

# Annex A

## Conservation Objectives

Sites are listed in alphabetical order

AUGHNADARRAGH LOUGH SAC

UK0030318

# CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

## Document Details

Title	<i>Aughnadarragh Lough SAC Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>R. McKeown</i>
Approved By	<i>P. Corbett</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V2</i>
Next Review Date	<i>Nov 2020</i>
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## Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials
V1	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2	January 2015	Complete review	RMK

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

## **3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS**

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4. SITE INFORMATION

**COUNTY:** DOWN

**GRID REFERENCE:** IJ443594

**AREA:** 12.8 ha

### 5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

Aughnadarragh Lough is a complex site of high conservation value, with a variety of wetland habitats.

The area is particularly notable as one of the longest established colonies of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* in Northern Ireland. The species was first recorded in 1984, with records in most years since then, and annually since 1990. In 1999, 48 webs were recorded in August/September.

The area is an inter-drumlin wetland with a mosaic of notable vegetation communities fringing the mesotrophic lake. Of particular importance is the marginal mossy fen, which is extensive to the south and east behind the swamp and tall herb fen that fringes Aughnadarragh Lough. The mossy fen is predominantly base-rich in type, with pockets of poor acid fen around a small remnant pocket of raised bog in the south. Wet woodland and scrub fringe the lough to the east and north. Although not an ASSI qualifying feature, the open water community is also significant, being a reasonable example of a mesotrophic lake (NILS type VIII – open water extent 2.58 ha).

The range of vegetation types associated with the site makes it one of the most diverse wetlands in County Down.

Further details of the site are contained in the ASSI Citation and Views About Management statement, which are available on the NIEA website ([www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)).

## 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The boundaries use permanent man-made features whenever possible. However, along a few small sections such boundaries are absent and recognisable topographical or physical features such as break in slopes or tree line have been used. The boundary has been drawn to include the lake, all areas of fen, swamp and associated semi-natural habitats, including bog, scrub and woodland.

## 6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
Species	Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	B	48 webs were counted in 1999 18 webs were counted in 2004

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

**A** - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

**B** - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

**C** - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

**D** - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click [here](#) to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Aughnadarragh Lough SAC.

## 6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

### Aughnadarragh Lough ASSI

Feature Type	Feature	Size/extent/ population
Species	Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	
Habitat	Lowland Fen NVC types: M6 <i>Carex echinata</i> – <i>Sphagnum recurvum</i> mire, M5 <i>Carex rostrata</i> – <i>Sphagnum squarrosum</i> mire S27 (tall herb fen) <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> - <i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	4.40ha

Table 2. List of ASSI features.

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The **Conservation Objective** for this site is:

***To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly population to favourable condition.***

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

## 8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Global Status	Component Objectives
Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	B	Maintain (and if feasible enhance) population numbers and distribution*.
		Maintain (and if feasible enhance) the extent and quality of suitable Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat, particularly suitable rosettes of the larval food plant <i>Succisa pratensis</i>

## 9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Component Objective
Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Lowland Fen	Maintain (and if feasible expand) the extent of existing fen.
	Maintain and enhance fen species and community diversity, including the presence of notable species
	Maintain and enhance fen structure and hydrology
	Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the fen – i.e. mesotrophic lake, fringing swamp and fen, wet grassland, cut-over bog, scrub/woodland - and transitions.

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### Ownership

In total there are 8 individuals with ownership rights associated with the site.

### Adjoining Land Use

The land surrounding the area has been greatly modified by grazing and reseeded. The main adjacent agricultural uses outside the ASSI boundary are silage production and grazing.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Aughnadarragh Lough, or could affect it in the future. Although Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* is the qualifying SAC feature, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.**

### ***Grazing/Scrub Encroachment***

Grazing levels and stock type are crucial to the maintenance of both the Marsh Fritillary population and the fen vegetation. Overgrazing/poaching causes physical damage and may lead to changes in vegetation composition and structure. This can be particularly damaging to Marsh Fritillary populations, by reducing the size and abundance of *Succisa pratensis* plants and producing a short, even vegetation structure. For the same reason, sheep (except at low stocking levels) are generally not recommended because of their close and selective grazing habits.

Alternatively, the exclusion of grazing – particularly from the more species-rich communities – should also be avoided, as it is likely to result in the development of a rank and less diverse stand, and ultimately scrub encroachment. Many wetland species – including *Succisa pratensis* – would be lost.

The site is largely ungrazed at present resulting in an increase in rankness and scrub development around the fringes, threatening both the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly colony and the fen vegetation. Extensive cattle grazing appears to be the most suitable form of grazing (at around 0.1 to 0.4 LU/Ha/year). It is also reported that hardy ponies can be effective grazers.

**ACTION: Ensure that suitable grazing regimes are in place and monitor and control scrub encroachment onto good-quality fen habitat on the site.**

### ***Drainage***

The area occurs within an intensively farmed setting. Although reclamation for intensive agriculture is unlikely, past drainage activities could still be impacting on the site. Drying out would threaten both the Marsh Fritillary and the fen vegetation.

**ACTION: Ensure no further drainage takes place and liaise with Rivers Agency to ensure any drainage or watercourse maintenance work does not threaten the hydrology of the wetland.**

### ***Application of fertiliser/manure/slurry***

The fen vegetation and especially the lough are vulnerable to eutrophication from fertiliser drift and other diffuse sources of pollution from surrounding agricultural land.

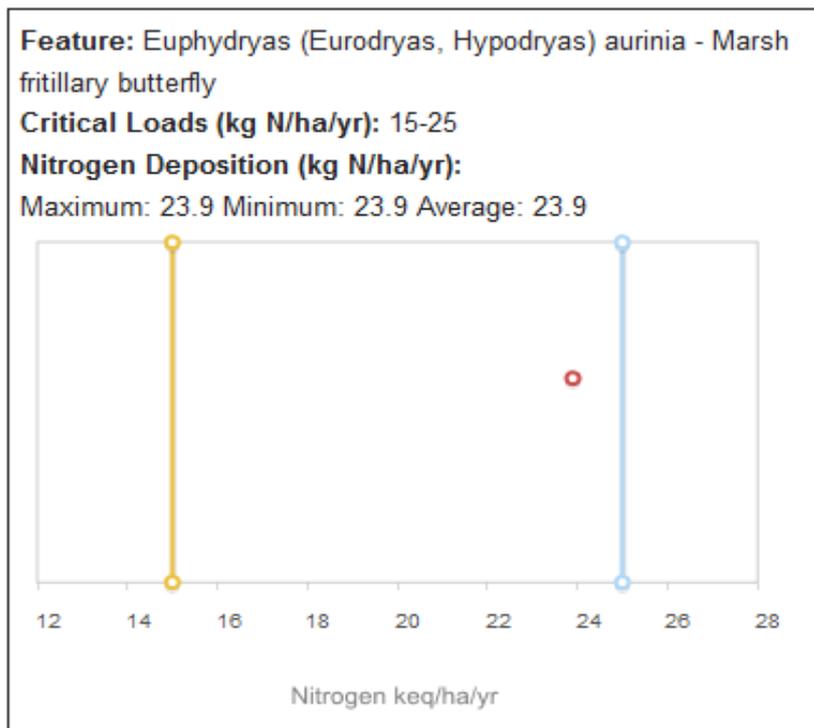
**ACTION:** To minimise the risk of nutrient enrichment and promote the adoption of nutrient management plans and good practice in slurry disposal, encourage landowners to leave “buffer” strips between the fen and adjoining land that has fertiliser applied.

***Fly-tipping*** – Both local fly-tipping and more extensive infilling have proved to be a threat to fens in this part of Northern Ireland. There have been some incidents of fly-tipping around the periphery of the area.

**ACTION:** If fly-tipping occurs remove the material as soon as possible from the area, to prevent the build-up of debris and to discourage further tipping.

### ***Nitrogen Deposition***

Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for habitats and species present on Aughnadarragh Lough SAC.



	Minimum CL
	Maximum CL
	Total Max Deposition

N.B. There is insufficient knowledge to make a judgment of the impact of excess nitrogen deposition on the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. If the habitat on which the species depends on this site (Moist and wet oligotrophic grasslands: *Molinia caerulea* meadows) exceeds the critical Nitrogen load, then there would be cause for concern.

(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- [www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk))

**ACTION: Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.**

#### ***Changes to surrounding land use***

Any changes in local land-use e.g. drainage, road improvements, afforestation, agricultural intensification and development, may be detrimental to the SAC.

**Action: Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.**

#### ***Climate Change***

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events.

**ACTION: When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered and appropriate changes made.**

## **12. MONITORING**

Monitoring of SACs takes place on using two monitoring techniques.

**Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM)** is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC Schedule. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. dumping, burning, turf cutting, grazing etc.) or will be comparatively slow (e.g. gradual degradation of the habitat).

These longer-term changes will be picked up by monitoring of the feature via **Site Condition Assessment** - this is carried out on a rolling basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland.

## **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

### **1. Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)**

All sub-sites to be checked periodically, particularly for any evidence of fly-tipping or infilling, signs of inappropriate grazing levels, evidence of drainage (including over-deepening of existing drains, but not their periodic maintenance) or signs of drying out (the fen area should be 'soft, bouncy and squelchy'), evidence of slurry or fertiliser application or signs of eutrophication from agricultural run-off or any other source. This SIM should be carried out once a year.

### **2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)**

Monitor the key attributes for each of the SAC selection features. This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annex I.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

### 13. REFERENCES

Cooper, A., McCann, T. and Rogers, D. (2009). Northern Ireland Countryside Survey 2007: Broad Habitat Change 1998-2007. Northern Ireland Environment Agency Research and Development Series No.09/06

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European Commission (2014). Establishing conservation measures for Natura 2000 Sites.

Hobson, R., Bourn, N. and Warren, M. 2002 Conserving the Marsh Fritillary in Britain *British Wildlife* August 2002 pp 404-411.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (2013). 3<sup>rd</sup> UK Habitats Directive Report.

Nelson, B. 2000 *The Distribution, Status and Habitat Preferences of the Marsh Fritillary Euphydryas aurinia in Northern Ireland*. Environment and Heritage Service.

## ANNEX I

### Feature 1 (SAC) – Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* - Global Status B

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Population Size	Number of larval webs present in at least one year in six	At least 50 larval webs should be present in at least one year in six  (unless unfavourable meteorological conditions during the flight period occur more often)	Larval webs are a much more reliable measure of the “health” of the colony than flying adults  Note: Figure for Wales is 200 webs per hectare.
* Habitat Extent	Extent of suitable fen and wet grassland	Maintain the extent of suitable fen and wet grassland at 2 ha	<b>Definition of suitable vegetation</b> - Stands of grassland where <i>Succisa pratensis</i> is present and scrub (>1 metre tall) covers no more than 10% of area .  Note: Figure for Wales is 10 hectares of suitable marshy grassland. To be assessed for Northern Ireland on completion of the Marsh fritillary Research Project.
	Extent of good Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat	Maintain the extent of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat at 2 ha <sup>2</sup>  Extent of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat needs to be assessed for Northern Ireland on completion of the Marsh fritillary Research Project.	<b>Definition of good Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat</b> - <i>Molinia</i> -dominated grassland where the vegetation height is within the range of 10 - 20 cm, and where <i>Succisa pratensis</i> is present within a 1 m radius of any point  Note: Figure for Wales is 4 hectares of good Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat.

