



Vides pārraudzības valsts birojs

Environment State Bureau of the Republic of Latvia

Rūpniecības iela 23, Rīga, LV-1045, Latvia, phone +371 67321173, e-mail pasts@vpvb.gov.lv, www.vpvb.gov.lv

Rīga

12.08.2024 No. 5-01/969/2024

Ref. to: 21.06.2024. No 6-3/24/2872-3

The Ministry of Climate of the Republic of Estonia
e-mail: info@kliimaministerium.ee

Regarding the transboundary environmental impact assessment for the Rail Baltica railway line section „Kabli–Estonia-Latvia border“ in Pärnu county

The Environment State Bureau (hereinafter – the Bureau), acting as a Point of Contact regarding Notification in accordance with Article 3 of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (hereinafter – the Espoo Convention) of Latvia and the competent authority on the environmental impact assessment (hereinafter – the EIA) in Latvia, would like to express gratitude to the Ministry of Climate of the Republic of Estonia for notification sent concerning the environmental impact assessment (hereinafter – the EIA) for the Rail Baltica railway line section „Kabli–Estonia-Latvia border“ in Pärnu county (hereinafter – the Project) with reference to Article 3 of the Espoo Convention¹.

The Bureau hereby acknowledges receipt of the notification and prepared documentation. Considering the nature and scope of the Project and the possibility of transboundary impacts, as well as opinion expressed in the Bureau`s letter No 5-01/601 dated 19 July 2019, we hereby confirm that Latvia intends to take part in the proceedings on the EIA and transboundary consultations of the Project as an affected party.

Please be informed that the Bureau published received information regarding the Project on the Bureau`s webpage² on 8 July 2024 and sent information directly to the involved authorities. The Bureau received opinions regarding participation in the transboundary consultations within the scope of competence from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Latvia, the State Environmental Service, the Nature Conservation Agency, the Limbaži District Municipality and AS “RB Rail” in cooperation with SIA “*Eiropas Dzelzceļa līnijas*” (the national implementer of the *Rail Baltica* project in Latvia). The Bureau has not received comments from the public.

¹ The Bureau`s registration N0 5-05/1866/2024 on 21 June 2024.

² <https://www.vpvb.gov.lv/lv/parrobezu-ietekmes-uz-vidi-novertejumu-projekti/eiropas-standarta-platuma-dzelzcela-linijas-rail-baltica-posma-pernava-igaunijas-latvijas-robeza-sektora-kabli-igaunijas-latvijas-robeza-buvnieciba-pernavas-aprinki-igaunija>

Below mentioned authorities highlighted aspects that need to be stressed and foreseen in the transboundary EIA of the Project or provided more detailed comments regarding transboundary impact:

The State Environment Service noted that the EIA procedure has been carried out for the *Rail Baltica* railway line in the territory of the Republic of Latvia, during which various impacts on the environment, their importance, and the necessary measures to reduce the impacts have been identified. According to the State Environment Service, the activities envisaged during the EIA in the Republic of Estonia with regard to the realisation of the *Rail Baltica* project should not identify significantly different potential environmental impacts already identified in the EIA procedure of the *Rail Baltica* project in the territory of Latvia. During EIA of the Project, it is possible to apply various planning principles and solutions that will prevent a negative impact on the population and the quality of the environment in general also in the territory of the Republic of Latvia. At the same time, the State Environment Service points out that the *Rail Baltica* infrastructure solutions in the territory of the Republic of Estonia must be synchronized with the *Rail Baltica* infrastructure solutions in the territory of the Republic of Latvia. In addition, the Project should not cause changes in the position of the *Rail Baltica* railway line in the territory of the Republic of Latvia, as well as cause significant changes in other downstream infrastructure in the territory of the Republic of Latvia. The Environment State Service has issued technical regulations No VI21TN0281 on 1 July 2021 (amended on 19 July 2024 No AP24VL0470)³ for the intended activity – related section of the *Rail Baltica* route in the territory of the Republic of Latvia within the Limbažu District Municipality.

