in terms of expertise, sustainable mining practices and skilled workforce to attract inward investment.

The draft and final Policy Statement will be informed by the SEA and AA processes to ensure that the requisite environmental protection measures are inherent in the policies and priorities presented in the final Statement.

3 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

3.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

SEA is a process for evaluating, at the earliest appropriate stage, the environmental quality and consequences of policy, plan or programme initiatives by statutory bodies. The purpose is to ensure that the environmental consequences of plans and programmes are assessed both during their preparation and prior to adoption. The SEA process also gives interested parties an opportunity to comment on the environmental impacts of the proposed plan or programme and to be kept informed during the decision-making process.

The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004). Both pieces of legislation were amended in 2011 under S.I. 200/2011 and S.I. 201/2011 respectively.

The SEA process is comprised of the following principle steps:

- **Screening:** Decision on whether or not an SEA of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining is required;
- **Scoping:** Consultation with the defined statutory bodies on the scope and level of detail to be considered in the assessment;
- **Environmental Assessment:** An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the Policy Statement leading to the production of an Environmental Report;
- **Consultation** on the draft Policy Statement and associated Environmental Report;
- **Evaluation of the submissions and observations** made on the draft Policy Statement and Environmental Report prior to finalising the Policy Statement;
- **Issuance of an SEA Statement** identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the final Policy Statement.

Figure 3.1 shows the key steps required to complete the statutory SEA process in accordance with the relevant national legislation.



Figure 3.1: Overview of the SEA Process

3.1.1 SEA Screening Stage

The SEA Directive requires that certain plans and programmes, prepared by statutory bodies, which are likely to have a significant impact on the environment, be subject to the SEA process. To inform the screening, consultation with statutory bodies was undertaken in January 2021 with responses from the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine (DAFM) informing the subsequent screening determination.

An SEA screening assessment of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining was undertaken and reported by the DECC in April 2021 which concluded the following:

The conclusion that arises from the SEA Screening analysis detailed in this report is that, depending on factors including the nature of the mineral sector activity and the location, scale, design and management of mineral sector works, the Policy Statement would, in combination with the sector's wider frameworks for development consent and plans and programmes from other sectors, be likely to result in significant environmental effects and would require SEA.

As a consequence, the SEA has progressed to this Scoping Stage as detailed within this report. The SEA Screening determination was published online at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c4fc1-determinations-for-emerging-draft-policy-statement-on-mineral-exploration-and-mining/>.

3.1.2 SEA Scoping Stage

Under Article 6 of the SEA Directive, the competent authority preparing the plan or programme is required to consult with specific 'environmental authorities' (statutory consultees) on the scope and level of detail of the information to be included in the Environmental Report. The competent authority in relation to the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining is the DECC. The statutory consultees for SEA are established within the national legislation. It is noted however that a number of government departments have changed name and certain responsibilities have migrated between departments. The SEA legislation has not yet been updated to reflect these changes however, for clarity the relevant departments consulted as part of this SEA scoping are listed below:

- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM);
- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC); and
- Department of the Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH).

The need for transboundary consultation has been identified within the SEA process and this scoping documentation will therefore be sent to the relevant authority for SEA in Northern Ireland.

The main objective of scoping is to identify key issues of concern that should be addressed in the SEA of the plan and the appropriate level of detail to which they should be considered. The scoping exercise should answer the following questions:

- What are the relevant significant issues to be addressed by the SEA?
- Against what environmental objectives should the potential options be evaluated?

While the issuance of a Scoping Report is not a formal requirement of the SEA Regulations, it is recommended as good practice. A Scoping Report can inform stakeholders about the key environmental issues and the key elements of the plan/programme. In addition, the Scoping Report can be used as a tool to generate comments from stakeholders on the scope and approach of the SEA.

For wider public consultation, the SEA Scoping Report will also be published online on the gov.ie website.

3.1.3 Environmental Assessment

An assessment of the likely significant impacts on the environment as a result of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining will be undertaken in due course. This will include, as relevant, a description of the baseline, an assessment of likely significant impacts, mitigation measures to offset negative impacts and provision of a monitoring programme. The output from this stage is an Environmental Report. Further details on these issues are presented later in this document.

In parallel to this assessment, Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening was also undertaken in April 2021 and it has been concluded that a Stage 2 Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be required for the Policy Statement (refer **Section 3.2**). The development of this NIS will inform the SEA and development of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining.

Public consultation will be carried out on the draft Policy Statement, the SEA Environmental Report and the Natura Impact Statement (NIS). The submissions and observations made on these documents will be reviewed and considered during finalisation of the Policy Statement.