* Habitat Mosaic	Extent of other semi-natural habitats	<p>Maintain the extent of other semi-natural habitats which contribute to Marsh Fritillary breeding success</p> <p><b>No loss in extent of other semi-natural habitats</b></p>	The comparatively large extent of the site, with the mosaic of different habitats, is believed to contribute to the success of the colony on the site
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# **BELFAST LOUGH OPEN WATER- SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

**UK9020290**

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

**Including conservation objectives for Inner Belfast Lough ASSI  
and Outer Belfast Lough ASSI**

### Document Details

<b>Title</b>	Belfast Lough Open Water SPA Conservation Objectives
<b>Prepared By</b>	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
<b>Approved By</b>	<i>Mark Wright</i>
<b>Date Effective From</b>	<i>01/04/2015</i>
<b>Version Number</b>	<i>V2</i>
<b>Next Review Date</b>	January 2020
<b>Contact</b>	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	29/09/2009	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### **Site relationship**

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA adjoins Belfast Lough SPA. It is also contiguous with Outer Ards SPA and the proposed East Coast Marine SPA.

The SPA also adjoins Belfast Lough Ramsar site.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Antrim and Down

G.R. J407 838

AREA: 5592.99 ha

NB – UK marine SPA programme has identified an important area for non-breeding Red-throated Diver in the Belfast Lough area. This area partly overlaps with the existing Belfast Lough Open Water SPA but also falls within the unclassified marine area eastwards of the existing Open Water SPA.

In addition a marine extension to the Copeland Islands SPA will be defined to reflect usage of the marine area by rafting Manx Shearwater.

The extent of the marine areas for non-breeding Red-throated Diver and Manx Shearwater rafting is will be available from NIEA.

These boundaries will be further revised once JNCC report on marine usage by tern species from existing SPA's designated for breeding terns is received.

THE AREA IS ALSO UTILISED BY FORAGING COMMON TERN DURING TRHE BREEDING SEASON, BIRDS ORIGINATING FROM THE BELFAST HARBOUR COLONY.

Conservation objectives will be revised as these issue progress

## **5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION**

Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons. The outer lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays.

The Belfast Lough open water area comprises the marine area below the mean low water mark. Seawards it extends to a notional boundary between the eastern limits on the north and south shores of the Outer Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest at Kilroot and Horse Rock respectively. The boundary towards the head of the lough is a notional line between Greencastle on northern shore and Holywood Bank on the southern shore.

Water depths within the site are generally between 1m and 10m. Shallow waters, less than 5m in depth, dominate the area with deeper waters confined to the central area of the lough, east of a line between Greenisland and Cultra.

### **5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE**

The SPA comprises the marine area of Belfast Lough. The landward boundary conjoins that of Belfast Lough SPA and Ramsar site. The outer boundary is a notional line taken between the eastern limits of Belfast Lough SPA that is from Kilroot on the northern shore to Horse Rock near Grey Point on the southern. The open water supports the main part of the internationally important wintering population of Great Crested Grebe. While the main roosting area for this species is in the Inner Lough area, the entire site is of importance for feeding and loafing activities. In addition these waters host nationally important wintering populations of a number of other species.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population (5 year average 1995-2000)	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1646	N/A	<b>1677 individuals – wintering</b>		
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Roosting /loafing sites <sup>1</sup>	locations of sites					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat and roost sites are not a selection feature but are a factor and more easily treated as if they were a feature.

### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

### 6.1. ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Note that as the site is entirely below the low water mark, none falls within the adjoining Inner Belfast Lough ASSI or Outer Belfast Lough ASSI. However the following populations are cited as of national importance and, through common practice, are assessed as part of both the Inner and Outer Belfast Lough ASSI's.

#### Marine populations of national importance

In addition, the site supports nationally important numbers of (all data are 5 year averages of individuals for period 1996/97 – 2000/01) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (407, 8.7 % of the Irish wintering population), Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (405, 5.8%), Scaup *Aythya marila* (233, 7.8%), Eider *Somateria mollissima* (1116, 55.8%), Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (287, 14.4%) and Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrato* (170, 8.5%). While utilising the open marine area, these species are treated as ASSI features against the Inner and Outer Belfast Lough ASSI area.

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8. BELFAST LOUGH OPEN WATER SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Great Crested Grebe	2148	1055	1174	325	780	1015	1096.4	<b>108.02</b>	Favourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

## SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

Feature	Component Objective
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	No significant decrease in population against national trends
Habitat extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roosting/loafing sites	Maintain all locations of sites.

Table 4. SPA Component objectives

### 9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

See Conservation Objectives for Belfast Lough SPA for ASSI (Inner and Outer Belfast Lough ASSIs) selection feature objectives. These may be relevant to the present site.

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

*Owner/Occupier's* – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

Key landowners, leasees and other users within the SPA, relevant to the site management, include Crown Estate Commissioners, local Councils (Belfast, Ards, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim), Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Fisheries Division and shellfish operators, together with the many commercial shipping operators. There may be conflicts of interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

Consideration must also be given to all land and sea based activities which have a bearing on site quality. This includes activities influencing water quality, ecological communities and disturbance.

Adjacent commercial operations which may impact upon the SPA include BP Oil, AES (Kilroot Power Station) and Dargan Road Landfill site. Kilroot Power Station located adjacent to Belfast Lough Open Water SPA is a Part A Process under the Industrial Pollution Control Order. Additionally sewage discharge points from Duncrue Street and Kinnegar Sewage Treatment Works may impact upon the site. A range of smaller established discharge points are present elsewhere around the site boundary together with the major discharge point at Brigg's Rocks (Groomsport) and the sewage sludge disposal site NE of the Copeland Islands.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES

The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Belfast Lough SPA, or could affect it in the future. Factors affecting the features within the adjoining ASSI are also considered.

### Generic site/feature issues

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
2	Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural littoral and sub-littoral communities through seeding, tray/trestle cultivation, dredging/control of pest species. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.	Much of Inner Belfast Lough has active licences for shellfish production.	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license applications individually. Current extent of licences may significantly alter seabed conditions. Consider the collective impact.
6	Boating activity – commercial	Disturbance and potential for impact from high-speed liners.	Major shipping channel. This is a long-established activity	Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Consider the collective impact.
7	Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	Sailing clubs at Carrickfergus, Whiteabbey, Holywood and Cultra. Additional slipways and quays.	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the

				collective impact.
12	Dredging	Generally only an issue in relation to commercial shipping channels. Issues include disturbance, remobilisation of contaminated sediment and spoil dumping zones.	Ongoing capital dredging programme maintains shipping channel. Established ongoing maintenance programme.	Liaise with port authority and Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent ‘competition’ for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Most commercial activity related to aquaculture. Recreational fishing not deemed to be a problem.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
15	Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Loss of habitats through development, changes in coastal processes. Loss of inter-tidal habitat may impact on system ecology and hence the selection feature.	There has been extensive loss of inter-tidal habitat historically. Inner lough mudflats particularly vulnerable.	Assess planning applications. Monitor using aerial photography.
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Ongoing and further planned harbour developments will reduce open water area. Probably insignificant.	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
17	Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality, invasive species or changes in coastal processes.	Historically impacted by industrial and sewerage effluent.	Assess planning applications. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Historically impacted by industrial and sewerage effluent. Vulnerable to pollution incidents from both industry and shipping.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
20	Roosting and loafing areas	An essential component of sites hosting waterfowl. Inappropriate development of or change in use of critical areas may adversely impact on the sites carrying capacity.	Localities should be mapped.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Not evident but given nature of the site, could be an issue through commercial shipping and aquaculture.	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration	Open water has been heavily used for recreational activities over long timescale.	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties.

			Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, wildfowling, walkers, dogs etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations	
25	Research activities.	To date targeted work has been land-based e.g. population census. A range of marine based activities are ongoing in relation to water quality, commercial shellfish and benthic communities.		All research activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. If not directed at waterfowl, the latter must be considered. Liaise with relevant research bodies
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Main considerations are historical reclamation, especially along the north shore and Sydenham areas, together with widespread coastal engineering works and ongoing development within the Belfast harbour area. Sediment responses may be expected. Changes in water quality have led to an expansion of mussel beds, in turn altering system behaviour. Expanding aquaculture represents an alteration to substrate. System changes in relation to past high speed ferries have been suggested.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.

Table 3. List of site/feature management issues

## 12. MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA objectives. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial

photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

## **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## **12.2. ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.
2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.

3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

### 13. SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Great Crested Grebe	Stable	Increasing	Moderate Fluctuation	Increasing-Stable	Stable circa 1990 in UK.

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Wintering waterfowl

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = Optional factors – these can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
*Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

### Non-avian factors

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Roosting/loafing sites	Location of roosting/loafing sites	Maintain all locations of sites.	Map site locations.

# **BELFAST LOUGH - SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

**UK9020101**

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

**Including conservation objectives for Inner Belfast Lough  
ASSI and Outer Belfast Lough ASSI**

### Document Details

Title	Belfast Lough SPA Conservation Objectives
Prepared By	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
Approved By	<i>Mark Wright</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V3</i>
Next Review Date	January 2020
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	05/08/1998	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### **Site relationship**

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA adjoins Belfast Lough Open Water SPA. It is also contiguous with Outer Ards SPA and the proposed East Coast Marine SPA.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Antrim and Down

G.R. J353 783

AREA: 432.14 ha.

Inner Belfast Lough ASSI

Outer Belfast Lough ASSI

## 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

The site comprises the sea lough of Belfast Lough. A range of inter-tidal habitats are present including extensive mud and sand flats, mussel beds, boulder shores and rock platforms. Adjoining habitat includes beaches and limited maritime heath and grasslands notably on the outer southern shore.

### 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The SPA comprises most of Inner and all of Outer Belfast Lough ASSI and is coincident with the Ramsar boundary. All inter-tidal habitat is included together with any adjoining natural or semi-natural habitat. The outer boundary on the northern shore is the limit of wide sediment dominated shore (east of Kilroot the inter-tidal zone is generally narrow and typically boulder dominated). On the southern shore, it is the general limit of rock platform interspersed with mud and sand dominated embayments (east of Horse Rock typically alternates between broad sand beaches with intervening rock shores). Also included is the important brackish lagoon at the Harbour Estate (D2), together with the tidal channel at Dargan Road. All these areas are utilised by Redshank. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated. The boundary differs from the Inner Belfast Lough ASSI with the following areas within the ASSI excluded from the SPA

- Victoria Park – formerly tidal but now of limited importance
- Reduced section of Dargan Channel – limited to inter-tidal area only, excluding developed land.
- Inter-tidal area on lands north of Herdman Channel – developed for industry
- Inter-tidal area on lands north of Musgrave Channel – developed for industry
- Former lagoon, D3, in Belfast Harbour Estate - infilled

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population (5 year average 1995-2000)	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Redshank wintering population <sup>a</sup>	2266		2466	2466	2010 (1993/4-1997/98)
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1646		Not listed	1385	1015 (1993/4-1997/98)
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Roost site locations					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat is not a selection feature but is a factor and is more easily treated as if it were a feature. Feature species are fully dependant on such habitats

## NB Great Crested Grebe population now attributed to Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

### 6.1. ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type (i.e. habitat, species or earth science)	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop'	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Habitat	Maritime cliffs and slope (Outer Belfast Lough ASSI)			
Species	Invertebrate assemblage			
Species	Turnstone wintering population		614	503 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Cormorant wintering population			276 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Shelduck wintering population		589	278 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Mallard wintering population			321 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Scaup wintering population			29 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Eider wintering population			391 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Goldeneye wintering population			231 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Red-breasted Merganser wintering population			136 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Oystercatcher wintering population		6584	4782 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Ringed Plover wintering population			93 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Lapwing wintering population			1770 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Knot wintering population			56 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Dunlin wintering population		1440	742 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Black-tailed Godwit wintering population		433	135 (1989/90-1995/96)
Species	Curlew wintering population		1271	871 (1989/90-1995/96)
Earth Science	Cultra – Craigavad Carboniferous stratigraphy (Outer Belfast Lough ASSI)			
Earth Science	Grey Point - Horse Rock Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy (Outer Belfast Lough ASSI)			

Earth Science	Cultra Permian stratigraphy (Outer Belfast Lough ASSI)			
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Table 2. List of ASSI features, additional to those that form all or part of SPA selection features. These will be referred to in ANNEX II.

