

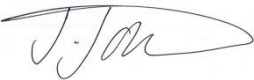

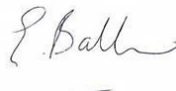

Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector

Appendix 7.5
Smooth Newt Report (2019)

SONI

June 2019

Quality information

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Revision History

Revision	Revision date	Details	Authorized	Name	Position
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

AECOM was commissioned by SONI to conduct an updated assessment of smooth newt *Lissotriton vulgaris* along the route of the proposed Tyrone – Cavan Interconnector. This includes proposed temporary access tracks and associated areas.

In order to update the assessment of the potential for smooth newt across the route of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector, a Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) (Oldham et al.2000) was completed for waterbodies which were previously identified as having potential for smooth newt (Consolidated ES Addendum, 2015). In addition, where suitable waterbodies were identified elsewhere along the route of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector, these were also assessed.

This document describes the results of the updated assessment to determine any changes to the status of smooth newt within 200 m of the centreline of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector and substation.

There has been no change to the legislation regarding smooth newt since the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015). Information on the relevant legislation and policy pertaining to smooth newt are presented in the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report.

1.2 Previous Work

Potential newt habitat was identified by AECOM in proximity to the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector (Tyrone – Cavan Interconnector Environmental Statement, 2009). In 2009, three sites were identified and subsequently discounted as having potential as smooth newt habitat.

In 2012, an extended Phase 1 Habitat survey was conducted for the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector. Based on the results of that survey, a further opportunity was taken in 2013 to assess potential newt habitats that could be affected by the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector. The route was reassessed for smooth newt, and an HSI was completed for eight waterbodies across the route of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector. One of these waterbodies was subsequently surveyed for presence / likely absence of smooth newt. The results of the HSI and subsequent newt survey were published in the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015). No smooth newts were identified within the waterbody surveyed in 2013.

1.3 Site Description

Habitats remain largely unchanged since previous surveys conducted between 2009 and 2012. Ponds and wet ditches are still present; however, no new suitable sites were identified for smooth newt. Details are presented in Chapter 7 of the 2019 Addendum.

1.4 Survey Aims

The survey aims are unchanged from the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report.

2. Methods

The methods used for the data request and the habitat assessment remain unchanged from the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report.

2.1 Limitations

One of the ponds assessed (Site 2) was not fully accessed as landowner access was not granted. The pond was viewed through the boundary fence. The HSI determination does not require direct contact with a waterbody and the parameters used to determine the overall habitat suitability can be recorded from a distance, as long as the waterbody is visible. Assessment of Site 2 is therefore considered sufficient in conjunction with the previous assessment that confirmed the presence of fish in the pond. The HSI attributed to the pond is an accurate reflection. Furthermore, no impacts are anticipated to this

pond, as it lies over 200 m from the centreline of Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector and substation (220 m south of T6).

Other limitations of the methods used remain unchanged from the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report.

2.2 Survey Personnel Experience

Habitat assessments were led by Jenny Jones (Consultant Ecologist) on 30 April 2019 and 22 May 2019. Assistance was provided by Rachel Whyte (Graduate Ecologist) and Paul Donaghey (Ecological Placement Student). Direction was provided by Dr Eleanor Ballard and Dr Paul Lynas. Surveyor experience is provided within Appendix 7.2 of the 2019 ES Addendum.

3. Assessment Methodology

Assessment methodology remains unchanged from the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015).

4. Results

4.1 Data Request

The CEDaR request returned one record for smooth newt, dated 27 March 2010. The record originates from the Argory, located circa 1.3 km east of the substation site. The Argory lies on the other side of the River Blackwater, which may present a physical barrier to smooth newt between the Argory and the substation, or more generally along the route of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector.

4.2 Habitat Assessment

4.2.1 Waterbody Descriptions

Each waterbody assessed is described in Table 4.1 and mapped in Figure 7.1 (Volume 4 of this Addendum). No new areas of suitable newt breeding habitat were identified over those identified previously.

Table 4.1: Waterbody descriptions.

