



SIFP

Strategic Integrated Framework Plan
for the Shannon Estuary
2013-2020

Strategic Integrated Framework Plan for the Shannon Estuary

An inter-jurisdictional land and marine based framework to guide the future development and management of the Shannon Estuary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Introduction

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**The Shannon Estuary is
an immensely important
asset and one of the
most valuable natural
resources in Ireland**

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The Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary is an inter-jurisdictional land and marine based framework plan to guide the future development and management of the Shannon Estuary. It has been commissioned by Clare County Council, Kerry County Council, Limerick City and County Councils, Shannon Development and the Shannon Foynes Port Company. The project is being overseen by a multi-agency steering group comprised of the above together with other key stakeholders with an interest in the Estuary.

The Shannon Estuary is an immensely important asset and one of the most valuable natural resources in Ireland and the Mid-West Region in particular – the fringe lands and the marine area both provide space and location for development, activities and opportunities to progress economic, social and environmental growth within the Region. The Estuary adjoins the local authorities of Clare County Council, Limerick City Council, Limerick County Council, and Kerry County Council, who coordinate, develop and control land-use planning and development on its landward sides respectively, in conjunction with the Mid West and South West Regional Authorities.

The Estuary and its environs is a multi-functional zone, with the waters and adjoining lands supporting a range of functions, uses, communities, activities, and environmental resources/assets which bring character, prosperity and vibrancy to the area. The Shannon Estuary is of strategic significance to the regional and national economy. It is Ireland's premier deepwater resource where 6 main terminal facilities handle a total of 1,000 ships per year and 20% of goods tonnage handled at national ports. The Estuary hosts a wide range of strategic economic assets including the Shannon-Limerick Gateway, Shannon International Airport and the Shannon Free Zone as well as strategic energy infrastructure including Moneypoint and Tarbert power stations that between them have capacity to provide in excess of 1400MW to the national power supply through a strategic transmission network. The Estuary also supports a significant tourist resource that attracted 850,000 foreign visitors to the Region in 2011 resulting in a tourism income of €271m, most notably the North American market which alone accounts for €100m spend.

The Shannon Estuary is also a very important and sensitive ecosystem as the entire area is designated as a Special Area of Conservation [SAC] as part of

a network of sites across Europe under the Habitats Directive. All of the Shannon Estuary as far west as Foynes is also designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) - as part of a network of sites across Europe that are protected under the Birds Directive.

The challenge going forward is to maximise the economic, social and environmental potential of the Shannon Estuary through coordinating and managing a balanced, comprehensive approach to economic growth and sustainable management of the area's natural assets which are the very attributes which sustain this natural resource. An over-arching, integrated framework for moving forward is required, to assist in the planning and sustainable development of this exceptional region.

The SIFP will be adopted through variation of the relevant County and City Development Plans, and will become planning policy within the spatial land use planning system. As such, the local Authorities

will undertake the primary role of enabling its implementation and delivery.

The SIFP sets out an overall strategy for the proper sustainable growth, development and environmental management of the Shannon Estuary Region for the next 30 years. Within its lifetime, the Plan must be able to respond to changing circumstances at EU, national, regional and local levels within policy and governance, as well as contextual changes within the Estuary region, including population, lifestyles and aspirations for the future.

Regular reviews should be undertaken to ensure that the SIFP reflects any changes that may take place, and it is recommended that these are commenced by the Steering Group at six-yearly intervals. The first review period will commence in 2019.



A Vision for Shannon Estuary 2020

A Shannon Estuary that makes a meaningful contribution to economic, social and environmental prosperity of the region by optimising the sustainable development potential of its natural resources and assets to build a successful and vibrant estuarine economy and community, which protects, manages and enhances its considerable environmental qualities in a thriving natural ecosystem'

The strategy seeks to encourage, facilitate and promote a balanced approach to harnessing the Estuary's economic growth potential, whilst simultaneously ensuring careful protection, management and enhancement of the natural environmental resources of the area. The Strategy seeks to achieve the Vision within a 30 year timeframe.

The strategy contains sustainable, forward looking and deliverable objectives, and will involve all relevant stakeholders. The objectives represent the link between the analysis of the key issues, the multi-functional nature of the Estuary, the challenges being faced, and the process of achieving the desired future state of the Estuary.