3.1.4 SEA Statement

An SEA Statement identifying how environmental considerations and consultation have been integrated into the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining will be provided for information alongside the final published Policy Statement.

3.1.5 SEA Guidance

The Environmental Report will contain the findings of the assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment resulting from implementation of the proposed Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining. It will reflect the requirements of the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and also the transposed regulations in Ireland (S.I. 435/2004) as amended in 2011. The following principal sources of SEA guidance will be used during the overall SEA process and during preparation of the Environmental Report:

- Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring, EPA 2020;
- SEA Spatial Information Sources Inventory, November 2020, Environmental Protection Agency;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Pack, September 2020, Environmental Protection Agency;
- GISEA Manual – Improving the Evidence Base in SEA, 2017, Environmental Protection Agency;
- SEA Scoping Guidance Document, 2015, Environmental Protection Agency;
- Integrating Climate Change into Strategic Environmental Assessment in Ireland – A Guidance Note, 2015, Environmental Protection Agency;
- Developing and Assessing Alternatives in Strategic Environmental Assessment – Good Practice Guidance, 2015, Environmental Protection Agency;
- Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment – Streamlining AA, SEA and EIA Processes: Practitioner’s Manual. EPA Strive Programme 2007-2013. Strive Report Series No. 106;
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Checklist - Consultation Draft. January 2008. Environmental Protection Agency;
- Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC). Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment. Guidelines for Regional Planning Authorities. November 2004. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government; and
- Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland. Synthesis Report. 2003. Environmental Protection Agency.

The SEA will also have regard to the findings of the EPA's 2012 and 2019 reviews of SEA effectiveness in Ireland.

3.1.6 Department Circulars

In addition, the then named Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (now, Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage) have issued a number of relevant circulars in relation to SEA which will have relevance for the environmental assessment of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining and will be taken into account during the course of the SEA. These circulars are as follows:

- PSSP 6/2011: 'Further Transposition of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)'; and
- Circular PL 9 of 2013: 'Article 8 (Decision Making) of EU Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) as amended'.

3.2 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

The EU Habitats Directive places strict legal obligations on member states to ensure the protection, conservation and management of the habitats and species of conservation interest in all European Sites. The Habitats Directive has been transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended.

Article 6 of the Directive obliges member states to undertake an 'appropriate assessment' (AA) for any plan or project which may have a likely significant effect on any European Site. The outcomes of such AAs fundamentally affect the decisions that may lawfully be made by competent national authorities in relation to the approval of plans or projects.

Article 6(3) states:

Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.

Article 6(4) states:

If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the [Natura 2000] site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest [IROPI], including those of a social or economic nature, Member States shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.

The Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site for nature conservation. As a national strategic policy, it has the potential for likely significant effects on Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

In acknowledgement of this, DECC has undertaken screening for AA on the Policy Statement in April 2021. It has been concluded that full AA is warranted for the Policy Statement and as such a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) will be prepared. This AA Screening Determination was published online at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c4fc1-determinations-for-emerging-draft-policy-statement-on-mineral-exploration-and-mining/>.

The NIS will consider the potential for the emerging policy and measures to impact on the integrity of any European Sites, in view of the conservation objectives of the site(s) alone or in combination with other plans and projects. An iterative process for undertaking plan-level AA will be used to reflect the level of detail available at a strategic plan level and to harness opportunities for avoidance of impacts as the preferred mitigation. The DECC will finalise and adopt the Policy Statement only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of any European site.

It is noted that there are requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives that are not encompassed by AA (e.g. Annex IV species as per Articles 12 and 13 of the Habitats Directive, landscape features outside designated sites which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna as per Article 10 of the Habitats Directive and disturbance and deterioration of bird habitats as per article 4(4) of the Birds Directive) and these will be addressed in the SEA.

3.3 Integration of the Processes

The Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining process is running in parallel with the SEA and AA processes as shown in **Figure 3.2**. It is noted that post adoption of the Policy Statement, there will also be implementation and SEA monitoring which extends beyond that shown in the graphic below. This ex-post element will be developed further through the Statement development process.