Site reference	Location	Description
Site 1	100 m east of T5, 20 m southeast of overhead line route	No drain or other evidence of standing water was identified at this location. No aquatic / emergent vegetation indicative of standing water was noted.
Site 2	220 m south of T6, 210 m south of overhead line route	A man-made pond surrounded by trees. The pond was not accessible and viewed through the delimiting fence. Fish are possibly present and waterfowl are presumed present.
Site 3	160 m east of T13, oversailed in part by overhead line	A wide (circa 1-2 m) field drain. Whilst it previously held standing water, it is now choked with terrestrial vegetation. Great reedmace <i>Typha latifolia</i> was abundant within the area, however no standing water was present during survey. The surrounding habitat comprises woodland and scrub, which provides suitable terrestrial habitat for smooth newt.
Site 4	200 m southeast of T20, 110 m east of overhead line	A large man-made pond in a wet woodland, adjacent to a house. Emergent vegetation including great reedmace was noted, as were macrophytes on the water surface, and amenity planting in the vicinity. Fish and waterfowl are likely present. The surrounding woodland habitat provides potential terrestrial habitat for smooth newt.

Site reference	Location	Description
Site 5	140 m south of T22, 90 m west of overhead line	A large man-made pond within an improved grassland. Waterfowl were noted on the water surface during the survey (in addition to other visits for mammal surveys) and fish are present. The pond is shaded at the banks by tall trees.
Site 6	80 m north of T63, 40 m west of overhead line	The drain is choked with terrestrial vegetation and limited standing water was noted during assessment.
Site 7	130 m north east of T65, oversailed by overhead line	A wide (circa 2-3m) field drain. The drain is shaded by a hedgerow and associated trees, although it does extend back into a marshy grassland. Emergent vegetation such as great reedmace was noted, however water levels were low during assessment, and disturbance from livestock was evident.
Site 8	210 m south of T70, 190 m southeast of the overhead line	A mosaic of marshy grassland with woodland and scrub. Dead reedmace, stands of reed canary grass <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> and meadowsweet <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> are indicative of wet ground conditions, however the habitat was dry during assessment. No standing water or wet ditches were noted, however surrounding woodland habitat may provide suitable terrestrial habitat for smooth newt.

4.2.2 Habitat Suitability Indices

Habitat assessments were carried out using the HSI (Oldham *et al.* 2000) calculation on those waterbodies which contained standing water. Sites 1, 3, and 8 did not contain any standing water, and therefore were not assessed as questions relating to water quality, pond area could not be answered. The HSI scores are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: HSI scores.

Site reference	HSI Score	Waterbody Suitability
Site 2	0.51	Below Average
Site 4	0.57	Below Average
Site 5	0.56	Below Average
Site 6	0.42	Poor
Site 7	0.51	Below Average

All waterbodies achieved a suitability of Below Average or Poor and have therefore been scoped out of further study. Therefore, no waterbodies along the route of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector were surveyed for smooth newt presence / likely absence.

5. Impacts

The impacts as identified in the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report remain unchanged as a result of these updated surveys.

6. Mitigation Measures

Sites 3 and 8 held no standing water, and therefore did not contain smooth newt breeding habitat during the 2019 updated surveys. Although Site 3 was previously considered to be of Average suitability to support smooth newt (Consolidated ES Addendum, 2015), and whilst Site 8 is considered to have suitable terrestrial habitat for smooth newt, in the absence of breeding habitat, both sites have been discounted from HSI. Both sites are considered to have seasonally fluctuating levels of standing water, and their importance to smooth newt may vary across years.

The Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector will not impact Site 3 (160 m east of T13, oversailed in part by overhead line) or Site 8 (210 m south of T70, 190 m southeast of the overhead line), however the potential suitability of waterbodies to support smooth newt should be maintained. Mitigation previously prescribed in the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report remains unchanged as a result of these updated surveys and assessment.

In the unlikely event that smooth newt are discovered within the works area in the future, all works will cease immediately and the NIEA will be consulted.

7. Residual Impact Assessment

The residual impacts as identified in the Consolidated ES Addendum (2015) Smooth Newt Report remain unchanged as a result of these updated surveys.

8. Conclusion

Of the eight waterbodies which were identified following the updated Phase 1 Habitat surveys in 2012 and reassessed in 2019, none were assessed to have potential as smooth newt breeding habitat, and no presence / likely absence surveys were considered necessary. However, Sites 3 and 8 are considered to have seasonally fluctuating water levels and have potential terrestrial habitat for smooth newt. Whilst neither site will be impacted as a result of the construction and operation of the Tyrone - Cavan Interconnector, the overhead line oversails Site 3. Previously prescribed mitigation should be implemented. Indirect impacts to Site 8 are not expected..

9. References

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