The strategy aims to:

- Support the multi-functional nature of the Shannon Estuary and identify opportunities to expand the existing economic base, including port-related industry and other associated activities;
- Facilitate the diversification of the economy, through the promotion of appropriate commercial/ industrial employment, environmentally friendly aquaculture, maritime energy, transport, recreation and tourism industries in a sustainable manner;
- Protect, manage and enhance the natural coastal environment along the Estuary, including its cultural, natural and built heritage;
- Safeguard the Estuary's sensitive environmental resources and natural heritage of National, European and International significance.

A core component of the Strategy is the development of a Thematic Spatial Plan for the Estuary to provide clarity of purpose and direction for future development and investment. As part of the wider Framework, it helps communicate the long term ambitions for the Estuary, and enables effective prioritisation of expenditure and investment, at local, regional and national level across all jurisdictions, Departments, and administrative boundaries.

The Thematic Spatial Plan and development objectives have been developed through:

- **Participation & consultation**

The preparation of the Plan has been a participative process, involving a wide range of stakeholders at key stages. The Steering Group for the SIFP comprised a representative group of key stakeholders with various interests in the Estuary, including those tasked with various decision-making responsibilities within the Study Area.

- **SEA & AA**

The processes of SEA and AA have been carried out in tandem with the evolution of the draft SIFP. Environmental considerations have been at the core of the decision-making process at each stage in the plan development and the assessment has exerted a strong directional influence on the formulation of the draft Plan, both in terms of the Development Objectives and the selection of the Strategic Development Locations. The outcomes of these processes have identified mitigation measures which seek to reduce the likely significant effects on the sensitive environment, and have therefore been incorporated into the draft Plan.

- **Evidence based approach**

The evidenced based approach employed a systematic comprehensive and consistent assessment of key technical/feasibility and environmental considerations and provided direction in confirming the range of development themes that are representative of the multi-functional nature of the Estuary. It identified potential Strategic Development Locations and assisted in establishing the appropriate key development objectives relevant to each development theme and in formulating strategic spatial proposals that assist in delivering the strategic objectives of SIFP.

The SIFP evidence based approach identified two very strong clusters of marine related industry containing a number of sites that are evidently of strategic significance to the Estuary.

The SIFP seeks to safeguard the future strategic role of the identified Strategic Development Locations through recognition of the existing development plan zonings that already apply and the long established strategic industries and through the framing of appropriate development objectives and providing direction on key environmental considerations at each location.

Areas of Opportunities have also been identified in the marine area for other potential strategically important development opportunities including renewable energy and fishing/aquaculture.

Other smaller scale development opportunities exist at a 'lower level' which in themselves are not strategic in respect of their scale but nevertheless are of potential benefit/risk to the long term sustainable development of the Estuary. The actual land use requirements of these uses are more appropriately dealt with at Local Area Plan level but still require a coordinated and integrated approach across the Estuary. In common with the strategic development locations and opportunity sites, the SIFP provides strategic objectives to direct development in respect of those uses.



Shipping & Navigation as a Key Economic Driver

A Shannon Estuary that continues to play a major role in the Ireland's international trade and can adapt to meet changing market demands and trade patterns through sustainable expansion and growth

Shipping is a key national economic driver accounting for 99% of Ireland's international trade. The Shannon Estuary is Ireland's premier deepwater resource and a prime maritime transportation hub, lying at the heart of the Mid-West Region. Shipping and navigation in the Estuary has significant potential to stimulate further economic growth, in a balanced and sustainable manner.

Shannon Foynes Port Company, Ireland's second largest port operation, is the statutory navigational authority for all marine activities in the Shannon Estuary. The strategic location of SFPC terminals at Foynes, Limerick, Shannon, Aughinish, Tarbert and Moneypoint offers connection between an important regional economy and the global market place. The Estuary handles a total of 1,000 ships per year, carrying in excess of 12 million tonnes of cargo, equivalent to 20 per cent of goods tonnage and 35% of bulk cargo handled at national ports.

The availability of sheltered natural deep water pockets in the Estuary is a major asset, providing significant opportunities to improve the potential for shipping and commercial activity.