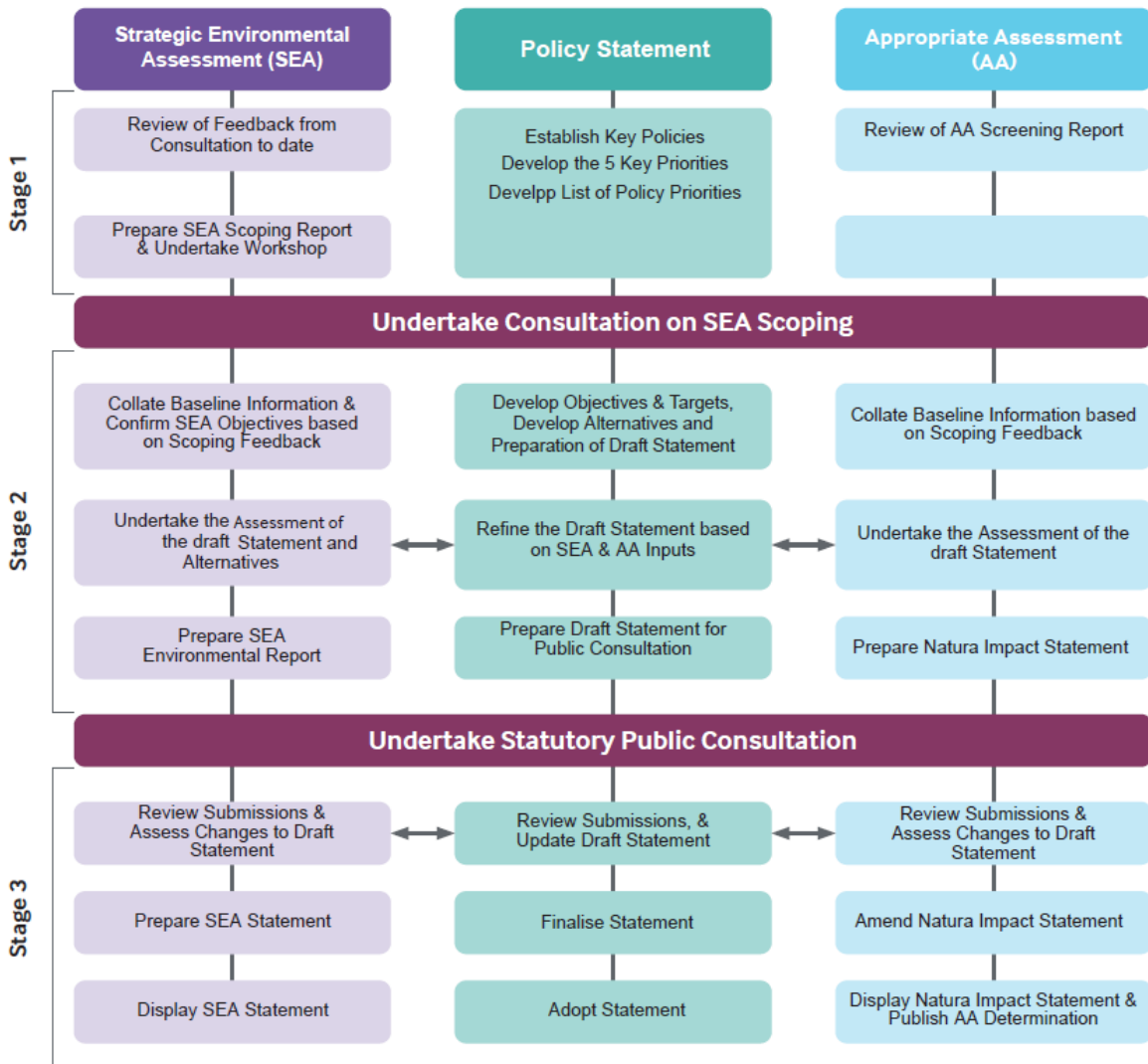


Figure 3.2: Integration of the Policy Statement with the SEA and AA Processes

4 OTHER RELEVANT PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

As part of the SEA process, it will be necessary to consider the environmental protection objectives, established at the international, European and national level which are relevant to the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining and how they have been considered during the preparation of the Statement. The interaction of the environmental protection objectives with the Policy Statement requires consideration.

For the purposes of scoping, the key legislation and plans/ programmes are included in **Table 4-1** (international) and

Table 4-2 (national). A more detailed list will be compiled as part of the Environmental Report and suggestions are welcomed as part of the scoping consultation as to environmental protection objectives that are relevant to the Policy Statement. However, it is noted that this is not intended to be a register of all legislation/ plans/ programmes, but rather an examination of the key environmental protection objectives relevant to the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining.

