



**FLYNN
FURNEY**

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

RFI Response to An Coimisiún Pleanála ABP-322646-25 Otters

Clare Glens River Walk Enhancement Plan,
Co. Tipperary

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Prepared by: Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants

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Contents

1. Background information	3
2. Clarification of survey findings and mitigations	4

1. Background information

This document is a memorandum response to the Request for Further Information received in relation to Otters in Clare Glens, relative to the works for the enhancement of the existing trail. This document aims to clarify the results of the dedicated otter surveys carried out thus far in Clare Glens.

2. Clarification of survey findings and mitigations

A dedicated otter survey was undertaken as part of the baseline ecological fieldwork for the project. The survey was carried out by suitably qualified ecologists in accordance with recognised best practice, which included the systematic inspection of the river corridor and banks within and adjacent to the proposed works area, searching for signs such as spraints, couches and slides, and an assessment of any suitable resting, feeding and breeding habitat.

Evidence of otter activity, as reported in the submitted reports, was recorded within the wider Clare Glens river corridor, confirming their presence. Field signs recorded included several spraints and footprints along the river margins, which indicate regular otter passage. No holts or couches were recorded within the immediate footprint of the proposed works. It was also determined that the rock facing present in the gully where the river runs makes the habitat sub-optimal for the establishment of holts. In summary, while suitable foraging habitat is present, no resting or breeding features were identified, which informed the conclusion that works would not result in direct loss of otter habitat.

The reference in the EclA and NIS to a pre-construction otter survey is included as a standard mitigation measure that reflects industry best practice for this protected species. The preconstruction survey was recommended where more than 12 months have elapsed since the initial survey and the commencement of works. This wording was not meant to indicate that a baseline survey had not being carried out. With the mitigation measures put in place in the submitted documents, no significant effects on otters are predicted.