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12<sup>th</sup> February 2020

Our Ref: SCP200102.1

**Re. SEA Pre-Draft Consultation on the Preparation of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We acknowledge your notice, dated 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2020, in relation to the SEA Pre-Draft Consultation on the Preparation of the Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027 (the 'Plan').

The EPA is one of five statutory environmental authorities under the SEA Regulations. In our role as an SEA environmental authority, we focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into the Plan and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan. Our functions as an SEA environmental authority do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans.

As a priority, we focus our efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. For land use plans at county and local level, we provide a 'self-service approach' via the attached guidance document '*SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources*'. This document is updated regularly and sets out our key recommendations for integrating environmental considerations into Local Authority land use Plans. We recommend that you take this guidance document into account in preparing the Plan and SEA.

In preparing the Plan, Laois County Council should also ensure that the Plan aligns with key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant



objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region.

### **Available Guidance & Resources**

Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

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

You can access these resources at: [www.epa.ie/monitoringassessment/assessment/sea/](http://www.epa.ie/monitoringassessment/assessment/sea/)

### ***Environmental Sensitivity Mapping (ESM) Webtool***

The ESM Webtool is a new decision support tool to assist SEA and planning processes in Ireland. The tool brings together over 100 datasets and allows users to explore environmental considerations within a particular area and create plan-specific environmental sensitivity maps. These maps can help planners anticipate potential land-use conflicts and help identify suitable development locations, while also protecting the environment. The ESM Webtool is available at [www.enviromap.ie](http://www.enviromap.ie).

### ***EPA SEA WebGIS Tool***

Our SEA WebGIS Tool, available through the EDEN portal ([https://gis.epa.ie/EIS\\_SEA/](https://gis.epa.ie/EIS_SEA/)), allows public authorities to produce an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area. It is intended to assist in SEA screening and scoping exercises.

### ***EPA WFD Application***

Our WFD Application provides a single point of access to water quality and catchment data from the national WFD monitoring programme. The Application is accessed through EDEN <https://wfd.edenireland.ie/> and is available to public agencies. Publicly available data can be accessed via the Catchments.ie website.

### ***EPA AA GeoTool***

Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the NPWS. It allows users to select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: <http://www.epa.ie/terminalfour/ApproAssess/index.jsp>

### ***State of the Environment Report – Ireland’s Environment 2016***

In preparing the Plan and SEA, the recommendations, key issues and challenges described within our most recent State of the Environment Report [Ireland’s Environment – An Assessment 2016](#) (EPA, 2016) should be considered, as relevant and appropriate to the Plan.

### **Transition to a low carbon climate resilient economy and society**



You should ensure that the Plan aligns with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as relevant sectoral, regional and local adaptation plans.

### **Environmental Authorities**

Under the SEA Regulations, you should also consult with:

- The Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, where it appears that the plan or programme, or modification of the plan or programme, might have significant effects on fisheries or the marine environment
- where it appears that the plan or programme, or amendment to a plan or programme, might have significant effects in relation to the architectural or archaeological heritage or to nature conservation, the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and
- any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan.

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

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David Galvin'.

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David Galvin  
*SEA Section*  
*Office of Evidence and Assessment*  
*Environmental Protection Agency*