## 7 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objective for this site is:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each SPA feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8 BELFAST LOUGH SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Redshank	1163	1381	1837	1331	771	2010	1296.6	<b>64.51</b>	Unfavourable

Species	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Great Crested Grebe	2148	1055	1174	325	780	1015	1096.4	<b>108.02</b>	Favourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

Feature	Component Objective
Redshank wintering population	As above
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As above
Habitat extent	To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species (X ha intertidal area), subject to natural processes
Habitat extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roost sites	Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts

Table 3. SPA Component objectives

### 9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

Feature	Component Objective
Maritime cliffs and slope (Outer Belfast Lough ASSI)	To maintain or extend, as appropriate, the area of the coastal habitat mosaic subject to natural processes
Invertebrate assemblage	To be finalised
Turnstone wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Cormorant wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Shelduck wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Mallard wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Scaup wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Eider wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Goldeneye wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Red-breasted Merganser wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Oystercatcher wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Ringed Plover wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Lapwing wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Knot wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Dunlin wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Black-tailed Godwit wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Curlew wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Cultra - Craigavad Carboniferous stratigraphy	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Grey Point - Horse Rock Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Cultra Permian stratigraphy	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes

Table 4. ASSI Component objectives

## 10 MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

**See also Views About Management for relevant ASSIs**

*Owner/Occupier's* – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

Key landowners and leasees within the SPA, relevant to the site management, include Crown Estate Commissioners, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, NIEA, the following council areas (Belfast, Ards, Antrim and Newtownabbey, Mid and East Antrim), Belfast City Airport, RSPB and Private Individuals. There may be conflicts of interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

Positive management within the site include the creation of two new lagoons north east of the Dargan Road Tip by Belfast Council. Additionally NIEA lease D2 from Belfast Harbour Commissioners which is managed by RSPB. RSPB are also involved in the management of Whitehouse Pools which are owned by Antrim and Newtownabbey Council.

Adjacent commercial operations which may impact upon the SPA include BP Oil, AES (Kilroot Power Station) and Dargan Road Refuse Tip. Kilroot Power Station located adjacent to Belfast Lough SPA is a Part A Process under the Industrial Pollution Control Order. Additionally sewage discharge points from Duncrue Street and Kinnegar Sewage Treatment Works may impact upon the site.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES

*Notifiable Operations* - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the schedule could affect the site. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Belfast Lough SPA, or could affect it in the future. Although, features 1, 2, 3, 4 etc, are the qualifying SPA features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**Generic site/feature issues – includes activities relating to both Belfast Lough and Belfast Lough Open Water SPAs**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat/comments</b>	<b>Local considerations</b>	<b>Action</b>
Adjoining habitat	Particularly important for swans and geese as well as providing high tide roost locations. Significant changes in land management and disturbance are key considerations. Such areas lie without the site making effective management of developments other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Most adjoining habitat utilised by birds other than as roost sites, comprises managed amenity grass. This provides important additional feeding opportunities for selected wader species but would not merit any formal designation.	Assess importance of adjoining and distant playing grounds, fields and other feeding areas. Assess impacts from development.
Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural littoral and sub-littoral communities through seeding, tray/trestle cultivation, dredging/control of pest species. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.	Much of Inner Belfast Lough has active licences for shellfish production.	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license applications individually. Current extent of licences may significantly alter seabed conditions. Consider the collective impact.
Bait digging – commercial or ‘recreational’ and shellfish gathering.	Disturbance and impact on sediment and invertebrate fauna – may be positive through making deeper prey items available on surface. Shellfish gathering represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass. Generally unregulated.	Appears to be organised on a commercial basis and is widespread.	Monitor scale of activity. Consider the collective impact.
Boating activity – commercial	Disturbance and potential for impact from high-speed liners.	Major shipping channel plus cross-lough activity imminent. The former is long-established.	Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Need to assess new trans-lough impact. Consider the collective impact.
Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	Sailing clubs at Carrickfergus, Whiteabbey, Holywood and Cultra. Additional slipways and quays.	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.
Coastal protection schemes	Where there is no history of this, it impacts on natural beach systems with loss of habitat.	Much of north and inner shores are heavily engineered. Balance in natural rock outcrop. No ongoing coastal erosion problems noted.	Liaise with Planning Service and other parties with an involvement in coastal management.
Dredging	Generally only an issue in relation to commercial shipping	Major capital dredging programme	Liaise with port authority and Environmental

	channels. Issues include disturbance, remobilisation of contaminated sediment and spoil dumping zones.	ongoing. Established ongoing maintenance programme.	Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents.
Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent ‘competition’ for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Most commercial activity related to aquaculture. Recreational fishing not deemed to be a problem.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Loss of habitats through development, changes in coastal processes. Loss of inter-tidal habitat is a critical issue as this is the feeding zone for the majority (numbers and species) of birds.	There has been extensive loss of inter-tidal habitat historically. Inner lough mudflats particularly vulnerable.	Assess planning applications. Monitor using aerial photography.
Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Ongoing and further planned harbour developments will reduce open water area. Probably insignificant.	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality, invasive species or changes in coastal processes.	Historically impacted by industrial and sewerage effluent.	Assess planning applications. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Historically impacted by industrial and sewerage effluent. Vulnerable to pollution incidents from both industry and shipping.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
High tide roosts	An essential component of sites hosting waders. Development of adjoining ground or actual traditional roost localities may adversely impact on the sites carrying capacity. Many such sites lie without the site making effective management of developments, other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Localities should be mapped. Loss of wader roost sites within the Inner Lough has been notable.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Not evident but given nature of the site, could be an issue through commercial shipping and aquaculture.	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration although vehicle access may also lead to beach compaction and impacts on beachhead habitats.	Shoreline has been heavily used for recreational activities over long timescale. Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g.	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties.

		boating, wildfowlers, walkers, dogs etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations impacting on both feeding (inter-tidal) and roosting birds	
Research activities.	Census and ringing activities especially have the potential to impact on bird populations, particularly at breeding sites.	Past cannon netting has occurred with ongoing high and low tide WEBS counts.	Census and ringing activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. In case of ringers, appropriate license must be held.
System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Main considerations are historical reclamation, especially along the north shore and Sydenham areas, together with widespread coastal engineering works and ongoing development within the Belfast harbour area. Sediment responses may be expected. Changes in water quality have led to an expansion of mussel beds, in turn altering system behaviour. Expanding aquaculture represents an alteration to substrate.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.
Wildfowling	Has direct effect through bag sizes/bag species and wider disturbance issue. Issue of regulated (through recognised shooting clubs) and ad hoc shooters. Lead shot on grazing lands.	Very limited shooting occurs off the north foreshore dump – presumably ad hoc.	Liaise with Belfast Council who control access to dump, if this is felt to be a problem.

Table 5. List of site/feature management issues

## **12. MONITORING**

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA/ASSI schedule. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

### **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

### **12.2. ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.
2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

### **13. SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS**

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering

populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Republic Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

Updated information on site, regional, national and international population trends for feature species will be contained in the most recent SPA site condition assessment report.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Redshank	Stable	Fluctuating-Incr	Stable	Stable-Fluctuating	
Great Crested Grebe	Stable	Increasing	Moderate Fluctuatid	Increasing-Stable	Stable circa 1990 in UK.

References (to be completed)

Stroud, DA, Chambers, D, Cook, S, Buxton, N, Fraser, B, Clement, P, Lewis, P, McLean, I, Baker, H & Whitehead, S (eds). 2001. *The UK SPA network: its scope and content* JNCC, Peterborough.

Way, L.S., Grice, P., MacKay, A., Galbraith, C.A., Stroud, D.A. & Pienkowski, M.W. 1993. Ireland's internationally important bird sites: a review of sites for the EC Special Protection Area network. JNCC, Peterborough, 231 pp.

The Wetland Bird Survey: Wildfowl and Wader Counts. BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC. Various years.

Wildfowl and Wader Counts, WWT and BTO. Various years.

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Wintering waterfowl

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = Optional factors – these can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
*Redshank wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

### Non-avian factors

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Habitat extent	Extent of other habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures where this would lead to different usage by notified species.
# Roost sites	Location of roost sites	Maintain all locations of roost sites.	Map roost site locations. Visit once every reporting cycle to ensure sites are available

## ANNEX II

### Feature (ASSI)

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = Optional factors – these can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
<b>Maritime cliffs and slopes</b>			
*Morphological naturalness (extent, mobility and physical structure)	Ensure that any loss in extent and change in system dynamics is only due to natural processes	No human induced developments impacting on the natural system or constraining it. Maintain the range of physical conditions arising from variation in geology and geomorphology, profile, stability, degree of maritime exposure, drainage, aspect, geographical location and history of management.	Impossible to precisely measure extent of each NVC type, many are represented. The detailed fluxes between communities which is likely to happen is beyond the scope of condition assessment.
Sward Structure:	Litter in a more or less continuous layer, distributed either in patches or in one larger area. This dense thatch-like material. Estimate % in 2x2.	<10%	Outside target indicates insufficient grazing. (See comments on grazing below)
Sward Structure:	Bare ground or sand <b>not rock</b> extent, noticeable without disturbing the vegetation.	<5%	Bare patches are the natural result of localised herbivore activity especially rabbit burrows. Such areas provide niche for more ruderal species.
Sward Composition:	Grass:Herb ratio	40 - 90% herbs	
*Vegetation –maritime rock crevice and cliff ledge communities.	At least 4 of the species below recorded as occasional: <b>Armeria maritima, Silene vulgaris maritima, Festuca rubra,</b>	Maintain maritime rock- crevice and cliff- ledge communities – i.e. MC1c	Individual sites will exhibit different patterns and range of of vegetation types depending on site characteristics Surveys may be needed to establish the full range for

