



Geoscience Policy Division

Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

29-31 Adelaide Road

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28.09.21

**Regarding: Consultation on mineral exploration and mining**

To whom it may concern,

The Association of Acoustic Consultants of Ireland (AACI) is an association of qualified acoustic professionals working in the Republic of Ireland. Many of our members are engaged in compliance monitoring and noise impact assessment in relation to the mining sector. We welcome the opportunity to submit our observations in relation to the DECC document **Draft Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining** (July 2021) (referred to as DPSMEM below).

The AACI notes that most mining operations are subject to IPC/IE licensing by the Environmental Protection Agency, and therefore the control and management of noise emissions on an ongoing basis at approved facilities is subject to EPA regulation. We appreciate therefore that most noise issues are the remit of the EPA, and outside the direct scope of the DPSMEM. Nonetheless, the AACI respectfully requests that consideration be given to the comments below in the DECC's finalisation of the DPSMEM document. We understand that some of the issues identified are not directly relevant to the document. However, our members have encountered a number of noise issues resulting from the absence of a cohesive and overarching national noise policy, and the AACI is strongly in favour of working towards same. We would ask that consideration be given to the comments below, and hope that they may also be used to inform future guidance potentially issued by the DECC and other governmental departments.

1. We note that the DPSMEM makes reference to the impending preparation of a National Clean Air Strategy (NCAS). In this regard, it is further noted that the DPSMEM will make a positive contribution towards the aims and objectives of the NCAS by providing minerals to green technologies thus reducing combustion pollutants and CO<sub>2</sub>. The DPSMEM supports better air quality and decarbonisation of the Irish economy. It could also be suggested that the DPSMEM will also support reduced anthropogenic noise sources in the same manner and thus contribute towards achievement of goals and objectives under Noise Action Planning. As noted above, a national noise policy could be developed in the same spirit as the NCAS.

2. In assessing noise emissions associated with mining, applicants and the EPA are required to give due regard to **NG4 Guidance Note for Noise: Licence Applications, Surveys and Assessments in Relation to Scheduled Activities** (EPA, 2016). NG4 does not make any reference to groundborne vibration. While **Environmental Management Guidelines: Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry (Non-Scheduled Minerals)** (EPA, 2006) includes recommendations regarding peak particle velocity limits, this document is applicable to aggregate extraction rather than mineral extraction. A similar situation exists with respect to air overpressure. It follows that there is no clear national guidance with respect to groundborne vibration or overpressure arising from mineral extraction. The mineral extraction sector would benefit from clear guidance in this regard.

3. On a similar note, NG4 does not address underwater noise associated with mineral extraction in the marine environment. We are not aware of any clear national guidance with respect to underwater noise. While we understand that offshore mining is not proposed in the DPSMEM, it is possible that increased mineral demand may result in offshore mining in the future. In this light, and given the likely future development of offshore wind farms, it is considered that clear national guidance on underwater noise assessment is warranted. The AACI will support any research and guidance development in this area, and our members welcome the opportunity to provide assistance to the DECC and other departments where required.

4. Most mining operations require licensing by the EPA. Sub-threshold operations are unlikely to be viable, and therefore it is unlikely that any mining operation will be subject to sole regulation by a local authority. Nonetheless, local authorities play an important role with respect to noise regulation, including regulation of construction/enabling works prior to commencement of licensed operations, and assessment of transport noise arising outside the licensed area. The AACI notes that, despite their role in regulating noise in mining and other sectors, local authorities operate in a vacuum with respect to national noise guidance. Most local authorities assess extraction noise by reference to **Quarries and Ancillary Activities: Guidelines for Planning Authorities** (DOEHLG, 2004), a document which has no direct role in mineral extraction. The AACI is strongly of the opinion that the DECC and other government departments have an obligation to work towards the issuing of clear national guidance for local authorities, covering a wide range of sectors including mining. Indeed, the SEA Environmental Report prepared by RPS (2021) for the DECC states 'national noise planning guidelines for local authorities is flagged as a need by the EPA' (p.49). The AACI document **Environmental Noise Guidance for Local Authority Planning and Enforcement Departments** (AACI, 2021) was issued in the absence of any government guidance.

5. Exploration, drilling and trenching are required to be carried out in accordance with **Guidance for Good Environmental Practice in Mineral Exploration** (DCCAE, 2019). This document includes only one short paragraph regarding noise, specifically in relation to drilling (p. 5). Noise criteria are not set out, and the document merely states that noise should be reduced to acceptable levels. The AACI would welcome greater guidance and clarity here, possibly by reference to other guidance documents including those issued by the EPA.

6. The AACI asks that the DPSMEM document takes into account local authority noise action plan objectives. This particularly relates to road and rail transport of minerals.

7. Our members repeatedly note that most rural noise issues are in fact planning issues, resulting from granting of planning permission for one-off dwellings in proximity to geographically-dependent resources such as mineral and aggregate deposits. Although outside the scope of the DPSMEM document, the AACI would welcome greater protection of identified resources and noise-sensitive receptors in the planning process.

The AACI thanks the DECC for the opportunity to make this submission. Please contact us if you would like to discuss any of the above or other noise issues.

Yours faithfully



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