There has been an increasing trend in global shipping, towards containers and bulk cargoes being handled in increasingly larger ships based on the concept of moving cargoes in deep draft vessels and transferring

to shallower vessels for onward distribution to regional ports. The Shannon Estuary, with its considerable deep water resource and location on the western edge of Europe, would appear to be well placed for the potential development of transshipment feeding into the near European, Baltic and Scandinavian Ports.

The ability to accommodate larger ships is critical to safeguarding and developing trade potential and competitiveness on the global market. SIFP seeks to provide the policy framework that safeguards the critical deep water channels, and facilitates the sustainable growth of deep draught berths, quayside infrastructure and cargo handling facilities to ensure that the Estuary shipping continues to make a significant contribution to the national and regional economy.



“To facilitate and promote the economic growth of shipping, trade and investment within the Shannon Estuary, in a sustainable, safe and environmentally sensitive manner”

One of the key objectives to deliver this goal is:

To safeguard the core commercial shipping lane, port & berthing facilities, and critical navigational assets from inappropriate development.

Some of the associated objectives that will be pursued over the lifetime of the SIFP in respect of this goal include:

- **To facilitate appropriate maintenance of key navigation channels and berthing facilities.**
- **To ensure that SFPC is consulted in respect of any development proposals that may potentially impact on navigation, marine safety and port operations.**
- **To safeguard the operation of the Shannon Estuary ferry services as a vital community, tourism and economic linkages.**
- **To ensure that any expansion of marine shipping & navigation takes appropriate account of existing economic and social activities as well as environmental and heritage interests.**



Promoting Marine Related Industry/ Large Scale Industry on the Estuary

The Shannon Estuary is one of Ireland's premier maritime resources with a number of long-established and successful marine enterprises including major ports and nationally significant industries and economic centres.

The Estuary benefits from key attributes that influenced the development of existing large scale industry and the marine industrial base and have the potential to attract further significant investment. These characteristics have led to the emergence of two definable clusters of industry in the Estuary, one concentrated broadly around Moneypoint / Tarbert / Ballylongford, and another focussed around Foynes / Aughinish / Cahiracon. They have become broad focal points for the concentration of marine related industrial development and provide potential catalysts for further industrial development attracted by the available synergies and associated opportunities.

It is important that future development of industry in the Estuary derives maximum benefit from the key assets including:

- Natural Deep Water locations throughout the Estuary with the potential for larger ships, enabling trade growth and competitive expansion;
- Existing Ports at Foynes and Limerick Docks already established as International Trade Gateways;
- The Gateway of Limerick-Shannon and well established coastal communities and settlements
- Close proximity to Shannon International Airport, as an international gateway;
- Strong transport network of onshore connections;
- Existing major energy infrastructure within the area and significant potential to harness marine based renewable energy;

- Strong economic base & skilled labour force including third level institutions. Shannon Development Free Zone, connectivity with Shannon Development Knowledge network, a number of international and multi-national companies in the area and a rich agricultural hinterland supporting robust food sector
- Strategic location on the Atlantic Seaboard with excellent connection into the Atlantic Corridor Transport Network.

SIFP recognises the primacy of the Limerick- Shannon Gateway in prioritising development, in line with national and regional spatial policy. The Strategic Development Locations focus on the established development clusters in the Estuary where a strong industrial base is either already well established or approved in principle through the statutory planning process. SIFP development objectives acknowledge the existing development plan zonings at Askeaton where the development priority is to safeguard the lands for the establishment of industry and enterprise of regional importance and at Limerick Docks where primary objective is the retention of the existing port and the development of an employment and residential hub to facilitate the sustainable development of the Docklands as a Strategic Employment Location.

To capitalise on the natural deep water potential and existing Port and maritime infrastructure, by facilitating and proactively encouraging the environmentally sustainable development of maritime industries at appropriate locations within the Shannon Estuary, while seeking to improve and promote the road and rail connectivity of the deepwater ports.