(Where present on a site)	Spargularia rupicola, S. maritima, Daucus carota, <b>Plantago coronopus, P. maritima</b> , Sedum anglicum and <b>orange Xanthoria lichens</b>	and MC5c.	each site.
*Vegetation composition sea-bird cliff communities. (Where present on a site)	At least 3 of the species below recorded as occasional: Festuca rubra, Matricaria maritima, Beta vulgaris maritima, Atriplex prostrata, Stellaria media, Rumex acetosa, Holcus lanatus and Atriplex hastata	Maintain range of sea-bird cliff communities - i.e. MC6 and MC7.	Individual sites will exhibit different patterns and range of vegetation types depending on site characteristics. Surveys may be needed to establish the full range for each site.
*Vegetation composition maritime grassland communities. (Where present on a site)	At least 6 of the species below recorded as occasional: Alchemilla spp, Carex flacca, Small sedge spp, Campanula rotundifolia, Primula vulgaris, Euphrasia vulgaris, Thymus polytrichus, Galium verum, Ranunculus bulbosus, Linum catharticum, Koeleria macrantha, Lotus corniculatus, Polygala sp, Potentilla erecta, Succisa pratensis, Pilosella officinalis, Veronica officinalis.	Maintain range of maritime grassland communities – i.e. MC8, MC9a, MC9c, MC9d, MC9e (including non-maritime forms of these).	Individual sites will exhibit different patterns and range of vegetation types depending on site size, history, substrate and patterns of human use. Surveys may be needed to establish the full range for each site.
*Vegetation composition-maritime heath communities. (Where present on a site)	At least 3 of the species below recorded as occasional: Festuca ovina, Plantago maritima, Lotus corniculatus, Scilla verna, Calluna vulgaris, Thymus praecox, Potentilla erecta.  Record species composition at selected sample points across site.	Maintain range of maritime heath communities – i.e. H7a and b and H10d	Maritime heaths can show some affinities with lowland heaths in relation to quality. Reference should be made to the appropriate guidance for dry heaths, taking into account the maritime influence and the effects of exposure and silt deposition as factors affecting growth rates and succession in.
*Vegetation of soft cliffs and other communities. (Where present on a site)	Ensure that the general distribution of communities is broadly maintained	Maintain range of transitions and other communities – the area is notable for the significant range of NVC communities.	Aerial photographs will pick up spread of scrub and bracken. The NVC survey is unlikely to be repeated but revisit of condition assessment points will pick up changes. This is probably a site where more detailed work should also be carried out.
Vegetation Structure	Sward height 4 – 12 cm during summer	Maintain short sward in areas of	<b>It is clear from discussion with the site manager for</b>

	(July/August) over 65% of the area	species-rich vegetation * This to be assessed in conjunction with other short, species-rich grassland communities, including SD8	Killard, that over the past number of years due to a variety of mitigating circumstances including the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001, that the winter grazing hasn't been as consistent as usual. This has already been rectified and the 2003/04 winter grazing of the site is already complete at the time of writing (Jan 04).
Vegetation negative indicators	Ensure that the more species-rich elements of the cliff vegetation are maintained  Aerial photography to record maximum extent of scrub, bracken, etc.	No further increase in bracken, scrub, rank grasses, ruderal species (Thistles, Nettle etc).	Changes in the extent and cover of invasive species usually indicate a change in conditions on a site, often as a result of anthropogenic activities which may promote rapid expansion or increase in cover. These are often initiated by changes in management. Some tall ruderal communities may be present naturally on a cliff site.
<b>Invertebrates</b>			
Invertebrate assemblage	To be finalised	To be finalised	To be finalised
<b>Ornithological</b>			
Turnstone wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Cormorant wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Shelduck wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

Mallard wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Scaup wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Eider wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Goldeneye wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Red-breasted Merganser wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Oystercatcher wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

Ringed Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Lapwing wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Knot wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Dunlin wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Black-tailed Godwit wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Curlew wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
<b>Earth Science</b>			

Cultra - Craigavad Carboniferous stratigraphy		Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes	
Grey Point - Horse Rock Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy		Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes	
Cultra Permian stratigraphy		Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes	

# **EAST COAST MARINE - SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

**UK9020320**

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

### Document Details

Title	East Coast Marine SPA Conservation Objectives
Prepared By	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
Approved By	<i>Mark Wright</i>
Date Effective From	
Version Number	<i>V1</i>
Next Review Date	January 2020
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	April 2015	Draft document	IE	CO for proposed SPA

### **Site relationship**

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

The boundary adjoins the following existing Special Protection Areas –

Larne Lough SPA  
Belfast Lough SPA  
Outer Ards SPA  
Copeland Islands SPA  
Strangford Lough SPA

It also subsumes the existing Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

The boundary also adjoins the following existing Ramsar sites –

Larne Lough Ramsar  
Belfast Lough Ramsar  
Outer Ards Ramsar  
Strangford Lough Ramsar

See also [Boundary Rationale](#)

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

Council bodies - marine waters adjoining:

Belfast City Council  
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
Ards and North Down Borough Council  
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

**County:** adjoining County Antrim and County Down

*Area:* 96668.34 Ha

*Geographic co-ordinates:*

54.03.00 W  
06.07.00 N

The principal interests are as follows – marine area used by -

- Wintering populations of Red-throated Diver and Eider Duck
- Rafting Manx Shearwater originating from an adjoining colony
- Foraging Sandwich, Common and Arctic Tern originating from adjoining tern colonies

## 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

The East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine Special Protection Area includes coastal and near shore waters from Ringfad near Carnlough, Co. Antrim in the north, the marine area of Larne Lough, the marine area of Belfast Lough, waters around the Copeland Islands and offshore of the Ards Peninsula to Cloghan Head, near Ardglass in the south.

The SPA covers a diverse range of seabed habitats, from extensive coastal fringing reefs of various lithologies to the fine silt of inner Belfast Lough.

To the north of Belfast Lough, fringing reef is notable, with substantial areas of coarse sediments and boulders and cobbles offshore from Islandmagee. Further north, towards Ballygally and Carnlough, the glacial till dominates the seabed but also with important areas harbour maerl, a coralline algae (mostly *Phymatolithon calcareum*), known for its associated high biodiversity and for acting as a scallop nursery ground. Rippled sands and gravels are also notable between the relic drowned drumlins that are present off much of the ‘Glens of Antrim’ coastline. Bedrock outcrops with near vertical sides are found at the Maidens; these reefs and the surrounding sand banks are form part of the designated Maidens SAC.

Within Belfast Lough muds grade into muddy sands toward the outer Lough, with extensive areas of cobbles and shell debris overlying the muddy sand. Part of the muddy sand in the outer Lough is bioturbated by Dublin Bay prawn (*Nephrops norvegicus*), and also harbour the Seapen *Virgularia mirabilis*. Topographically complex reef areas surround the Copeland Islands.

To the south of Belfast Lough, the seabed off the Ards Peninsula is dominated by stony reef and mixed sands and gravels (often with a notable silt content). The gravelly sands support commercially harvestable seed mussel in geographically limited areas (affected by local hydrography), and further offshore support a scallop fishery (*Pecten maximus*). Mobile bedforms, such as extensive sand waves and banks, are found at Rigg Bank and extending south of the bank.

Offshore of Belfast Lough and off the Maidens Islands the seabed within the site reaches a depth of 125m.

### 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The SPA represents a series of merged marine areas defined by a number of studies into use made of the marine area along the East Coast by selected species of waterbird and seabird.

Targeted survey work has identified an important area for non-breeding Red-throated Diver in the Belfast Lough area.

In addition a marine extension to the Copeland Islands SPA has been defined to reflect usage of the marine area by rafting Manx Shearwater originating from the Copeland colony.

Finally, a number of marine areas have been identified as important for a range of foraging tern species originating from adjoining tern colonies designated as part of the following existing Special Protection Areas -

Larne Lough SPA  
 Belfast Lough SPA  
 Outer Ards SPA  
 Copeland Islands SPA  
 Strangford Lough SPA

All of the above marine areas overlap to a greater or lesser extent. The SPA boundary subsumes all of these. In addition the SPA boundary subsumes the existing Belfast Lough Open Water SPA.

The landward boundary for this marine area is the **MEAN LOW WATER MARK**.

In addition to the designation map which shows the extent of the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine Special Protection Area, maps are also included for information purposes showing the marine areas used by each of the important bird populations.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1646 individuals (5 year average 1995-2000)	N/A	1677 individuals – wintering		
Species	Red-throated Diver	142 individuals 5 year mean (2006/07 – 2008/08)		142 individuals 5 year mean (2006/07 – 2008/08)		
Species	Sandwich Tern	1656 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		1656 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		
Species	Common Tern	908 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		908 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		
Species	Arctic Tern	1351 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		1351 pairs Breeding 5 year mean (2010 - 2014)		
Species	Manx Shearwater	4800 pairs Breeding 2000–2002				
Species	Eider Duck	3126 individuals				

		Wintering 5 year mean (2010/11 – 2014/15)				
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Roosting /loafing sites <sup>1</sup>	locations of sites					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat and roost sites are not a selection feature but are a factor and more easily treated as if they were a feature.

**Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs**

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

**6.1. ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES**

Note that as the site is entirely below the low water mark, none falls within the adjoining ASSI designations. As such there are no additional ASSI features but see section 9.1.

**7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

**8. EAST COAST (NORTHERN IRELAND) MARINE SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014**

Refer to the individual adjoining SPA Condition Assessments for further information – these are contained in the most recent conservation objectives for each of the sites.

Relevant sites are

- Larne Lough SPA
- Belfast Lough SPA
- Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
- Outer Ards SPA
- Copeland Islands SPA
- Strangford Lough SPA

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

## SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

Feature	Component Objective
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As above
Red-throated Diver wintering population	As above
Sandwich Tern breeding season	As above
Common Tern breeding season	As above
Arctic Tern breeding season	As above
Manx Shearwater breeding season	As above
Eider Duck wintering population	As above
Habitat extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roosting/loafing sites	Maintain all locations of sites.

Table 4. SPA Component objectives

### 9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

See Conservation Objectives for adjoining SPAs for selection feature objectives. These may be relevant to the present site. Relevant sites are -

Larne Lough SPA

Belfast Lough SPA

Outer Ards SPA

Copeland Islands SPA

Strangford Lough SPA

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

**Owner/Occupier's** – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

Key landowners, leasees and other users within the SPA, relevant to the site management, include Crown Estate Commissioners, local Councils (Belfast City Council, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, Ards and North Down District Council, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council), Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Fisheries Division and shellfish operators, together with commercial shipping operators. There may be conflicts of interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

Consideration must also be given to all land and sea based activities which have a bearing on site quality. This includes activities influencing water quality, ecological communities and disturbance.

There are a large number of significant commercial operations adjoining the marine area which may impact upon the SPA. Many of these are regulated through planning, relevant discharge and marine licensing arrangements. There is no evidence at present that any of these activities are having an adverse impact on the site features.

An assessment of the site boundary against commercial fisheries activity suggests that activity within the site tends to be inshore at Islandmagee, around the Copeland Islands, along the Outer Ards and towards the southern section of the site. Given that these sites are already important and of sufficient quality to support the birds, it may be reasonable to assume that current fishing in many of these areas is largely compatible with the birds' interest. However in cases where a type and level of fishing activity might impact upon the birds, a review may be needed so that authorities can establish the extent to which the fishing activities do influence the birds' interests. A fuller assessment of the distribution of fishing activities and the relationship between commercial stocks and site feature prey requirements will be undertaken.

## **11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES**

The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting the East Coast (Northern Ireland) Marine SPA, or could affect it in the future. Factors affecting the features within the adjoining ASSI are also considered.