Table 4-1: International and EU Legislation, Plans/ Programmes

International and EU Legislation	International and EU Plans/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision No. 1386/2013/EU on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 Proposal for a Decision on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030 SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) EIA Directive (85/337/EC) as amended EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC- codified version of 79/409/EEC) Directive (2000/60/EC) and associated directives which have been subsumed there under EU Bathing Water Directive (revised) 2006 (2006/7/EC) Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC) EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) EU Integrated Pollution Prevention Control Directive (2008/1/EC) EU Directive on industrial emissions (2010/75/EU) EU Plant Protection (Products) Directive 2009/127/EC EU REACH Initiative EC 1907/2006 EU Floods Directive (2007/60/EC) EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC) EU Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) EU Renewable Energy Directive (recast) (EU 2018/2001) EU Energy Efficiency Directive (EU 2018/2002) EU Seveso Directive (2012/18/EU) EU Dangerous Substances Directive (2006/11/EC – codified version of 76/464/EEC) EU Emissions Trading Scheme Directive (EU 2018/410) Revised National Emission Ceilings Directive (EU 2016/2284) EU Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EU) Regulation (EU) 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (2017/821) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 UN Convention on Biological Diversity [1992] UN Kyoto Protocol [1997] Green Deal for Europe 2050 Circular Economy Action Plan 2020 The Seventh Environmental Action Programme (EAP) to 2020 - Living Well within the Limits of our Planet The Eighth EAP to 2030 [<i>adoption in 2021 TBC</i>] Raw Materials Initiative, 2008 Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF) The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030 2030 EU Climate and Energy Framework [adopted 2014] Paris Agreement COP21 [adopted 2015] Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance [1971] Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals [1983] Bern Convention on European Wildlife and Natural Habitats [1982] Geneva Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution [1979] Gothenburg Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone [1999] Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants [2004] Minamata Convention on Mercury [2017] Florence (European Landscape) Convention [adopted 2000] Valletta European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe [adopted 1992] Grenada Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe [adopted 1985] Strategic Action Plan on Batteries [2018] Critical Raw Materials Resilience: Charting a Path towards greater Security and Sustainability (2020)

International and EU Legislation	International and EU Plans/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU Directive on the management of waste from the extractive industries (2006/21/EC) 	

Table 4-2: National Legislation, Plans/ Policies/ Programmes

National Legislation	National Plans/ Programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, (S.I. 435 of 2004) as amended by S.I. 200 of 2011 Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1992, as amended Protection of the Environment Act 2003, as amended Waste Management Act, 1996, as amended Minerals Development Acts 1940 to 1999. Waste Management (Management of Waste From the Extractive Industries) Regulations 2009. The Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000; European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011 as amended) Quality of Bathing Waters Regulations 1988 (S.I. 84 of 1988) as amended European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003, (S.I. 722 of 2003) European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Water) Regulations (S.I. 272 of 2009) European Communities Environmental Objectives (FPM) Regulations 2009 (S.I. 296 of 2009) European Communities Environmental Objectives (Groundwater) Regulations 2010 (S.I. 9 of 2010) Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 Foreshore Acts 1933 – 2014 [comprise a collective series of Acts] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018 – 2020 [2018] Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework [2018] National Development Plan 2018-2027 [2018] Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies [2020] Water Services Strategic Plan [2015] National Water Resources Plan [<i>in prep.</i>] National Marine Planning Framework [2021] The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 [2017] Regional Waste Management Plans 2015-2021 [2015] [<i>consolidated national plan in prep. 2021</i>] NPWS Conservation Plans and/or Conservation Objectives for SAC and SPAs Rural Development Programme (including 6 amendments) 2014-2020 [<i>forthcoming programme period: 2021-2027</i>] Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management Studies (CFRAMS) and Flood Risk Management Plans Climate Action Plan [2019] National Climate & Energy Plan 2021-2030 [2019] Sectoral Planning Guidelines for Climate Change Adaptation [2018] National Adaptation Framework [2018] Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy [2020] Heritage Ireland 2030 [2018] Draft Seascape Character Assessment [2020] National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025 [2015] Realising our Rural Potential - the Action Plan for Rural Development (APRD) [2017]

Scoping Question # 1

Based on the plans, policies and programmes outlined, are there any other key **relevant international**, national or regional plans, policies or programmes that should be considered in the SEA Environmental Report on the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining?

5 SCOPING

5.1 Geographic Scope

The Policy Statement is a national policy for mineral exploration and mining in Ireland. As such, the assessment will be primarily focussed at activities occurring at the national to regional scale. It is noted that as a high level policy document, the Policy Statement will not have a spatial element and the policies provided will be at national level. Recognition will be given within the assessment to the issue of environmental impacts in Northern Ireland also.

There has been no mining and little or no exploration of scheduled minerals in Irish waters to date. Future exploration and mining for scheduled minerals in the marine area **is not anticipated at this point** but any potential future activity in this area will depend on future technologies and require a better understanding of the impacts of mineral activities in the marine space.