The strategy focuses on identified Strategic Development Locations (SDL) for marine related industry and large scale industrial development around the Estuary. The Strategic Development Locations are:

- Strategic Development Location A: Innishmurry / Cahericon
- Strategic Development Location B: Moneypoint
- Strategic Development Location C: Foynes Island
- Strategic Development Location D: Lands to Rear of Foynes
- Strategic Development Location E: Askeaton
- Strategic Development Location F: Aughinish Island
- Strategic Development Location G: Tarbert
- Strategic Development Location H: Ballylongford
- Strategic Development Location I: Limerick Docks

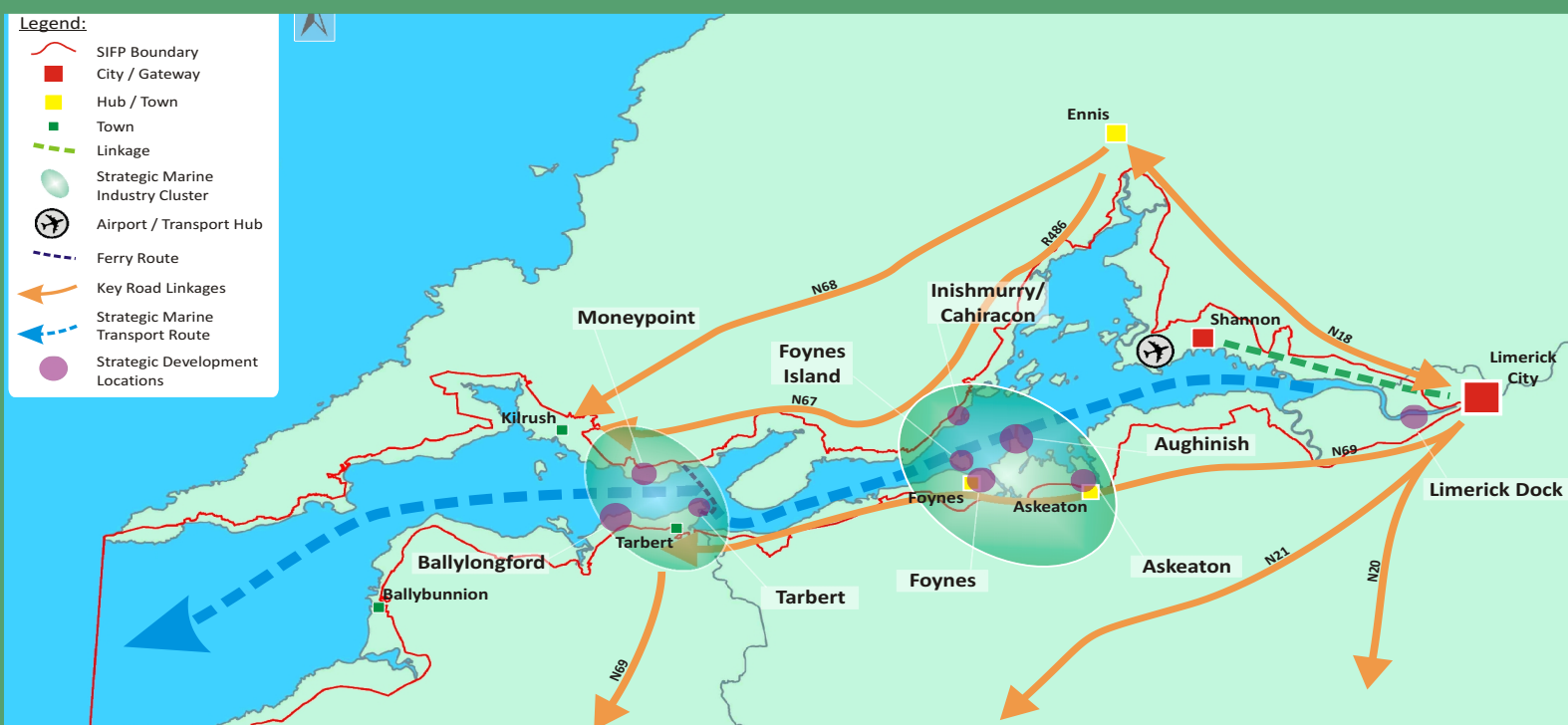
One of the key objectives to deliver this goal is:

- To safeguard the role and function of the **Strategic Development Locations** identified for marine related industry and encourage their sustainable growth, development and appropriate diversification for economic development.