### **Generic site/feature issues**

<b>No</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Threat/comments</b>	<b>Local considerations</b>	<b>Action</b>
2	Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural sub-littoral communities through seeding, maintenance, harvesting,	Licensed aquaculture areas in Larne Lough and Belfast Lough especially.	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license applications individually. Current extent of licences may significantly alter seabed

		dredging/control of pest species. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.		conditions. Consider the collective impact.
6	Boating- shipping activity – commercial	Disturbance and potential for impact from high-speed shipping.	Major port facility at Larne and shipping channel at Larne Lough and Belfast Lough. These are long-established activities. Significant commercial fisheries activity at Portavogie. Smaller commercial harbours at Carnlough, Glenarm, Ballylumford, Carrickfergus, Bangor, Donaghadee and Ballywalter.	Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Consider the collective impact.
7	Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	Sailing clubs and/or facilities at Carnlough, Glenarm, Larne, Magheramourne Carrickfergus, Holywood, Cultra, Donaghadee, Ballywalter. Additional slipways and quays.	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.
12	Dredging	Generally only an issue in relation to commercial shipping channels. Issues include disturbance to birds, disturbance to seabed, remobilisation of contaminated sediment and spoil dumping zones.	Ongoing capital dredging programme maintains shipping channel. Established ongoing maintenance programme.	Liaise with port authority and licensing bodies as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent ‘competition’ for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Most commercial activity related to aquaculture. Current position unclear but there is little or no overlap between commercial stock and tern prey species. Recreational fishing not deemed to be a problem.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Ongoing and further planned harbour developments will reduce open water area. Probably insignificant.	Assess planning and marine licensing applications. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Historically impacted by industrial and sewerage effluent. Vulnerable to pollution incidents from both industry and shipping.	Assess planning and marine licensing applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Not evident but given nature of the site, could be an issue through commercial shipping and aquaculture.	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
	Marine	Potential for disturbance and direct	No site related proposals at time	Assess planning and

	renewable energy developments	impact to terns in flight and actively feeding (diving)	of writing. Potential for impact from schemes elsewhere	marine licensing applications. To be addressed through HRA process.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration	Open water has been heavily used for recreational activities over long timescale. Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, wildfowling etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties.
25	Research activities.	To date targeted work has been land-based e.g. population census. A range of marine based activities are ongoing in relation to water quality, commercial shellfish and benthic communities.		All research activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. If not directed at waterfowl, the latter must be considered. Liaise with relevant research bodies
	Sand dredging - commercial	Not actively pursued in the NI marine environment but pressures to seek alternative sources to terrestrial/freshwater sites may make this potentially viable.	Potential to impact seabed habitat of importance to seabird prey species.	Liaise with commercial operators, planning and other regulatory authorities.
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Main considerations are historical reclamation together with widespread coastal engineering works and ongoing developments. Sediment responses may be expected. Changes in water quality have led to changes e.g. an expansion of mussel beds in Belfast Lough, in turn altering system behaviour. Expanding aquaculture represents an alteration to substrate.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.

Table 3. List of site/feature management issues

## 12. MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA objectives. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site

Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

## **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## **12.2. ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.
2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

### 13. SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

Table to be completed

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Great Crested Grebe					
Red-throated Diver wintering population					
Sandwich Tern breeding season					
Common Tern breeding season					
Arctic Tern breeding season					
Manx Shearwater breeding season					
Eider Duck wintering population					

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Wintering waterbirds

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = Optional factors – these can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
*Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Eider Duck wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Red-throated Diver wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends. WeBS methodologies have been shown to seriously underestimate Diver numbers. Species specific methodology to be employed. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

## Feature (SPA) – Breeding Seabirds

= primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Sandwich Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in breeding population against national trends	Ideally annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Common Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in breeding population against national trends	Ideally annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Arctic Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in breeding population against national trends	Ideally annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Manx Shearwater breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in breeding population against national trends	Survey delivery likely to be tied to national seabird census programme. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

Note that breeding seabird populations will be assessed at the 'source colonies'. Separate validation surveys may be required to assess utilisation of the marine area for foraging (tern species) and rafting (Manx Shearwater) behaviours. Further assessments e.g. of prey availability, water quality, impacts on seabed may also be necessary if inexplicable declines in breeding populations are recorded.

**Non-avian factors**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of marine habitats	Maintain the area of marine habitats used or potentially usable by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	To be addressed as part of wider marine monitoring programmes especially MSFD actions

EASTERN MOURNES SAC  
UK0016615

# CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

## Document Details

Title	<i>Eastern Mournes SAC Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>R. McKeown</i>
Approved By	<i>P. Corbett</i>
Date Effective From	<i>11/10/2017</i>
Version Number	<i>V2.1</i>
Next Review Date	Nov 2020
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@daera-ni.gov.uk">cdp@daera-ni.gov.uk</a>

## Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials
V1.0	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2.0	January 2015	Complete review	RMK
V2.0	01.04.2015	Effective date of Version 2.0	PC
V2.1	11.10.2017	Removed wording 'excluding recently burnt areas' from bare peat target in all relevant Annex tables	PMC

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

## **3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS**

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4. SITE INFORMATION

**COUNTY:** DOWN

**GRID REFERENCE:** IJ 330270

**AREA:** 7510 ha

### 5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

The Eastern Mourne consists of a compact range of mountains forming the highest ground in Northern Ireland. They are situated in the south-east of the Province in County Down, just west of Newcastle. Within the Mountain range, 12 peaks extend to over 600m, with Slieve Donard rising to 852m. The area is important geologically representing the largest outcrop of Tertiary granites in the British Isles covering some 150 sq. km. The Eastern Mourne host three distinct granite types with associated mineralogies.

The Eastern Mourne SAC has a unique combination of upland habitats and associated vegetation communities including the largest extent of European dry heaths in Northern Ireland. This is mostly of the *Calluna/Erica cinerea* type, but includes *Ulex gallii/Erica cinerea* dry heath on the lower slopes. The dominance of *Erica cinerea* is a notable feature of the area and characteristic of dry heath in the oceanic climate of more western parts of the UK. The area supports a number of other vegetation communities including wet heaths and blanket bog, montane heaths and grasslands on the highest summits and plant communities associated with the cliffs and scree.

Further details of the site are contained in the ASSI Citation and Views About Management statement, which are available on the NIEA website ([www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)).

## 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The boundary has been drawn to include all areas of dry, wet, upland and lowland heath communities together with associated semi-natural habitats in the Eastern Mourne region. The major valley of the White Water, a small river that runs from Deers Meadow south, divides the lower lying Western Mournes from the Eastern Mournes. The vegetation communities along the length of this valley are severely degraded such as areas adjacent to the Moyad Road that runs along the bottom of the valley. At the time of designation, the Western Mournes were seen as a separate entity from the Eastern Mournes. The heathland and blanket bog associated with the Western Mournes will be declared as an ASSI at a later date.

The boundary around the entire Eastern Mournes SAC is clearly defined as the edge of high quality, semi-natural heathland communities surrounded by severely degraded heathland communities, improved agricultural land and forestry. The boundaries are generally clearly defined as stone walls - marking a change in land ownership or along the edge of roads, rivers and streams; or fences - along the edge of forestry plantations and field boundaries. These forests have been planted on the lower slopes of the mountains and many of the fields have also been reclaimed from the lowland heath communities in recent years. The majority of boundaries are stock proof.

## 6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	European dry heaths	B	4680 ha
Habitat	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	B	889 ha
Habitat	Active blanket bogs	C	318 ha
Habitat	Alpine and boreal heaths	C	32.1 ha
Habitat	Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands	C	32.1 ha
Habitat	Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation	C	58.5 ha
Habitat	Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels	C	17.7 ha

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

**A** - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

**B** - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

**C** - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

**D** - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click [here](#) to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Eastern Mourne SAC.

## 6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

### Eastern Mourne ASSI

Feature type	Feature	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	Dry Heath	4680 ha
Habitat	Wet Heath	889 ha
Habitat	Blanket Bog	318 ha
Habitat	Montane Heath	64.2 ha
Habitat	Inland Rock	76.2 ha
Habitat	Oligotrophic lakes	4ha
Species	Higher Plant Assemblage	
Species	Notable assemblage of alpine fungi	
Species	Notable invertebrate assemblages of specialist montane species.	
Earth Science	<p>Tertiary Igneous series - Five sub-sites within the Eastern Mourne SAC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eagle Rock – Inland outcrops and streams</li> <li>• Bloody River – Coastal and river cliffs</li> <li>• Diamond Rocks - Inland outcrops and streams</li> <li>• Lindsay’s Leap - Inland outcrops and streams</li> <li>• Ben Crom - Inland outcrops and streams</li> </ul>	
Earth Science	Pleistocene – glacial erosional series. This comprises the assemblage of features including – corries, ice-plucked slopes, ice-smoothed walls, tors, glacial troughs and trimlines, debris fans and cones, streamlined bedrock, ice-shattered debris fields, meltwater channels.	
Earth Science	Pleistocene – glacial depositional series. This comprises the assemblage of features including moraines, dissected valley and drift terraces, boulder fields.	

Table 2. List of ASSI features.

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The *Conservation Objective* for this site is:

*To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the*

- European dry heaths
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*
- Active blanket bogs
- Alpine and boreal heaths
- Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands
- Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation
- Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels

*to favourable condition.*

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

## 8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Global Status	Component Objectives
European dry heath	B	Maintain the extent of existing European dry heath vegetation.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the European dry heath community types.
		Seek to expand the extent of the dry heath communities into degraded areas of species poor, dry acid grassland.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the dry heath.
		Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the SAC where there may be the potential for dry heath rehabilitation.
Northern Atlantic wet heath with <i>Erica tetralix</i> .	B	Maintain the extent of existing Northern Atlantic wet heath vegetation.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the existing wet heathland.
		Seek to expand the extent of the wet heath communities into degraded areas of species poor, wet acid grassland.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the Northern Atlantic wet heath.
		Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the SAC where there may be the potential for wet heath rehabilitation.
Active blanket bog	B	Maintain the extent of intact blanket bog and actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the blanket bog community types including the presence of notable species.
		Seek to expand the extent of actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation into degraded (non-active) areas of cutover bog.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the blanket bog.
		Maintain the hydrology of the intact blanket bog peat mass.
		Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the SAC where there may be the potential for blanket bog rehabilitation.

<b>Alpine and boreal heaths</b>	<b>C</b>	Maintain the extent of existing alpine and boreal heath vegetation.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the existing alpine and boreal heaths.
		Seek to expand the extent of the alpine and boreal heath communities into degraded areas of species poor acid grassland.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the alpine and boreal heaths.
<b>Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands</b>	<b>C</b>	Maintain the extent of existing siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the siliceous alpine and boreal grassland community types.
		Seek to expand the extent of the siliceous alpine and boreal grassland communities into degraded areas of species poor, dry acid grassland.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands.
<b>Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation</b>	<b>C</b>	Maintain the existing acid rock chasmophytic Vegetation.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the siliceous rocky slopes.
<b>Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels</b>	<b>C</b>	Maintain the extent of existing siliceous scree (partially vegetated siliceous scree).
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the siliceous scree community types.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats of conservation interest, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the siliceous scree.

