



Determination on the Requirement for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening for Exploration Drilling

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| DECC Reference: | WIC_2023_001 |
| PL Area(s) | 4032 |
| County | Wicklow |
| Licensee | Blackstairs Lithium Ltd |

The Minister has assessed the drilling activity proposed by the company in accordance with the criteria set out in S.8A(4) of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended (listed below).

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| | The proposed drilling activity has been assessed taking into account the criteria set out below |
| (a) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is less than one hectare |
| (b) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is more than 100 metres from- <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) land to which a notice under section 16 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 of an intention of the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to make an order designating land as a natural heritage area under section 18 of that Act applies, or(ii) land designated a natural heritage area under section 18 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000; |
| (c) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is not within a European site; |
| (d) | No equipment capable of waste spillage or process run-off shall be operated for the purpose of the proposed activity within 10 metres of a watercourse which is a river or lake entered on those parts of the register of protected areas established by the |



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| | Environmental Protection Agency under Regulation 8 of the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003) called respectively "WFD Riverwater Bodies that are protected for drinking water" and "WFD Lakewater bodies that are protected for drinking water"; |
| (e) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is more than 100 metres from water abstraction carried on for the purpose of human consumption on a non - commercial basis; |
| (f) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is more than 300 metres from water abstraction carried on for the purpose of supply of water to the public; |
| (g) | The equipment proposed to be operated for the purpose of the proposed activity has been tested and a report of the results of the test shows that noise caused by that equipment shall not, at the nearest noise sensitive receptor, exceed noise limits set out in guidelines issued by the Environmental Protection Agency for the time being called NG4; |
| (h) | The site where the proposed activity will take place is not situated in any national park owned by and managed on behalf of the State. |

The proposed activity did not meet criteria (a) and therefore will require a screening determination for EIA in accordance with S.8A(6) of that Act.

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| Environmental Information available on DECC website . | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploration Drilling - Guidance on Discharge to Surface and Groundwater (2019)• Guidance for Good Environmental Practice in Mineral Exploration (2019)• Environmental Safeguards- The Irish Way (2006)• Expert Environmental Guidance R4 – Drilling (2017) |
| Authority | Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications |
| Date of Notice | 27 July 2023 |



Screening for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Determination for Exploration Drilling

The Minister has assessed the drilling activity proposed by the company in accordance with S.8A of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended.

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| DECC Reference | WIC_2023_001 |
| PL Area(s) | 4032 |
| County | Co. Wicklow |
| Licensee | Blackstairs Lithium Ltd |
| Date of EIA Screening Determination | 17 August 2023 |

Determination

The Minister has determined in accordance with S.8A(9) of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended that the proposed activity is not likely to have a significant effect on the environment and that Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

Further information on EIA Screening Determination

The GSRO considers that the proposed activity did not meet the criteria of S.8A (4)(a) of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended, specifically:

S.8A (4)(a) The site where the proposed activity will take place is less than one hectare.



The site of the proposed activity is likely to cumulatively exceed one hectare as there will be 40 holes drilled from 25 surface locations over seven months, therefore, a Case-by-Case Determination is advised under Article 4(b) of the European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Minerals Development Act 1940) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 (S.I. No. 384 of 2018). An independent Environmental Assessor examined the application and reviewed the Case-by-Case Environmental Impact Assessment Screening, considering the relevant selection criteria specified in Schedule 7 to the Planning and Development Regulations of 2001, as provided for in S.8A(6)(7)(8) of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended. The main findings of the Environmental Assessor are presented in the table below.

The Proposed Activity

Blackstairs Lithium Ltd proposes to undertake the drilling of diamond drill holes by rotary core drilling to define subsurface geology. The project comprises a drilling programme of 40 boreholes from 25 surface locations within Prospecting Licence 4032. Drilling operations at the site will be over approximately seven months. The planned operations will be sites set up for diamond core drilling, using a rotary coring rig, the water to be utilised in drilling will be trucked in, filtered and UV treated on site and re-circulated. No permanent infrastructure or changes to the land use is anticipated because of the project operations.