The Nature Conservation Agency (hereinafter – the Agency) highlighted the following:

- The railway line is planned to be built along the west side of the Nature Reserve (Natura 2000 area) “Mērnīeku dumbbrāji”. The “Mērnīeku dumbbrāji” Nature Reserve was created for the protection of wet broadleaf forests. The Agency draws attention to the fact that in accordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations No 264 of 16 March 2010 “General regulations for the protection and use of specially protected natural areas”, it is prohibited in the territory of the nature reserve to “16.5. drain mires, forest stands in wet mineral soils and wet peat soils”⁴.
- Several species of the Annex 1 of the EU Birds Directive can be found in the Nature Reserve – critically endangered Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*, etc. To the south of the “Mērnīeku dumbbrāji”, approximately 450 m from the planned railway line, there is a micro reserve (with the code 2481) created for the protection of the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarina*. During the research carried out within EIA, increased attention should be paid to assessing the potential impacts on these areas.
- In the vicinity of the Latvian-Estonian border (up to 3 km distance), according to the Owl⁵ and Woodpecker⁶ conservation plans, there are priority areas for the Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*, critically endangered Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*, White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*, Middle Spotted Woodpecker *Leiopicus medius* and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*, as well as the territories to be inventoried for the Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*, Boreal Owl *Aegolius funereus* and Eurasian Pygmy Owl *Glaucidium passerinum*. One of the important causes of death of owls is collisions with vehicles, incl. trains. When assessing the impacts,

³ Available on the website: <https://registri.vvd.gov.lv/izsniegtie-tehniskie-noteikumi/>

⁴ Available on website: <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/207283-general-regulations-on-protection-and-use-of-specially-protected-nature-territories>

⁵ Available on website: <https://www.daba.gov.lv/lv/sugu-un-biotopu-aizsardzibas-plani;>
<https://www.daba.gov.lv/lv/media/5890/download?attachment>

⁶ Available on website: <https://www.daba.gov.lv/lv/sugu-un-biotopu-aizsardzibas-plani;>
<https://www.daba.gov.lv/lv/media/10646/download?attachment>

the location of these territories must be taken into account and research of owls and woodpeckers must be carried out in accordance with the methodologies mentioned in the species protection plans.

- In addition, it should be noted that an increase in noise pollution in the environment is expected during the modernization of the railway line. Sound pollution (noise) reduces the audibility of the sound of potential food objects or the audibility of the territory defence song, reducing the territory protection function, detection of food objects and the probability of successful hunting⁴ for various species of owls.
- In general, within the framework of the EIA, it is necessary to evaluate the impact of noise and vibrations on the nesting bird species, habitat loss and the increase of the edge effect, as well as the risks of collisions and the placement of bird flight paths in relation to the risks of collisions. For example, Lesser Spotted Eagle can search for food 3 km from the nesting site, these flights can cross the railway line. If the implementation of the Project increases the risks of collisions of Lesser Spotted Eagles or other birds, such as Black Storks, it is necessary to foresee effective mitigation measures.

AS "RB Rail" draws attention to the following issues relating to the possible impact of the proposed action:

- Solutions to address the impact of the proposed action on the Nature Reserve "Mērnīeku dumbrāji".
- Assessment of the possible impact of the Project on the micro reserve (with the code 2481) created for the protection of the Lesser Spotted Eagle *Clanga pomarine*.

The Limbaži District Municipality does not have proposals within the scope of its competence for possible aspects of transboundary impact, which should be assessed additionally for the Nature Reserve "Mērnīeku dumbrāji".

Looking forward to a constructive and effective bilateral cooperation in the transboundary context.

Enclosure:

The Environment State Bureau letter No 5-01/601 dated 19 July 2019.

Yours sincerely,

Indra Kramzaka (signature*) Deputy Director of Environment State Bureau of the Republic of Latvia

**Document is sign with secure electronical signature and contains a time stamp*

Ilze Lielvalode, phone: +371 67770813,
e-mail: ilze.lielvalode@vpvb.gov.lv