Other objectives supporting the achievement of this goal include:

- To support and facilitate the sustainable development of maritime industry on land within the **Strategic Development Locations** at **Aughinish, Foynes Island, Ballylongford Landbank** and **Inishmurry/Caheracon**, that harnesses the potential of the deep water, available hinterland and existing infrastructure.
- To safeguard the role and function of **Strategic Energy Sites** at **Moneypoint** and **Tarbert** as key strategic drivers of economic growth in the Region, encouraging their sustainable growth and diversification in accordance with national and regional energy objectives and to support and facilitate the development of marine related industry on adjacent lands.
- To permit development of other sustainable land uses at **Strategic Development Locations** where they are considered compatible or complementary with the level of flood risk and where the ability to deliver the primary marine related industry use is not compromised.

- To safeguard the role and function of **Foynes Port** and **Limerick Docks** as key strategic drivers of economic growth within the Estuary, and wider region.
- To facilitate and support sustainable development of **Limerick Docks** and lands adjacent and support the diversification and re-use of lands not considered core Port assets for complementary, compatible and sustainable uses.
- To support and facilitate the sustainable growth and expansion of **Foynes Port**, and encourage growth in port-related uses along with alternative uses which are complementary or compatible with the level of flood risk and with the existing and proposed uses within the site.
- To support, facilitate and promote the sustainable development of the lands at **Askeaton** for general large scale industry and enterprise.
- To support and facilitate improvements to key transport infrastructure network within the **Shannon Estuary** environs, to provide a strong attractive base for supporting economic activity within the **Strategic Development Locations**.



Harnessing the Energy Resource

The Shannon Estuary is long established as a major contributor to the national energy supply market. There are three sites within the Estuary that are of strategic significance in national and regional terms with regard to their contribution to the Government objectives in relation to security and diversity of energy supply and to their further economic and energy potential.

Moneypoint Power Station has been generating electricity for around 25 years and has the capacity to meet approximately 25% of the nation's demand for electricity.

Tarbert with 640MW capacity is also a significant contributor to the national energy supply.

The Ballylongford Landbank benefits from a significant deepwater asset and extant permission for a major LNG plant.

Aughinish Alumina also makes a major contribution to the diversity and security of energy supply in the region through its combined Heat and Power Plant.

These strategic energy hubs either side of the Estuary are well connected to major infrastructure in the regional and national electricity and gas networks.

The energy hubs also have very significant port infrastructure adjacent to a deepwater resource. These facilities allied to the existing energy infrastructure make the sites very attractive to other marine related industries. The SIFP will safeguard the status of these sites, facilitate development of energy infrastructure in line with the Bord Gáis and EirGrid infrastructure strategies and supporting the potential to diversify and develop additional complementary sea-related industrial activities.

The growth of the offshore renewable energy sector presents an opportunity for the Shannon Estuary in respect of new infrastructure and supply chain opportunities. The Shannon Estuary is well placed to capture a significant share of that market. Technical analysis

of the Estuary and its port infrastructure in the Irish Ports Offshore Renewable Energy Services (IPORES) Report 2012 concludes that the Shannon Estuary has potential to become a European Ocean Energy Hub and Shannon Foynes would be an ideal location for the manufacturing, assembly and servicing of ocean energy generators.

The Estuary and the west coast of Ireland generally possess a considerable but, as yet, un-harnessed renewable energy resource in its wind, wave and tidal capacity which can play a major role in aiding the attainment of ambitious national targets for the contribution of renewable sources to power generation, including a target of obtaining at least 500MW from wave and tidal energy by 2020.

The tidal nature and geographical shape of the Shannon has created tidal flows on a commercially viable scale. The draft Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan (dOREDPP) estimates the development potential of tidal energy in the Estuary to be around 1,000MW. The SEAI Report 'Tidal & Current Energy Resources in Ireland' identified four areas within the Estuary deemed to be of best potential, namely Kilconly Point, Carraig Island, Tarbert Bay and an area adjacent to Moneypoint. The analysis carried out in preparation of SIFP confirms that there is significant potential for development of the tidal energy resource in the Shannon Estuary.

It is recognized that the development of tidal energy in the Estuary will have technological, logistical and environmental issues to address. However there is a considerable capacity and commitment within the region for research and development in this field, providing opportunities to sensitively explore this renewable energy potential in the identified Areas of Opportunity and ensure that appropriate projects that demonstrate compatibility with the critical environmental considerations and the strategic shipping/navigation interests may be progressed further.