## 9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Component Objective
Dry Heath	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Wet Heath	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Blanket Bog	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Montane Heath	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Inland Rock	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Oligotrophic Lakes	Maintain the extent of oligotrophic lakes and ponds – i.e. Blue and Binnian Loughs.
	Maintain the open water area of the lakes.
	Maintain the water chemistry and water levels – i.e. water poor in plant nutrients and levels not to fluctuate outside normal limits.
	Maintain characteristic aquatic vegetation
Higher plant assemblage	Maintain viable populations, and enhance where practicable the species comprising the rare plant assemblage. ( <i>Diphasiastrum alpinum</i> , <i>Salix herbace</i> , <i>Cryptogramma crista</i> , <i>Phegopteris connectilis</i> , <i>Carex bigelowii</i> , <i>Saxifraga stellaris</i> )
Notable assemblage of alpine fungi	To be finalised.
Notable invertebrate assemblage	Ensure that the populations of notable invertebrates are maintained within the Eastern Mourne SAC.
Tertiary igneous rocks	Maintain the extent of exposure at each of the five sub-sites that display nationally important exposures of Tertiary igneous rocks and access to them subject to natural processes.
Pleistocene – glacial erosional series	Maintain the position in the landscape of these features including access opportunity, viewlines and physical character subject to natural processes
Pleistocene – glacial depositional series.	Maintain the extent and physical integrity of these features subject to natural processes

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### Ownership

About 50% of the Eastern Mournes SAC (3,640 ha) is owned by Belfast Water Commissioners and this area of land is completely surrounded by the 'Mourne Wall' built between 1912 and 1920 to delimit their ownership. This area is often referred to as the high Eastern Mournes and acts as the catchment for the Ben Crom and Silent Valley Reservoirs. An additional eleven estates are located around the periphery of the high Eastern Mournes including the Annesley Estate, which is now the property of the National Trust. The remaining estates are privately owned and in multiple ownership with over 100 owners identified in the area in addition to a much greater number of graziers. Additional individuals also have shooting rights over the area.

The complex pattern of ownership and grazing rights together with the added complication of shooting rights makes a unified approach to site management more difficult.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Eastern Mournes, or could affect it in the future.

Although **European dry heaths, Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*, Active blanket bogs, Alpine and boreal heaths, Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands, Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation and Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels** are the qualifying SAC features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.**

### *Grazing*

Within the Eastern Mournes SAC, many of the mountain summits and lower slopes are heavily grazed by sheep. As a consequence, these heathland communities are degraded and in unfavourable condition. Overgrazing has been identified on all lower slopes outside NI Water Ownership. Within the Mourne Wall, the grazing pressure is somewhat lower, but overgrazing still does occur. The areas that have been most severely affected by over-grazing include the montane heaths and grasslands on the summits of Slieve Donard and Slieve Commedagh, along tracks and paths such as the Brandy Pad and on some of the lower slopes. NI Water has tried to exclude sheep grazing from all lands within the Mourne Wall in an attempt to prevent the bacteria *Cryptosporidium* from infecting the water

supply. However, they have not been able to maintain a no grazing policy due to illegal grazing by landowners.

Therefore, overgrazing is a consequence of a number of factors that are extremely difficult to control. These include grazing prescriptions which have been set too high for the Mourne region, illegal grazing (including winter grazing which is particularly damaging to Heather), lack of shepherding and the difficulties of monitoring sheep numbers over extensive areas of upland.

**ACTION: Establish a sustainable stocking density within each management unit of the Eastern Mournes SAC and ensure that set grazing prescriptions are strictly adhered to. Continue careful monitoring of the heathland communities to establish if the set grazing prescriptions are permitting the heathland communities to recover towards favourable condition.**

### *Burning*

Burning of the vegetation has taken place occasionally, with some areas of past burning being identifiable. Excessive burning will lead to the deterioration of all heathland communities. Within the Eastern Mournes, burning should only be carried out in exceptional circumstances.

**ACTION: Ensure that any burning within the SAC is carefully controlled and monitored.**

### *Scrub/Bracken Encroachment*

There are many small pockets of bracken associated with the lower slopes around the periphery of the Eastern Mournes SAC as well as localised pockets of bracken on some of the upper slopes. There is also some limited scrub development – mainly *Ulex europaeus* associated with areas of disturbance. Any further scrub or bracken encroachment into the heathland communities is undesirable.

**ACTION: Monitor further scrub/bracken encroachment (where it occurs) and take remedial action if required. Remove any invasive exotic species, such as Rhododendron as a matter of urgency.**

### *Water abstraction*

Within the Mourne Wall, the land is managed by NI Water for the purpose of water abstraction and supply. With growing water requirements within the Belfast area, there is constant pressure to increase supply.

**ACTION: Ensure that increased levels of water abstraction do not damage the heathland communities within the SAC. There may be a requirement to lay new water pipelines from the upper reservoirs down to Spelga Dam or Fofany Dam. If required, pipe laying should be carried out with the minimum disruption to the heathland communities.**

### *Fly-tipping*

There does not appear to be a serious dumping issue anywhere within the Eastern Mournes SAC.

**ACTION: If any dumping does occur, remove all evidence immediately to prevent any further incidences.**

### *Quarrying*

Historically quarrying within the Eastern Mournes has been very small scale and a number of mineral rights are held by private and state organisations in the area. There is currently no quarrying within the Mourne Wall, but there are two small scale operations presently in operation at Thomas' Mountain and Trassey Track.

**ACTION: There should be no quarrying within the Eastern Mournes SAC. The status of mineral rights within the site requires clarification in order to identify potential threats that they might have on the SAC features.**

### *Land reclamation*

Much of the lower *Ulex gallii* dry heaths have been lost to reclamation in recent years. The remaining *Ulex gallii* heath is an important component of the SAC. In addition some of the dry heaths further up-slope have also been reclaimed.

**ACTION: Ensure that there is no further reclamation of the lowland or upland heaths anywhere within the SAC.**

### *Recreation*

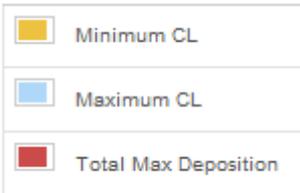
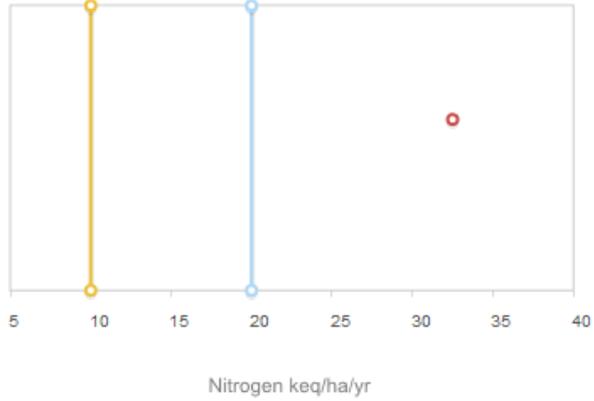
An increased interest in hill walking within the Northern Ireland population together with increased tourist activity in the Newcastle area, is beginning to put real pressure on the footpaths and surrounding vegetation within the Eastern Mournes. Ideally, a sustainable level of recreational activity should be established to ensure that there is no adverse affect on the heathland communities.

**ACTION: Ensure that all precautions are taken to minimise the impact of hill walking on upland paths throughout the Mourne Mountains. Footpath maintenance is of paramount importance and there is also a need to develop and promote paths in areas that are not highly sensitive to disturbance.**

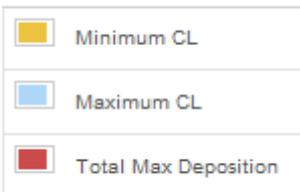
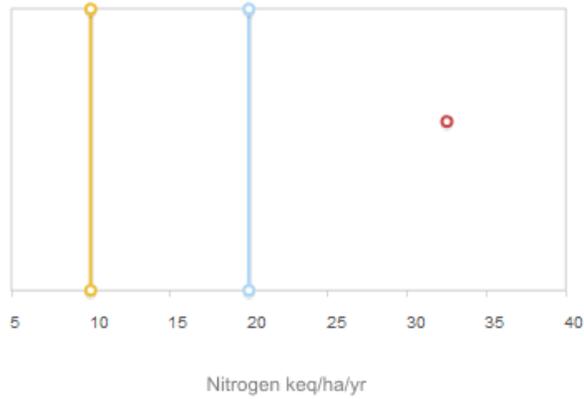
### *Nitrogen Deposition*

Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for habitats and species present on Eastern Mournes SAC.

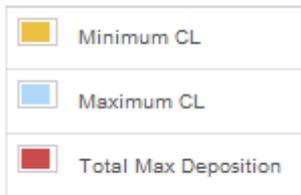
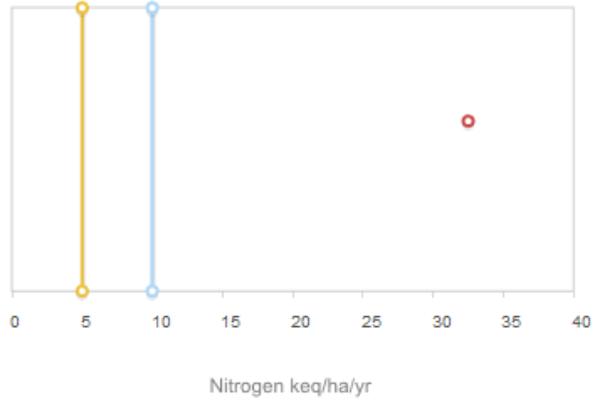
**Feature:** European dry heaths  
**Critical Load Class:** Dry heaths  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 10-20  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4



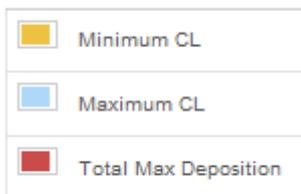
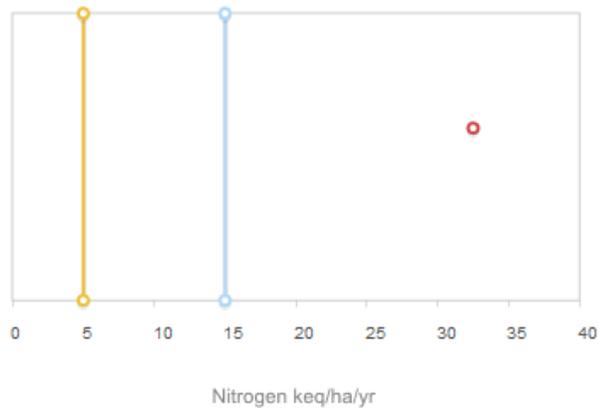
**Feature:** Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix  
**Critical Load Class:** Northern wet heath: Erica tetralix dominated wet heath  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 10-20  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4



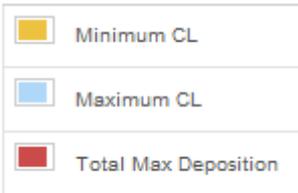
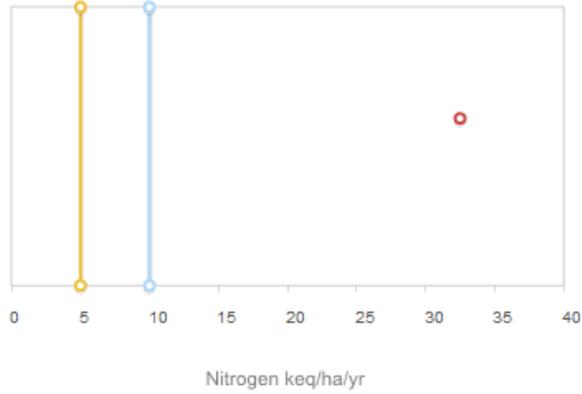
**Feature:** Blanket bogs (\* if active bog)  
**Critical Load Class:** Raised and blanket bogs  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 5-10  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
 Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4