5.2 Temporal Scope

As a policy document, the Policy Statement is open ended with no fixed end date. In line with the SEA Directive, short, medium and long-term impacts (including reference to secondary, cumulative, synergistic, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects) will be considered during the assessment. For the purpose of this SEA, the short-term will consider the period up to 2030, the medium to long-term horizon will consider the period up to 2050 to coincide with Ireland's net zero emissions target.

5.3 Environmental Scope

In accordance with S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended, consideration has been given to whether the environmental effects, both positive and negative, of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining are likely to be significant. A summary of the issues is presented in **Table 5-1** by environmental topic, with reference in the first instance to the environmental topics listed in the SEA Directive including biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, geology, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, and landscape.

Table 5-1: Potential Significant Environmental Issues

SEA Topic	Potential Environmental Issues for Consideration in the ER	Scope In/Out
Population and Human Health (PHH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new exploration or mining activities and proximity to human presence; • Continuation or intensification of existing exploration or mining activities and proximity to human presence; • Impacts on drinking water quality; • Impacts to recreational use of water (e.g. bathing, fishing); • Health impacts and disturbance through issues such as dust, noise and visual impact; • Loss of amenity usage and access; • Impacts on tourism; • Public participation in decision making and transparency in mineral exploration and mining activities; • Potential employment opportunities (in particular in rural areas); and • Consumer consumption and green economy. 	In
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects on protected areas: European (e.g. SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites) and National (e.g. (p)NHAs); • Protecting and enhancing biodiversity as a whole on a national, regional and local level; • Effects on water dependent habitats and species; • Effects on flora and fauna, (including migratory bird species, invertebrates etc.) and habitats; • Potential for habitat loss and fragmentation; 	In

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects on Freshwater Pearl Mussel, salmonids, other protected fish and shellfish species; • Effects on sensitive habitats, e.g. peatlands, limestone habitats; • Invasive species management; • Effects of hydromorphology; and • Impact on high status sites and protection of status sites. 	
Land & Soil (LS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future infrastructure land requirements and land use change; • Lands vulnerable to subsidence through underground mines; • Loss of the natural soil characteristics through extraction; • Influence on land use practices reliant on soil as a resource; • The potential for impacts on soil functions due to contamination from site/mining activities; • Potential impacts on geo-heritage and associated tourism; and • Aftercare management of mining facilities. 	In
Water (W)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water pollution from point or diffuse sources; • Morphological and impacts on water bodies from engineering and other works; • Impacts to marine waters and the foreshore from offshore development; • Impacts on groundwater quality and quantity, e.g. through dewatering or groundwater rebound; • Pressures and impacts on ecological status of water bodies; • Impacts on water supply (including potable) and water conservation; • Potential impacts on commercial sea fishing activities; and • Protection of areas of fluvial or coastal flood risk. 	In
Air Quality (AQ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous dust emissions from mining – impact to human health and/or the environment; • Noise emissions from blasting, drilling, processing and transport, etc.; and • Transboundary air pollutants/ atmospheric deposition, and impacts on water-dependant habitats and surface waters e.g. mercury, hydrocarbons etc. 	In
Climatic Factors (CF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of climate change on water quality; • Climate change mitigation and adaptation, including to effects from severe weather events and coastal zone management; and • Support to the green economy through delivery of materials for batteries and other green technology. 	In
Material Assets (MA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts to potable water supplies; • Impacts to commercial and agricultural activities adjacent to mines; • Planning and development potential; • Potential for land severance or land access to support exploration and/or mining; • Competing with other offshore infrastructure under the National Marine Planning Framework; • Potential risks and opportunities for mining wastes; and • Change in land use based on risk to water quality, quantity and flooding thus reducing value of land either by limiting development potential or requiring a change in land use. 	In
Cultural Heritage (CH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for disturbance of known or previously undiscovered archaeological remains during exploration works and/or extraction; • Effects on industrial archaeology; • Potential impacts to underwater archaeology; and • Potential indirect effects on structure and features from exploration works and/or extraction. 	In
Landscape (LandS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscape impact from new mining infrastructure such as mines, processing facilities and tailings; and • Effects on the general landscape as well as seascapes. 	In

Scoping Question # 2

Based on the likely significant impacts outlined above, are there any other effects or impacts that should be considered in the SEA Environmental Report on the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining?

6 PRELIMINARY ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

In line with the SEA Directive, an environmental baseline will be compiled for the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining. This will include; a description of the state of the environment at present; a discussion of the key problems/ issues currently being faced nationally; and a description of the expected evolution of the environment should the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining not be implemented.