Case by Case EIA Screening Determination Checklist (Likely Significant Effects)

| Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Questions to be Considered | Yes / No /? Briefly Describe | Is this likely to result in a significant effect? Yes / No? Why? |
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| <i>Is Case by Case EIA Screening Required?</i> | | |
| Yes - Case by Case EIA Screening Determination is required given the likelihood that the site of the proposed activity will exceed one hectare | | |



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| <p>1. Will construction, operation or decommissioning of the Project involve actions which will cause physical changes in the locality (topography, land use, changes in waterbodies, etc)?</p> | <p>Yes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. There is no likely significant effect. The quantity of drill pads has been minimised by drilling multiple holes on some pads (so that 40 holes will be drilled from 25 pads). • Drill pads have been designed in natural breaks in the forest to minimise the felling of trees. • All pads will be cleared of any refuse at the completion of the planned holes. • The Moylisha Area of Interest lies outside the influence of any designated area and would not have a likely significant effect (nearest Slaney River SAC, 3.05km at nearest point). • Following the completion of the drill program, restoration works will be carried out as needed. Holes will be sealed with van Ruth plugs and cement as required, and drill pads will be restored and reseeded upon completion. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| <p>2. Will construction or operation of the Project use natural resources such as land, water, materials, or energy, especially any resources which are non-renewable or in short supply?</p> | <p>Yes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use: The total Area of Interest is >1ha. However, the physical land use for 25 drill pads will be c. 900m² (<0.09ha). • Soil use: No use of soil resources; temporary disruption of topsoil during drilling process only. Water use: Drilling water will be brought in with tankers (using 6m³/12hr day/ 2 rigs). Water will be UV treated prior to use and recycled throughout the programme. • Water will be UV treated and discharged down the final completed drillhole to undergo natural percolation at the end of the program. • There will be no discharge to surface waters. |



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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land will be used for the drill pads only for the period of drilling, this is temporary and short term. All land will be returned to pre-operation use. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 3. Will the Project involve use, storage, transport, handling or production of substances or materials which could be harmful to human health or the environment or raise concerns about actual or perceived risks to human health? | Yes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No. There is no likely significant effect. The application is supported with a Spillage Management Procedure (SOP 04). • Fuel will be stored in approved double skinned tanks. All refuelling operations will be fully attended. All muds, oils etc will be stored in their original containers and on oil absorbent material and off the land. • Open containers will be stored in a bunded unit. • Regular visual inspections of pipes, hoses etc for any leaks or possible sources of leaks. • No significant maintenance on machines will be conducted on site. • Emergency procedures are laid out in SOPs. |
| 4. Will the Project produce solid wastes during construction or operation or decommissioning? | Yes | <p>No. There is no likely significant effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drill cuttings will be produced as a standard by-product of drilling. • This will have no significant effect as materials will be collected and disposed of at a licensed disposal site. |
| 5. Will the Project release pollutants or any hazardous, toxic or noxious substances to air? | No | <p>No. There is no likely significant effect.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drilling machinery is diesel operated. • Emissions will be negligible and similar to those from agricultural or forestry machinery. |



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| 6. Will the Project cause noise and vibration or release of light, heat energy or electromagnetic radiation? | Yes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No - the site is at a sufficient distance from any NSR to not cause a significant effect.• Drilling will produce noise and vibration and will use lighting towers as required in the winter period.• The surrounding receptors have been assessed and notified and sound dampening screens will be used where necessary to reduce the chances of any significant effect on the community and environment.• The applicant has provided a report on the noise caused by the equipment. The report supplied by the drilling company indicates that noise caused by all equipment measured for the proposed activity shall not exceed the noise limits as set out in guidelines issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (NG4) for operation between 7am and 7pm with noise tested as being just 8.9dBA (well within the noise limits) at the closest noise sensitive receptor which lies 278m from the closest drill rig.• Applicant advised that no more than 2 drill rigs would be operational simultaneously, with general exploration practice being that each rig would work on different pads within the Area of Interest.• On the basis of the distance from noise sensitive receptors and operations being within the noise limits, no significant effect is likely. |
| 7. Will the Project lead to risks of contamination of land or water from releases of pollutants onto the ground or into surface waters, groundwater, coastal waters or the sea? | No | <p>No.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strict protocols are proposed.• All water being brought in and used for drilling will be UV treated to minimise risk of groundwater contamination. |