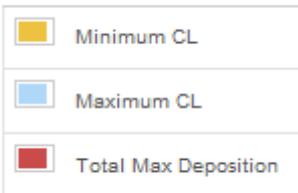
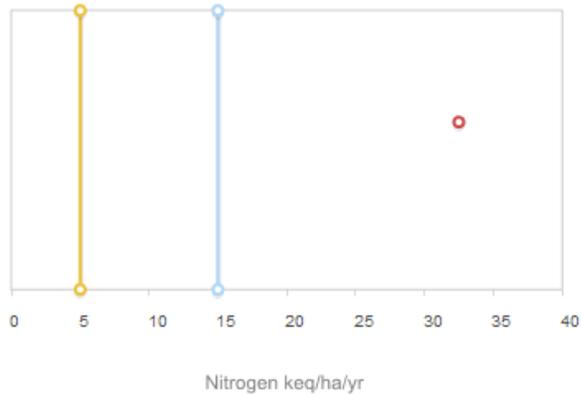
**Feature:** Alpine and Boreal heaths  
**Critical Load Class:** Arctic, alpine and subalpine scrub habitats  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 5-15  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
 Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4

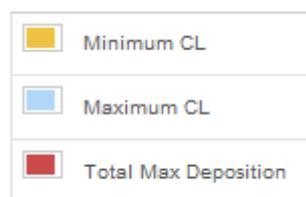
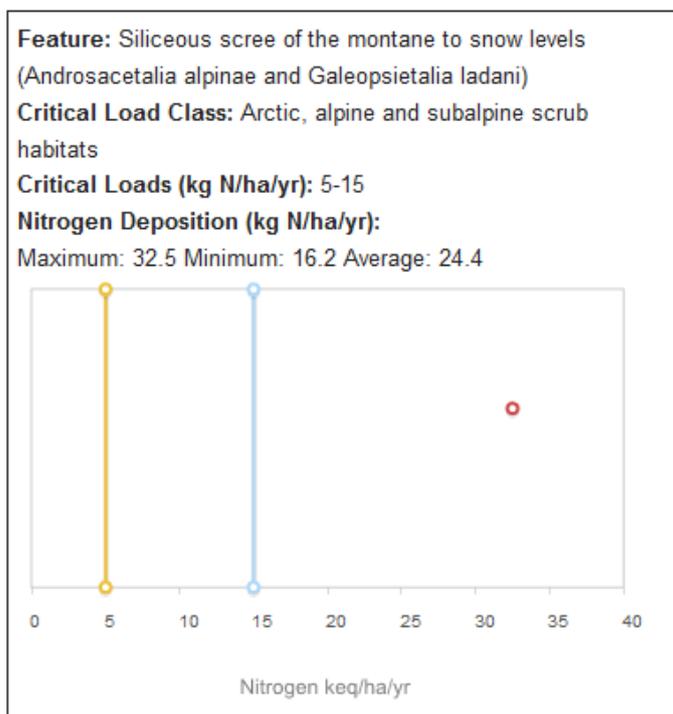


**Feature:** Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands  
**Critical Load Class:** Alpine and subalpine grasslands  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 5-10  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4



**Feature:** Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation  
**Critical Load Class:** Arctic, alpine and subalpine scrub habitats  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 5-15  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
Maximum: 32.5 Minimum: 16.2 Average: 24.4





(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- [www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk))

**ACTION:** Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.

#### *Changes to surrounding land use*

Any changes in local land-use e.g. agricultural intensification, drainage works and development) may be detrimental to the SAC.

**Action:** Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.

#### *Climate Change*

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events.

**ACTION:** When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered and appropriate changes made.

## 12. MONITORING

Monitoring of SACs takes place using two monitoring techniques.

**Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM)** is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC Schedule. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. dumping, burning, turf cutting, grazing etc.) or will be comparatively slow (e.g. gradual degradation of the habitat).

These longer-term changes will be picked up by monitoring of the feature via **Site Condition Assessment** - this is carried out on a rolling basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland.

### 12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY

#### **1. *Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)***

Complete boundary survey to ensure that the fencing is still intact. Ensure that there has been no illegal grazing, dumping or burning carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.

#### **2. *Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)***

Monitor the key attributes for each of the SAC selection features. This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annex I.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

### 13. REFERENCES

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European Commission (2001). Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites. Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC.

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Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (2013). 3<sup>rd</sup> UK Habitats Directive Report.

## ANNEX I

### Feature 1 (SAC) - European dry heath (Status B)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of dry heath	Maintain the extent of dry heath at 4680 ha. The dry heath communities include H10 - <i>Calluna vulgaris-Erica cinerea</i> , H12 - <i>Calluna vulgaris-Vaccinium myrtillus</i> and H8 <i>Calluna vulgaris-Ulex gallii</i> heath. The extent and distribution of each community to be maintained.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the dry heath using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Note that it may be possible to extend dry heath communities, provided this is into degraded areas and does not encroach into other habitats of scientific interest.
* Heath community diversity	Maintain the presence of the dry heath communities H7, H8, H10 etc. as established at base line survey.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Repeat monitoring of plots using GPS should indicate whether dry heath communities have changed or been lost.
* Area of mosaic communities and associated semi-natural habitats	Maintain associated mosaic communities and semi-natural habitats.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the ASSI using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Repeat monitoring of plots using GPS should indicate whether mosaics and associated habitats have changed or been lost.

Dwarf-shrub height	Average ericoid height should be 15–35cm with at least 25% of the dry heath in the late mature/degenerate growth phase (greater than 35cm).	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	On some areas of dry heath (especially on gentle slopes), the ericoid age structure will largely reflect recent burning patterns. However, in dry heath, burning should only be carried out occasionally under carefully controlled and monitored circumstances. A varied heather age structure is reflected in the height of heather.
* Bare peat, or ground covered by algal mats (% cover)	Bare peat etc. should occupy less than 2% of the dry heath surface overall.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bare peat (NOT exposed rock) or peat carpeted by <i>Polytrichum</i> spp., <i>Campylopus</i> spp. crust forming lichens or algal mats can occur as a consequence of constant burning and/or grazing. Bare peat here represents bare peat etc. within the dry vegetation rather than naturally eroded surfaces where exposed rock can form a natural part of the dry heath community.
* Ericaceous cover (% cover)	Dwarf-shrub cover should be greater than 75% over at least 75% of the dry heath community; and Mean dwarf-shrub cover should be greater than 75%	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	
* Ericoid diversity	At least two species of dwarf-shrub at least present in 90% of plots.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Ericoid (dwarf-shrub species) include <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> , <i>E. cinerea</i> , <i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i> , <i>Erica tetralix</i> , <i>Ulex gallii</i> , <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> and <i>Myrica gale</i> .
* Cover of <i>Ulex gallii</i> (% cover)	<i>Ulex gallii</i> cover should be less than 50% in plots within H8 stands.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Mean percentage cover should be assessed for stands of H8 only – i.e. exclude plots in other heath communities from the calculations. Stands of H8 are generally restricted to the south-east of Northern Ireland.

* Cover of graminoids (% cover)	Total graminoid cover should be less than 33%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Include true grasses, sedges, and rushes in this assessment. <i>Nardus stricta</i> , <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> , <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> or other graminoids should not dominate over other species.
* Frequency and % cover of bryophytes and bushy lichens (esp <i>Cladonia</i> spp.) (DAFOR and % cover)	Bryophytes (excluding <i>Polytrichum</i> spp. and <i>Campylopus</i> spp. on bare ground) and/or <i>Cladonia</i> species should be at least frequent.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plots.  Combined mean cover should be greater than 5%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Generally only bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) figure in this assessment, but occasionally bushy lichens can also be a prominent feature of the dry heath vegetation.
* Frequency and % cover of scrub/tree encroachment on dry heath communities (DAFOR and % cover)	Scrub/tree encroachment should be no more than occasional over the dry heath community.  No more than occasional is equivalent to less than 40% occurrence in recoded plots.  Mean cover should be less than 5%.	Visual estimate within a 10 m radius of plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Scrub encroachment should be checked using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Include invasive alien species in addition to <i>Betula pubescens</i> , <i>Prunus spinosa</i> , <i>Rubus</i> spp. Invasive exotic species such as <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> should be removed immediately. Exclude <i>Ulex europaeus</i> (see below)
* Cover of Gorse	Gorse ( <i>Ulex europaeus</i> ) cover	Visual estimate in 2x2	Although a natural component of heath communities,

<p><i>Ulex europaeus</i> (% cover)</p>	<p>should be less than 5%.</p> <p>During repeat surveys, Gorse cover should not exceed that of the baseline survey.</p>	<p>m plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	<p>Gorse can become invasive under both low and high grazing pressures.</p> <p>It is important to assess whether the relative quantities present in the site are increasing.</p>
<p>* Cover of Bracken (<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>) encroachment (% cover)</p>	<p>Bracken cover less than 10% in dense canopy.</p> <p>During repeat surveys, Bracken cover should not exceed that of the baseline survey.</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	<p>Although a natural component of heath communities, Bracken can become invasive under both low and high grazing pressures.</p> <p>It is important to assess whether the relative quantities present in the site are increasing.</p>
<p>* Frequency and cover of undesirable agricultural grasses and weeds (DAFOR and % cover)</p>	<p>None of the following should be more than rare:  <i>Cirsium arvense</i>, <i>C. vulgare</i>,  <i>Senecio jacobaea</i>, <i>Urtica dioica</i>, <i>Plantago major</i>, <i>Phleum pratense</i>, <i>Trifolium repens</i>,  <i>Holcus lanatus</i> and <i>Lolium perenne</i></p> <p>No more than rare is equivalent to less than 20% occurrence in recorded plots.</p> <p>Combined mean cover of agricultural grasses and weeds less than 1%.</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2 m plot.</p>	

<p>* Management - Grazing (% cover)</p>	<p>Signs of moderate or heavy grazing should occupy less than 5% of the dry heath vegetation.</p> <p>The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching, uprooting of dwarf shrubs and invasion by <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> etc. indicate moderate and heavy grazing where any one of the above is recorded as more than occasional.</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.</p>	
<p>* Management - Burning (% cover)</p>	<p>Signs of recent burning should occupy less than 5% of the dry heath vegetation.</p> <p>Recent burning is represented by areas burnt within the last two years.</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across feature using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	
<p>Frequency and cover of erosion features associated with human impacts. (DAFOR and % cover)</p>	<p>No gully erosion or bare rock associated with more concentrated human impacts (ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of the total area of dry heath other than very localised</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.</p>	<p>The extent of man induced erosion should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Erosion is a natural feature of high mountain slopes. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, mainly hill walking, the heath will not be in favourable condition, except where such erosion is very limited in nature.</p>

	instances.		
Herb diversity	Herbs (excluding negative indicators) at least frequent.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plots.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	

Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

## ANNEX 1

### Feature 2 (SAC) - Northern Atlantic wet heath with *Erica tetralix* (Status B)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of wet heath	Maintain the extent of wet heath at 889 ha. The wet heath community is M15 – <i>Scirpus cespitosus</i> - <i>Erica tetralix</i> wet heath.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the wet heath using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Any loss of wet heath, or fragmentation of this habitat is unacceptable. Note that it may be possible to extend wet heath communities, provided this is into degraded areas and does not encroach into other habitats of scientific interest.
* Heath community diversity	Maintain the presence of the wet heath community M15 as established at base line survey.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Repeat monitoring of plots using GPS should indicate whether wet heath communities have changed or been lost.
* Area of mosaic communities and associated semi-natural habitats	Maintain associated mosaic communities and semi-natural habitats.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the ASSI using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Repeat monitoring of plots using GPS should indicate whether mosaics and associated habitats have changed or been lost.