The SEA Environmental Report will present a full description of the relevant aspects of the national environmental baseline data. The baseline will reflect the strategic nature of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining. The environmental baseline will be presented in the Environmental Report under a number of Strategic Environmental Assessment topic headings as follows:

- Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF);
- Population and human Health (PHH);
- Land and Soils (LS);
- Water (W);
- Air Quality (AQ)
- Climatic Factors (CF);
- Material Assets (MA);
- Cultural Heritage (CH) including architecture and archaeology; and
- Landscape (LandS).

Under each of the SEA topic heading the current state of the environment will be identified along with the key problems/ issues and the expected evolution of the environment in the absence of the Policy Statement. The data sources that will be used to compile the current state of the environment are identified in **Table 6-1**.

It will be key that the current state of the environment is described using the most up to date environmental data, information and reports. Where updates of significant environmental data and associated reports become available during the SEA process, consideration will be given to incorporating the new information into the description of the current state of the environment. Where data gaps are found for particular aspects of the current state of the environment, the significance of these data gaps will be clearly stated. In addition, it will be stated whether these gaps can be reasonably and realistically addressed during the SEA process.

A key document that will be referenced will be the EPA four-yearly State of the Environment Report, *Ireland's Environment – An Integrated Assessment*, which was published in 2020. The broad environmental messages identified by the EPA relate to:

- Absence of an overarching national environmental policy position, negatively affecting integration and progress across multiple environmentally related strategies, plans and programmes: the sum of the parts do not make up a coherent whole;
- Protection of waters, air, soil, ecosystems and biodiversity needing to move beyond ambition to delivery; and
- Need to apply a 'green investment' approach to prevent sinking back toward carbon intensive consumption and **unustainable** production behaviours, services and technologies.

The EPA notes that historic mining sites are one of the significant pressures on water quality which is further assessed in the National River Basin Management Plan 2018-2021. However, the EPA also note significant 'large environmental improvements' in water quality from the mining industry in recent years partially from the closure of sites but also from general improvements in the industry.

It is intended to utilise geographic information systems (GIS) where possible to display and analyse information relevant to the region.

Table 6-1 provides a preliminary overview of each of the SEA topics that will be outlined in the SEA baseline. The table also includes a non-exhaustive list of the potential data sources that will be used to compile the baseline and, in addition, it outlines the preliminary extent of the assessment based on these available data sources. Given the strategic nature of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining, it is recognised that there are limitations on the extent of the scope of an environmental assessment and therefore it is beneficial to outline such limitations at this early stage. In addition, data gathered in support of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining will also be key for the SEA baseline, particularly monitoring programmes reports, and characterisation work.

Table 6-1: Baseline Data Sources and Extent of Assessment

SEA Topic	Potential Data Sources	Potential Extent of Assessment based on Data Sources
Population and Human Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Statistics Office (CSO) database, including census 2011 and 2016 data; EPA Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Tool; EPA Geoportal; EPA radon map; HSE Healthy Ireland; See also Soils, Water and Air Quality entries; Population centres, density and statistics; Administrative units e.g. county, catchment boundaries; Blue Flag beaches and marinas; Bathing waters/ recreational swimming; and Radiation monitoring. 	<p>National datasets are available for population density and distribution/settlement envelopes and the potential impacts of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining can be assessed relative to the available information.</p> <p>Reference will be made to the Institute of Public Health for appropriate information if available, and also the HSE.</p>
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) databases; NIEA datasets; National Biodiversity Data Centre; Invasive Species Ireland website; WFD Ireland website; EPA Geoportal; Ramsar; Biosphere Reserves; Birds Atlas; Birdwatch Ireland Database; and Biologically Sensitive Areas. 	<p>National and regional datasets are available for aspects relating to biodiversity, flora and fauna.</p>
Land and Soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CORINE Land cover Database; Coillte Forestry Database; Teagasc Soil Information; Geological Survey of Ireland Mapping; Landslide Events & Susceptibility Mapping; Geological Heritage Areas/ County Geological Sites; and DECC Interactive Maps on Licences, Leases and Prospecting Licences. 	<p>National high level datasets are available for soil and land use resources at a county/ national scale. This is in keeping with the geographic scope of the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining and is considered adequate at this scale</p>
Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA GIS datasets for WFD; EPA Geoportal; Catchments.ie; EPA database reports including but not limited to: Water Quality in Ireland (latest available); Integrated Water Quality Reports (latest available); and Quality of Estuarine and Coastal Waters (latest available); 	<p>A suite of national datasets is available for surface waters and groundwaters, transitional and coastal water bodies. The outputs of the CFRAMS mapping are now available online.</p>