To ensure that the Shannon Estuary fulfils its optimum role in contributing to the diversity and security of energy supply and to harness the potential of the Estuary for the appropriate development of renewable energy sources to assist in meeting renewable energy targets, ensuring that all developments shall comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive, Water Framework Directive and all other relevant EC Directives.

One of the key objectives in pursuing this goal is:

To facilitate the further development of the energy infrastructure at identified strategic energy sites and encourage appropriate diversification projects.

Supporting objectives include:

- **To support and facilitate the sustainable development, upgrade and expansion of the electricity & gas networks.**
- **To actively explore and pursue opportunities to service the renewable energy sector at existing ports.**
- **To promote the Shannon Estuary as a centre of excellence in Research & Development of renewable energy.**

- **To support and facilitate the sustainable development of appropriate renewable energy developments.**
- **To explore the potential of tidal energy, as a viable renewable energy resource at appropriate locations including the identified Areas of Opportunity.**
- **To facilitate complementary industrial activities at existing strategic energy sites.**



Promoting Tourism around the Shannon Estuary

The Shannon Estuary is a marketable tourist asset with a considerable range of attractions in terms of the scale and variety of the offer. Shannon International Airport is a key gateway to the region and to the west of Ireland handling 1.4m passengers in 2011. There are a wide range of major tourist attractions in and around the Estuary from Bunratty Castle in the east, Loop Head in the west, marina facilities and associated attractions at Kilrush, the Blue Flag beaches including Cappa and the resort of Ballybunion, Foynes on the southern shores of the Estuary, the network of cycling, trekking and walking trails, a myriad of water-based tourist facilities and scenic routes including part of the 1400kms Wild Atlantic Way. Recent studies have also examined the feasibility of sustainable exploitation of the potential business and tourism opportunities of the Shannon Fergus Islands.

The environment of the Shannon Estuary is internationally recognised for its nature conservation interest which is a tourist asset in its own right.

The SIFP tourism and leisure strategy seeks to build on the considerable assets and generally directs tourist development projects to focus on the settlements around the Estuary, pitching development at a level commensurate with the status of the settlement in the hierarchy and reflecting a sensitive exploitation of the tourist asset. The strategy is to encourage and facilitate expansion and re-development of existing facilities where possible to minimise the potential for harm to the prized environment and ensure that those settlements around the fringes of the Estuary profit from the economic, social and environmental benefits.

To facilitate and promote the sensitive and sustainable use of the Shannon Estuary's assets in an integrated manner leading to the development of a dynamic and sustainable tourism sector that delivers maximum social and economic benefit to the communities of the Estuary while safeguarding valued landscape, heritage and environmental interests.

The key objectives to deliver this goal within the plan period are:

- **To facilitate the long term sustainable development of Shannon International Airport as a major tourist gateway of regional and national importance.**
- **To support and facilitate the sustainable use of the Estuary by the Cruise Ship Industry by maintaining and safeguarding critical navigational channels, anchorage and berthing facilities.**
- **To support the sustainable development of appropriate tourism and leisure projects within and around identified hubs in the Shannon Estuary.**
- **To support and facilitate new sustainable land-based tourism development within existing settlements**
- **To support and facilitate the sustainable development and upgrading of marina facilities at appropriate locations**
- **To facilitate the expansion of existing marine based leisure schemes and the development of new opportunities for sustainable development of eco-tourism and water sports along the Estuary.**
- **To facilitate an evaluation of the tourism/leisure potential of the islands within the Estuary in the context of environmental designations and landscape/heritage sensitivities.**



Aviation as a Major Economic Driver in the Estuary

Shannon International Airport is at the heart of the Shannon Region and plays a significant role in providing international connectivity to the western seaboard of North America and Europe and increasing prosperity to the region. The airport is a key driver for economic, tourism and industrial development for the Shannon Region and the greater West of Ireland as a critical conduit for tourism and exports.

There is considerable scope to build on the heritage of Shannon and the traditional base of MRO (Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul). The Airport also provides considerable scope to accommodate complementary industries such as a logistics hub. The Shannon Free Zone (SFZ) is a 243 hectare industrial area with more than 7,700 people working in over 100 companies, including Manufacturing, International Trade Services, Aviation, Tourism, and Logistics services in for premier multinational firms and the largest concentration of North American companies in Ireland outside of Dublin. The SFZ generates exports in excess of €3.3 billion per annum.

