

12 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

12.1 Introduction

The 2001 Offshore EIS considered the landscape and visual impacts associated with the construction of the Corrib offshore pipeline and associated landfall terminating in an underground chamber. It also covered the issues surrounding the two crossings of the Sruwaddacon Bay (no longer under consideration due to revisions to the route of the onshore section of the upstream pipeline). As detailed in Section 3, an updated construction schedule and more detailed information on construction methodologies are now available for works yet to be completed.

12.2 Study Methodology

Based on this additional information, a re-assessment of the potential landscape and visual impact of the offshore, near-shore and landfall works has been undertaken. The potential visual and landscape impacts associated with the landfall valve installation (LVI) are addressed in the RPS Onshore Pipeline EIS 2010.

It is noted that whilst nearshore construction activity commenced during 2008, it continued in the summer of 2009 and it will require works over a further season. It is therefore acknowledged that some construction-related impacts will have a greater duration than that originally envisaged.

12.3 Receiving Environment

The landscape character of Broadhaven Bay is one of wild, exposed, windswept shoreline, with a small number of sandy bays separated and contained by steeply rising cliffs. Views across the area have been designated as 'Highly Scenic Views' within the Mayo County Council Development Plan 2008-2014.

12.4 Characteristics of the Proposed Development

The characteristics of the proposed development are as detailed in Section 2 and Section 3. The only aspects of the offshore elements of the development that will create a visual impact are those from the presence of the construction vessels and rock placement vessels and the temporary landfall construction facilities required for the umbilical pull-in.

In addition, during the pre-commissioning phase, a temporary nitrogen plant will be located adjacent at the landfall site in Glengad for a period of one to two weeks. This will include mobile (container based) diesel generator units, which will generate emissions of combustion gases.

12.5 Potential Impacts of the Proposed Development

Construction-related visual impacts associated with the presence of construction vessels in Broadhaven Bay and landfall facilities at Glengad occurred during 2008 and 2009, and will be expected over a further season. It is therefore acknowledged that the duration of impacts is greater than initially anticipated.

12.5.1 Offshore

The continuation of subsea installation activities in the Corrib Field will be located beyond the horizon; therefore, there will be no landscape or visual impact associated with these ongoing activities.

During operations, there will be occasional remotely operated vehicle (ROV) surveys of the pipeline to monitor its status. The ROV will be deployed from a survey vessel, which will be visible from the shore while it remains in coastal waters, although the frequency and duration of such operations will be such that the impacts are negligible.

12.5.2 Near-shore/Landfall Works

During the period of construction, there has been a significant increase in marine activity in the nearshore areas within Broadhaven Bay.

Remaining offshore related construction activity will include rock placement works, pre-commissioning works, and umbilical pull-in. A near-shore survey vessel and crew change vessel will be present, as well as a rock placement vessel, side-stone casting vessel, and a bulk-carrier. These vessels are anticipated to be present in the near shore areas of Broadhaven Bay for a relatively short duration. Works associated with installation of the umbilical will involve a number of vessels operating for a short period (approximately two to three weeks) between the landfall and the Corrib field including an umbilical lay vessel (typically 123m length), a trenching vessel (typically 95m length) and survey vessel (typically 80m length).

In addition to the above, there will be various vessels that will access the construction spread from Ballyglass Pier. Some of this activity will continue for the duration of offshore construction works. The introduction of these vessels will result in short term, but significant, visual impacts on 'Highly Scenic Views' into the usually quiet bay.

At the landfall location, various plant including a winch will be present during the umbilical pull-in. A security fence, which will be erected around these and the onshore pipeline construction works, will pose a visual intrusion for the duration of the landfall activities. Impacts to the landscape at the landfall will be short term, during construction and for a short period afterwards. In the vicinity of the landfall, the principal landscape features that will be affected by the proposed development will be the beach itself, and the boulder clay 'cliff' to the rear of the beach. Any earthworks associated with the construction of the LVI and umbilical entrenchment will be minimal and only result in short-term landscape and visual impacts upon these principal landscape features and the associated 'Scenic Views' into and out of the area.

12.5.3 Offshore Pipeline (Pre-) Commissioning Activities

The nitrogen compressors and associated generators will be present on site for approximately 1 to 2 weeks in the Glengad area. Any visual impacts will be minimal and only result in short-term landscape and visual impacts.

12.6 Do-Nothing Scenario

No change from 2001 Offshore EIS. Further consideration of the do-nothing scenario is addressed in Section 13.7.

12.7 Mitigation Measures

12.7.1 Offshore

There will be no landscape or visual impacts associated with the ongoing installation activities at the wellheads, therefore no mitigation is proposed. No mitigation measures are proposed for the ROV inspection surveys either, given their predicted negligible visual impact.

12.7.2 Near-shore/Landfall Works

The remaining construction activities have been scheduled carefully to minimise the number of vessels required at any one time and to maximise efficiency on site, thereby keeping the construction schedule to a minimum. This in turn will help to minimise the duration and intensity of visual impact on the local area as a consequence of the presence of the vessels.

The reinstatement of the landfall has utilised state-of-the-art reinstatement techniques to return the visual integrity of the landscape, as closely as possible, to its previous condition. Armour rock material has been used to reinstate the base of the cliff where bedrock was broken out. Subsoil has been backfilled and compacted (with mechanical rollers) in layers to ensure adequate compaction. The cliff top layer has been reinstated using the stored topsoil taken from that location and cultivated. A geotextile has been laid at steep sections to prevent silt run-off. Vegetation has been allowed to regenerate naturally. No seed will be imported. It is not envisaged that the remaining construction works will have a significant impact on the integrity of the reinstatement works that have already taken place at the landfall following installation of the pipeline in 2009.

12.7.3 Offshore Pipeline (Pre-) Commissioning Activities

Upon completion of the pre-commissioning activities, all the mobile plant will be removed from site.

12.8 Predicted Impact of the Proposed Development

Whilst it is acknowledged that the landfall construction works have a greater duration than that originally envisaged, there is no change to the level of overall predicted impact associated with the offshore, near-shore and landfall works to the level predicted in 2001. The impact remains one of short term, but significant impacts to the 'Highly Scenic Views' across Broadhaven Bay.

12.9 Monitoring

Monitoring requirements for the landfall site reinstatement are detailed in the RPS Onshore Pipeline EIS 2010.

12.10 Reinstatement and Residual Impacts

There will be no residual landscape and visual impact associated with the offshore works.

There will be no anticipated residual impacts associated with the near-shore/landfall works as it is not envisaged that the remaining construction works will disturb the reinstatement measures that have already taken place.