SEA Topic	Potential Data Sources	Potential Extent of Assessment based on Data Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Catchment Flood Risk Management Programme (CFRAM), Office of Public Works (OPW); • Groundwater Vulnerability; • Groundwater Recharge Mapping; and • Source Protection Zones. 	
Air Quality and Climatic Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA Transboundary Air Pollutant Emissions and National Ceiling Emissions Report; • EPA Irelands Greenhouse Gas Emission Projections Reports; • Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEAI), Energy in Ireland Reports and online GIS; • EPA SAFER database; and • OPW flood data. 	National reports are available for carbon emissions, greenhouse gases, and transboundary air pollutant emissions. Regional emissions data in GIS for 2015 are available from the MapElre Project.
Material Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA Geoportal; • GeoDirectory; • Irish Water; • DAFM datasets; • DECC datasets; • SEAI GIS data; • ESB and GNI datasets; • Industrial sites / licenced industrial and waste facilities; • Fisheries; and • Water-based recreational GIS data. 	National datasets are available for certain resources that may be affected by the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining.
Cultural, Heritage (incl. Architectural, Archaeological)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Monuments Service/Record of Monuments and Places (RMP); • National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH); • Discovery Ireland Programme; and • UNESCO World Heritage Sites and tentative List. 	National datasets are available for archaeology and architectural heritage however the scale of the datasets is directed towards local project-specific sources. Limited data on Architectural Conservation Areas and Records of Protected Structures.
Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no national datasets available for landscape; some information available at a county level but not consistent across all of the counties. 	Limited spatial data from existing sources.

7 PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSMENT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A key purpose of scoping is to set out sufficient details about the proposed methodological framework for the assessment of environmental effects to allow the consultees to form a view on this matter. It is proposed to use an objectives-led assessment which will involve comparing the proposed alternatives against defined SEA Environmental Objectives for each of the identified issue areas. The assessment will be supported by other tools such as GIS-based spatial analysis and other quantitative data as available. The preceding sections have identified the environmental characteristics and key environmental issues relating to the Policy Statement and the key influences from external plans, policies and strategies.

This section uses that information to set out a series of draft SEA environmental objectives, indicators and associated targets. These will be used in the environmental report to predict the likely environmental effects of the Policy Statement and, subsequently, monitor implementation of the policy. The use of these objectives ensures that following this scoping stage the SEA focuses only on those issues that are most relevant and significant to the study in the Policy Statement.

7.1 Draft SEA Objectives

Set out in **Table 7-1** are the draft SEA objectives that are being considered to test the potential environmental impacts of the Policy Statement. These objectives are based on the current understanding of the key environmental issues identified. The detailed assessment criteria are examples of the issues that will be considered during the assessment of whether the Policy Statement, including the proposed alternatives, meets the proposed SEA objectives. It should be noted that these are draft objectives only and are provided for the purpose of discussion at this scoping stage. The SEA team welcomes feedback on the draft objectives with a view to updating them prior to any assessment.

Table 7-1: Draft SEA Environmental Objectives

Related to SEA Topic(s)	Draft Objective(s)
Population and Human Health (PHH)	Objective 1: To protect human health.
Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna (BFF)	Objective 2: Preserve, protect, maintain and where appropriate restore the terrestrial, aquatic and soil biodiversity, particularly EU designated sites and protected species, and integrate biodiversity considerations wherever possible into the RBMP.
Land and Soil (LS)	Objective 3: Safeguard soil quality and quantity.
Water (W)	Objective 4: Protect, restore and enhance water quality (surface waters, groundwaters and marine waters).
Air Quality (AQ)	Objective 5: Minimise emissions to air as a result of the Policy Strategy activities.
Climatic Factors (C)	Objective 6: Contribute to the delivery of the green economy
Material Assets (MA)	Objective 7: Support sustainable mining and mineral exploration assets without conflicting with environmental protection objectives.
Cultural Heritage (CH)	Objective 8: Protect places, features, buildings and landscapes of cultural, historical archaeological or architectural heritage.
Landscape (LandS)	Objective 9: Protect landscape character and visual amenity.

Scoping Question # 3

Do you have any **comments** regarding the draft SEA Objectives **presented**?

7.2 Assessment of Impacts and Mitigation

In line with the requirements in the legislation the likely significant effects on the environment will be assessed. This includes reference to secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long term, permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects as well as the interrelationships between the environmental issue areas. Where possible and practical, assessment of these impacts will be quantitative and will use tools including environmental sensitivity mapping. Any problems encountered during the assessment of impacts, including technical difficulties and/or lack of information, will be highlighted and described, as appropriate.