It is critical therefore to safeguard the airport lands for future airport expansion and rationalisation. Priority will be given to aviation and other compatible uses including aircraft servicing & maintenance, freight cargo handling, complementary business park uses, flight schools, international logistics and research that support the long term sustainability of the airport.

To realise the long term potential of Shannon International Airport and its environs, and encourage the sustainable development of the Airport as a strategic economic driver in the Shannon Estuary and the wider region.

The development objectives supporting achievement of this goal include:

- **To safeguard current and future operational, safety, technical and development requirements of Shannon International Airport.**
- **To have regard to, and implement the national land use policies and guidance in relation to the Red Zones and Public Safety Zones for Shannon International Airport;**
- **To have regard to the advice of the Airport Authority with regard to the effects of any development proposals in the vicinity of Shannon International Airport.**
- **To support and facilitate the sustainable development of the lands around the airport for aviation related and other complementary or compatible uses.**
- **To explore opportunities to improve connectivity and linkages between the airport lands and waters of the Shannon Estuary to facilitate additional, complementary uses of existing jetty facilities.**



Commercial Fishing & Aquaculture

The Irish Seafood Industry is worth over €700million and aquaculture alone produces more than 27,000 tonnes of seafood per annum. Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) have estimated that the market value of exports in 2011 were €430million.

The Government Integrated Marine Plan 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth' confirms that Ireland's coastline, inshore and offshore waters contain some of the largest and most valuable sea fisheries in Europe and are an ideal location for finfish, shellfish and seaweed aquaculture.

The demand for fish and seafood produce throughout Ireland, the UK and Europe has grown this sector, which now employs almost 12,000 people in Ireland. Fishing, both as a commercial trade activity and as a leisure / recreational activity, has been traditionally important in the local economy for coastal communities of the Estuary.

There is a range of commercial fishing activity including fishing for mackerel and scad off Loop Head, local licensed boats working pots, gillnets and tanglenets and aquaculture, primarily oyster cultivation, focused on areas in/near Rinevella, Carrigaholt, Poulmasherry Bay, Ballylongford Bay, Bunnaclogga Bay and near Aughinish Island. There may also be opportunities for marine finfish farming to be explored in the Estuary.

The development of aquaculture in particular has derived significant benefit from the local knowledge, support and area management of the Co-ordinated Local Aquaculture Management Systems (CLAMS) initiative evolved by Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) together with the Marine Institute (MI).

Aquaculture and commercial fishery activities are continually developing, with new technologies, new seafood products, and new markets. Together, fishing, fish/shellfish processing, distribution, aquaculture and related activities continue to generate significant direct

employment in these enterprises and also in terms of secondary employment in processing and retailing outlets.

It is widely acknowledged by all stakeholders that there is the potential to expand the commercial fishing and aquaculture industries within the Shannon Estuary. The potential growth is dependent on ensuring that the environmental impacts of its operations are not detrimental to the core environmental resources upon which it is heavily dependent on for its growth. SIFP seeks to achieve an appropriate balance in the sensitive exploitation of this valuable resource.

To contribute to the diversification of the local economy, growth in employment and social well-being of coastal communities through the facilitation and promotion of environmentally sustainable commercial fishing and aquaculture compliant with the conservation objectives of the designated features within the Estuary.

The key objectives to be pursued in achieving this goal include:

- **To support the development of sustainable commercial fishing and aquaculture activities to assist in the diversification and growth of the local economy.**
- **To support and promote the sustainable development and expansion of aquaculture activities within the identified Areas of Opportunity.**
- **To support the provision of suitable infrastructure, including access routes and points, piers, harbours and processing facilities, required for growth in the fishing and aquaculture sector.**
- **To support the development and implementation of environmentally sustainable management practices.**
- **To ensure existing and future proposals for aquaculture development and inshore fishing do not cause adverse impacts on water quality within the Estuary.**

- To ensure all activities maintain and where possible improve the physical, chemical and microbiological requirements for Designated Shellfish Waters.
- To support the continued monitoring by Government Agencies within the marine environment to improve the technical and scientific advice available to stakeholders.
- To encourage all proposals for commercial fishing and aquaculture carry out appropriate pre-application consultation with key stakeholders.
- To ensure all proposals for aquaculture and commercial fishing likely to have significant effects on the Natura 2000 network are adequately assessed and comply fully with the objectives and requirements of the Habitats Directive.