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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surface waters are not expected to be interacted with during this project and there will be no direct discharge to surface waters. • Final waters will be UV treated prior to reintroduction to groundwater downhole for natural percolation. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 8. Will there be any risk of accidents during construction or operation of the Project which could affect human health or the environment? | Yes | <p>No.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Diamond drilling has inherent risks similar to agricultural or forestry machinery, which will be managed by the drill crew as per their training and SOPs. • Members of crews will have first aid training and an Emergency Response Plan will be in place. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 9. Will the project result in social changes, for example, in demography, traditional lifestyles, employment? | No | No significant effect is likely. |
| 10. Are there any other factors which should be considered such as the consequential development which could have environmental effects or the potential for cumulative impacts with other existing or planned activities in the locality? | No | No significant effect is likely. |
| 11. Are there any areas on or around the location which are protected under international, national, or local legislation, for their ecological, landscape, cultural or other value, which could be affected by the | No | <p>These features have been assessed and screened (Ecology, Surface Water, Groundwater, Monuments).</p> <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |



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| Project? | | |
| 12. Are there any other areas on or around the location which are important or sensitive for reasons of their ecology e.g. wetlands, watercourses or other water bodies, the coastal zone, mountains or forests, which could be affected by the Project? | No | <p>These features have been assessed and screened (Ecology, Surface Water, Groundwater). No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 13. Are there any areas on or around the location which are used by protected, important or sensitive species of fauna or flora e.g. for breeding, nesting, foraging, resting, overwintering, migration, which could be affected by the Project? | Yes | <p>The project lies within a Coillte-operated Forest, a sustainably managed commercial forest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is proposed that between 80 - 100 trees require to be felled which could have potential to impact on protected species - in particular bats and birds. • Prior to the felling of any trees, an 'inspection and search' should be conducted by a suitably trained professional to ensure that no protected species are at risk. • NOTE: All bats and birds are protected under the Wildlife Acts. It is an offence to disturb any nesting birds. Where bat roosts are known to occur on the site of a proposed development, the National Parks and Wildlife Service or a trained bat worker should be contacted for advice. It is an offence under the Wildlife Act (1976 & 2000) to intentionally disturb, kill or injure a bat or its resting place, so any work must be carried out with advice and under licence from the National Parks and |



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| | | <p>Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is expected that careful site planning and standard operating procedures will minimise any likely residual effects with specific regard to any potential species, and must be addressed under the provisions of the Wildlife Acts. |
| 14. Are there any inland, coastal, marine or underground waters on or around the location which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 15. Are there any areas or features of high landscape or scenic value on or around the location which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 16. Are there any routes or facilities on or around the location which are used by the public for access to recreation or other facilities, which could be affected by the Project? | Yes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Wicklow Way national waymarked way runs around the proposed Area of Activity to its western and southern boundaries. • Applicant advises that no public access trails are proposed to be closed during drilling operations. • Drill pads close to the public trails may have safety barricades erected around the drill rig for safety reasons, but this will not require closure off any public trails. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 17. Are there any transport routes on or around the location which are susceptible to congestion, or which cause environmental problems, which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |



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| 18. Is the Project in a location where it is likely to be highly visible to many people? | No | No. |
| 19. Are there any areas or features of historic or cultural importance on or around the location which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 20. Is the project located in a previously undeveloped area where there will be a loss of greenfield land? | No | No. All land to be reinstated. |
| 21. Are there existing land uses on or around the location e.g., homes, gardens, other private property, industry, commerce, recreation, public open space, community facilities, agriculture, forestry, tourism, mining or quarrying which could be affected by the Project? | Yes | <p>The project lies within a Coillte Forest, a sustainably managed commercial forest.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has been advised that the Applicant is engaging with Coillte and providing them with all the information regarding the proposed drilling operations, with permission to proceed. • The applicant has determined that the felling of 80 to 100 trees is required to take place to open space for drill rigs to access the drill pads. • The proposed felling has been discussed and agreed in principle by the applicant with Coillte. Coillte will be remunerated for the trees that will be felled. • Under agreement with Coillte, the latter will undertake the proposed felling of 80-100 trees. This must be conducted in accordance with the Forestry Act 2014 and associated regulatory requirements and obligations of the Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 191 of 2017), as determined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the |



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| | | <p>Marine, and in accordance with Coillte’s standard operating procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The final agreement between the Applicant and Coillte should be determined in writing and a copy provided to GSRO. |
| 22. Are there any plans for future uses on or around the location which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 23. Are there any areas on or around the location which are densely populated or built up which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 24. Are there any areas on or around the location which are occupied by sensitive land uses e.g. hospitals, schools, places of worship, community facilities, which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 25. Are there any areas on or around the location which contain important, high-quality or scarce resources e.g. groundwater, surface waters, forestry, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, minerals, which could be affected by the Project? | Yes | <p>As for 21. above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The applicant aims to identify whether the area may host a definable mineral resource of lithium minerals. • The project is within a commercial coniferous forest managed by Coillte, a semi-state body. Coillte’s forestry representatives are being engaged with concerning the proposed drilling operations. • Felling is required in order to open space for drill rigs to access the drilling areas. This has been discussed with Coillte and has been agreed in principle. • Under agreement with Coillte, the latter will |



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| | | <p>undertake the proposed felling of 80-100 trees. This must be conducted in accordance with the Forestry Act 2014 and associated regulatory requirements and obligations of the Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 191 of 2017), as determined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food & the Marine, and in accordance with Coillte's standard operating procedures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coillte will be remunerated for any trees that will be felled. <p>No significant effect is likely.</p> |
| 26. Are there any areas on or around the location which are already subject to pollution or environmental damage e.g. where existing legal environmental standards are exceeded, which could be affected by the Project? | No | No. |
| 27. Is the project location susceptible to earthquakes, subsidence, landslides, erosion, flooding or extreme or adverse climatic conditions e.g. temperature inversions, fogs, severe winds, which could cause the Project to present environmental problems? | No | No. |
| STAGE 3 CASE BY CASE EIA SCREENING DETERMINATION Summary of features of project and its location indicating the need for EIA | | |
| Given the limited scale and temporary (7 months) duration of the proposed works, it is considered that significant environmental effects are not likely to occur and so the proposed activity is not considered to fall within the remit of the EIA Regulations. | | |



The independent Environmental Assessor has noted the provisions and planning that has been undertaken to control those issues that have the potential to have a significant environmental impact.

The European Union (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Minerals Development Act 1940) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 requires an EIA to be carried out if there is a significant risk to the environment.

Conclusion

Based on all the information submitted by the applicant and the case-by-case screening determination, it is assessed that the application meets the criteria whereby an Environmental Impact Assessment Report is not required. The independent assessor has concluded that significant environmental effects are not likely to occur due to the proposed drilling activity. Accordingly, having regard to S.8A(9) of the Minerals Development Act 1940, as amended, the Minister has determined that there is no requirement for an Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed activity.

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| Environmental Information available on DECC website | <u>Exploration Drilling Guidance on Discharge to Groundwater</u> <u>Guidelines for Good Environmental Practice in Mineral Exploration</u> <u>Environmental Safeguards – The Irish Way</u> <u>Expert Environmental Guidance R4 – Drilling (2017)</u> |
| Authority | Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications |
| Date of Notice | 17 August 2023 |