With regard to **cumulative impacts**, the use and application of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) will be considered, where possible, at the various key stages in the SEA process. GIS, along with other methodologies and depending on the availability of relevant spatial data, will assist in determining the cumulative vulnerability of various environmental resources nationally/ regionally for the Policy Statement. Where significant adverse impacts are identified during the SEA process, relevant and appropriate mitigation measures will be provided in the Environmental Report. Consideration will be given to residual impacts where relevant.

7.3 Outline of Alternatives

The assessment of reasonable alternatives as part of the SEA process is required as part of an Environmental Report under Article 5(1) of the SEA Directive. Alternatives can be described as a range of options available to the policy makers for delivering the policies in the Statement. The identification of alternatives enables more informed decision-making and the assessment allows more sustainable options to be identified. Given the high level nature of the Policy Statement, the alternatives to be considered are likely to be predominately at the strategic level and must be realistic, reasonable and relevant.

However, it is anticipated that the environmental report will explore alternatives at a number of levels where feasible: strategic; policy actions etc. Recent EPA guidance on development of alternatives will provide a framework for development of alternatives development and **Table 7-2** provides an overview of the nature of alternatives that may be considered for the Policy Statement.

Table 7-2: Potential approaches to the development of alternatives for the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining

Alternative Type	Description	Example Considerations with respect to the Policy Statement
Strategic	<i>High-level options that achieve a given objective. These types are commonly realistic only at policy level.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of a <i>do nothing</i> scenario relating to the business as usual approach. • Consideration of a reliance on imports only for minerals. • Sector or mineral based prioritisation.
Value and Effects Oriented	<i>Alternatives that address policy priorities, cultural values or safety issues. Such alternatives are most appropriate for addressing public perceptions, concerns and values. Alternatives that address issues identified during scoping. Such alternatives are effective at mitigating potential significant effects.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public participation and engagement. • Policy prioritisation • Whole country versus action areas approach • Sectoral controls.
Spatial	<i>Alternative locations for the implementation of planning objectives.</i>	The scope of the Policy Statement will not specify geographically where measures will be applied.
Modal	<i>Different technical/ mode alternatives to achieve the same objective</i>	Different methods to achieve improvements, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal; • Administrative;

Alternative Type	Description	Example Considerations with respect to the Policy Statement
Sectoral and/or Temporal Prioritisation	<p><i>Alternatives that look at sectoral feasibility and needs at the strategic level, policies can be formulated to promote one sector versus another.</i></p> <p><i>Alternatives for the timing of implementation of plan/programme measures.</i></p> <p><i>These are most suitable at the local level for addressing infrastructure development.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection measures / restoration measures; • Financial; • Education / awareness / training; and • Related research and development <p>Alternatives that look at sectoral and temporal feasibility could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of alternatives which are not currently feasible but may become feasible/economically viable in the future.

Scoping Question # 4

Do you have any suggestions or comments in relation to the overall **approach to alternatives?**

7.4 Monitoring

A monitoring programme will be developed to facilitate monitoring of environmental effects during implementation of the Policy Statement. This will be focussed on key impact issues identified during the assessment phase. Where possible thresholds for action will be included to ensure that action is taken where unforeseen impacts are identified. It is noted that the EPA are currently compiling guidance on monitoring in SEA and if this is available during the course of the development of the Policy Statement, the approach will be adopted prior to finalisation.

8 NEXT STEPS

As part of the scoping of the SEA for the Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining, there will be statutory consultation with the designated consultees for SEA in Ireland as shown in **Table 8-1**. In addition, informal transboundary consultation will be undertaken with Northern Ireland as part of scoping.

Table 8-1: Consultees in SEA Scoping Process

Consultee
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)
Department of the Environment Climate and Communications (DECC)
Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Department of Agriculture, Environmental and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

To further facilitate meaningful discussion, a workshop will be convened with the above listed consultees. This will include presentations on both the Policy Statement the SEA/ AA to inform discussions on the scope and level of detail of the assessment. All discussions during this workshop, as well as formal written submissions received will be considered in preparation of the Environmental Report, the Natura Impact Statement and the draft Policy Statement.

Written submissions at this stage of the Policy Statement process can be made up to the 21st of June 2021.

You can make a submission by:

1. E-mail to the following address: GSPD@decc.gov.ie with **SEA Scoping for Minerals Policy** in the subject line.
2. Writing to the following address:
 Geoscience Policy Division
 Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
 29-31 Adelaide Road
 Dublin, D02 X285
 Ireland