Building on the Shannon Estuary as an Environmental Asset

The Shannon Estuary is a unique ecosystem in Ireland and of international significance, being one of the few large estuaries on the Atlantic seaboard of Europe. The greater Shannon Estuary comprises the tidal reaches of the Lower River Shannon between Limerick City and the Atlantic and incorporates the Fergus Estuary south of Clarecastle. The importance of the Estuary for birds, plants and animals is acknowledged through the designation of the Estuary as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) and an existing Special Protection Area for birds (EU Birds Directive 2009/147/EC). This SPA is currently proposed for re-designation with a major extension to cover much of the outer Estuary also. A major extension to this SPA, known as the River Shannon & Fergus Estuary SPA, is proposed to cover the rest of the outer part of the Estuary, which was previously undesignated as an SPA. This section of the pSPA is afforded the same level of protection as those areas which were previously designated as an SPA from the date of its notification (which was June 2011).

The Shannon Estuary and its surrounding hinterland is long established as an area for settlement, as a major communication and transport corridor and other human activity for thousands of years. The area is therefore also rich in cultural heritage, with many castles and fortifications, crannógs, enclosures, industrial archaeology and religious sites within the vicinity of the shoreline and on the numerous islands throughout the Estuary.

This natural and cultural heritage allied to the attractive rural landscape and small towns and villages in coastal settings result in an environment that is a real asset to the communities living there and to the wider region. The quality environment of the Shannon Estuary

provides communities with valued opportunities for accommodation, work, recreation and socialising. The environment of the Estuary is heavily regulated through nature conservation designations, protection of the cultural heritage, planning, licensing and other consent regulations.

SIFP seeks to deliver an integrated and sustainable approach to facilitate necessary development that will not seriously compromise the environment which is the core asset of the region.

To facilitate a development framework which is compatible with the areas of the Estuary which are designated under the Habitats & Birds Directives, whilst ensuring that the environment is protected, conserved and maintained and where possible restored, ensuring the dual goals of economic development and environmental conservation can be achieved.

The key objectives delivering this goal in the plan period are:

- **To safeguard the integrity of all designated Natura 2000 sites by applying the appropriate level of protection in accordance with relevant Directives and associated legislation, regulations and guidance on such matters.**
- **To ensure that there is appropriate protection of the qualifying features or interest features of the Natura 2000 network.**
- **To ensure that any development proposal in the vicinity of or affecting in any way a designated European Site or NHA provides sufficient information showing how its proposals will impact on the designated site and how any such impact will be appropriately mitigated.**
- **To ensure that development within the SIFP area does not conflict with the requirements and objectives of the Water Framework Directive**

- To ensure that all NHAs and pNHAs are afforded the appropriate level of protection in the determination of development proposals
- To promote biodiversity protection, management, monitoring, and awareness throughout the Shannon Estuary and to ensure proposals for development within the Shannon Estuary are designed to protect and enhance biodiversity, wherever possible.
- To support and promote measures to control and manage the presence of alien/invasive species.
- To safeguard land based and underwater sites and features of archaeological interest, to secure the preservation of all known sites of archaeological and historic interest have due regard for archaeological concerns in assessing all development proposals.
- To promote greater public awareness of the archaeological and historic heritage of the Shannon Estuary.
- To pay due regard to the guidance and actions set out in DoEHLG and OPW Guidelines in respect of flood risk management and to take account of predicted sea level rise in the assessment of proposed developments along the Estuary
- To facilitate enhanced understanding of coastal erosion issues within Shannon Estuary and to permit development that will not result in an increase in coastal erosion and will not be at risk of coastal erosion.
- To ensure that all proposals for development pay due regard to the special quality of the landscape and seascape of Shannon Estuary.
- Encouraging the holistic use of Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directive Assessment as an optimisation Tool to safeguard critical environmental interests, resolve conflicts, add value and promote sustainable decision-making.
- To ensure that Strategic Environmental Assessment is utilised during the preparation of plans and programmes by statutory bodies, which are likely to have a significant impact on the environment.
- To ensure that all future planning proposals, including land use planning and zoning, and proposals for development, are subject to compliance with the objectives and principles of the Habitats Directive.