Dwarf-shrub height	Average ericoid height should be 15–35cm with at least 25% of the wet heath in the late mature/degenerate growth phase (greater than 35cm).	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	On some areas of wet heath (especially on gentle slopes), the ericoid age structure will largely reflect recent burning patterns. However, in wet heath, burning should only be carried out in exceptional circumstances. Heather height reflects the age structure of the Heather.
* Bare peat, or ground covered by algal mats (% cover)	Bare peat etc. should occupy less than 2% of the wet heath surface overall.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bare peat or peat carpeted by <i>Polytrichum</i> spp., <i>Campylopus</i> spp. crust forming lichens or algal mats can occur as a consequence of excessive burning and/or grazing. Bare peat here represents bare peat etc. within the wet heath vegetation.
* Ericaceous cover (% cover)	Dwarf-shrub cover should be maintained between 50–75%	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Although dominated by dwarf shrubs, the sward should be composed of a variety of higher plants and bryophytes.
* Ericoid diversity	At least two species of dwarf-shrub at least present in 90% of plots.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Ericoid (dwarf-shrub species) include <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> , <i>Erica tetralix</i> , <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> and <i>Myrica gale</i> .
* Cover of graminoids (% cover)	Total graminoid cover should be less than 50%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Include true grasses, sedges, and rushes in this assessment. <i>Molionia caerulea</i> , <i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i> , <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> , <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> or other graminoids should not dominate over other species. Localised <i>Schoenus nigricans</i> flushes should not be included in this habitat assessment.
* Bryophyte cover and frequency of <i>Sphagnum</i> mosses (%)	Mean bryophyte cover (excluding <i>Polytrichum</i> spp. and <i>Campylopus</i> spp. on	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bryophytes should include a range of pleurocarpus species forming patches below, or in more open swards beneath the dwarf-shrubs as well as

cover and DAFOR)	bare ground) should be at least 25%. <i>Sphagnum</i> moss species should be at least frequent throughout the moss layer.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plots.		<i>Sphagnum</i> moss species.
* Frequency and % cover of scrub/tree encroachment on wet heath communities (DAFOR and % cover)	Scrub/tree encroachment should be no more than rare over the wet heath community. Mean cover should be less than 2%. No more than rare is equivalent to less than 20% occurrence in recorded plots.	Visual estimate within a 10 m radius of plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Scrub encroachment should be checked using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Invasive exotic species such as <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> should be removed immediately.
* Frequency and cover of undesirable agricultural grasses and weeds (DAFOR and % cover)	None of the following should be more than rare: <i>Cirsium arvense</i> , <i>C. vulgare</i> , <i>Senecio jacobaea</i> , <i>Urtica dioica</i> , <i>Plantago major</i> , <i>Phleum pratense</i> , <i>Trifolium repens</i> , <i>Holcus lanatus</i> and <i>Lolium perenne</i> .	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plot.	

	<p>No more than rare is equivalent to less than 20% occurrence in recorded plots.</p> <p>Combined mean cover of agricultural grasses and weeds less than 1%.</p>		
* Management - Grazing (% cover)	<p>Signs of moderate or heavy grazing should occupy less than 5% of the wet heath vegetation.</p> <p>The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching, uprooting of dwarf shrubs and invasion by <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> etc. indicate moderate and heavy grazing where any one of the above is recorded as more than occasional.</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	
* Management - Burning (% cover)	<p>Signs of recent burning should occupy less than 5% of the wet heath vegetation.</p> <p>Recent burning is represented by areas burnt within the last two years.</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	

Frequency and cover of erosion features associated with human impacts (DAFOR and % cover)	No gully erosion, bare peat or rock associated with more concentrated human impacts (ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of the total area of wet heath other than very localised instances.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The extent of man induced erosion should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Erosion is a natural feature of high mountain slopes. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, mainly hill walking, the heath will not be in favourable condition, except where such erosion is very limited in nature.
Herb diversity	Herbs (excluding negative indicators) at least frequent.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plots.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Wet heaths tend to be dominated by dwarf-shrubs and graminoids; however, some herbs should be present in most plots (albeit at a low cover).

Frequency -  
1-20% = Rare  
21-40% = Occasional  
41- 60% = Frequent  
> 60% = Constant

## ANNEX 1

### Feature 3 (SAC) - Active blanket bog (Status C)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of blanket bog and upland raised mire (ha)	Maintain the extent of the intact bog surface at 318 ha. The blanket bog communities include M17 – <i>Scirpus cespitosus</i> <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> blanket mire, M18 – <i>Sphagnum papillosum</i> raised and blanket mire and M19 <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> - <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> blanket mire.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the blanket bog using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	The blanket bog communities include M17 – <i>Scirpus cespitosus</i> <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> blanket mire, M18 – <i>Sphagnum papillosum</i> raised and blanket mire and M19 <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> - <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> blanket mire.
* Area of mosaic communities and associated habitats	Maintain associated mosaic communities and habitats (wet heath, dry heath, upland fen, etc)	Visual estimate across the SAC using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Repeat monitoring using condition assessment, SIM, and aerial photographs should indicate whether mosaics and associated habitats have changed or been lost.
* Pool/hummock system extent and complexity	The extent and complexity of pool and hummock systems at least maintained.	The extent of pool and hummock systems should be	The extent of pool and hummock systems should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment.

	Differentiation of <i>Sphagnum</i> species should be recorded with <i>S. cuspidatum</i> or <i>S. auriculatum</i> in the pools and <i>S. papillosum</i> and <i>S. capillifolium</i> forming the lawns and hummocks.	monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and SIM.	
Dwarf-shrub Height (cm)	Average ericoid height should be 15-30cm.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	On some areas of blanket bog, the dwarf-shrub height will largely reflect recent management patterns. However, on largely undisturbed sites with minimal or no grazing, dwarf shrubs should display no apparent growth forms with a fairly uniform height between 15-30cm.
* Bare Peat, or ground covered by algal mats (%)	Bare peat etc should occupy less than 2% of the intact blanket bog surface overall.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bare peat, or bare ground carpeted by <i>Polytrichum</i> spp., <i>Campylopus</i> spp. crust forming lichens or algal mats can occur as a consequence of peat cutting or excessive burning and/or grazing. Bare ground here represents bare peat etc. within the blanket bog vegetation rather than naturally eroded surfaces where bare ground forms a natural part of the erosion feature.
* <i>Sphagnum</i> cover/abundance (% cover and frequency)  Active Peat Formation (DAFOR)	<i>Sphagnum</i> moss species should have a minimum cover of 25% over at least 66% of the intact blanket bog surface.  Thick, hummock forming species of sphagnum should be at least occasional.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	A constant <i>Sphagnum</i> moss cover is indicative of active peat formation and is dependent on the maintenance of a high water table. <i>Sphagnum</i> moss is therefore used to measure the hydrological integrity of the blanket bog surface.

	Species present should include a mixture of both thin species: - <i>S. capillifolium</i> and <i>S. tenellum</i> and the thick hummock forming species: - <i>S. papillosum</i> and <i>S. magellanicum</i> at least occasional over the surface.		
* Ericaceous Cover (%)	Ericoid cover frequent over the surface of the intact blanket bog. Dwarf-shrub cover greater than 33%. Less than 33% is only acceptable in wetter areas where <i>Narthecium ossifragum</i> or <i>Sphagnum</i> spp. are abundant and forming lawns.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Ericoid (dwarf-shrub species) include <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> , <i>Erica tetralix</i> , <i>E. cinerea</i> , <i>Myrica gale</i> , <i>Vaccinium myrtillis</i> and <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> .
* Ericoid diversity (DAFOR)	At least two species of dwarf-shrub should be widespread and frequent. Where three or more species are present, but only one frequent and widespread, the abundance of the less abundant species may be combined and treated as if they are a single species.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	A mono-dominant sward of <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> may suggest that the surface of the intact bog is drying out – i.e. the water table is too low beneath the surface of the bog.
* Scrub/tree encroachment on any active peat surface	Scrub/tree encroachment should be no more than rare on the intact bog surface, or in	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Scrub encroachment should be checked using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Invasive exotic species such as

(DAFOR)	the actively regenerating cutover areas.		<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> should be removed immediately.
* Erosion Features associated with human impacts (% and DAFOR)	No gully erosion or bare peat associated with more concentrated human impacts (eg drainage, peat extraction, ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of the total area of blanket bog other than very localised instances.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The extent of man induced erosion should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Erosion is a natural feature of blanket bog, particularly marginal fretting on breaks of slope. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, the bog will not be in favourable condition, except where such erosion is very limited in nature.
* Graminoid Cover (%)	Total cover of graminoids should not exceed 50%, unless dominated by <i>Molinia caerulea</i> forming even swards over waterlogged areas with <i>Sphagnum</i> moss cover greater than 25%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Include true grasses, sedges, and rushes in this assessment. <i>Eriophorum vaginatum</i> , <i>Trichophorum cespitosum</i> , <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> , <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> or other graminoids (except <i>Molinia</i> in some instances) should not dominate over other species.
* Management – Peat extraction	No evidence of unconsented active peat extraction.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	In some instances areas of cut peat can re-vegetate with good blanket bog vegetation which meets the attributes for favourable condition.
* Management - Grazing (%)	Signs of moderate or heavy grazing by cattle or sheep should occupy less than 5% of the blanket bog vegetation within any grazing unit.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching and the presence of grazing induced <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> growth forms indicate moderate and heavy grazing where any one of the above is recorded as more than occasional.

<i>Molinia caerulea</i> Cover (%)	Where <i>Molinia caerulea</i> cover is greater than 50%, it should form an even (not tussocky) sward in waterlogged conditions with <i>Sphagnum</i> moss cover greater than 25%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	<i>Molinia caerulea</i> only occurs as a natural component of the bog vegetation in the extreme west of Northern Ireland where the climate is generally warmer and wetter i.e. more oceanic.
Presence of rare or scarce species specific to the site.	<i>Sphagnum imbricatum</i> and <i>Sphagnum fuscum</i> , where they have been recorded, should remain at least present along the length of each of the w-walks. If these species are not recorded on any one visit, it does not automatically make the SAC unfavourable.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	

Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

## ANNEX 1

### Feature 4 (SAC) - Alpine and boreal heaths (Status C)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
Area of montane heath (ha)	Maintain the extent of montane heath communities at a minimum of 32ha. These communities include H14 – <i>Calluna vulgaris-Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> heath and wind-pruned H10b – <i>Calluna vulgaris-Erica tetralix</i> heath ( <i>Racomitrium</i> sub-community).	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the montane heath using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Any loss or fragmentation of this habitat is unacceptable. It is probably not possible to extend montane heath communities beyond their current range at Cuilcagh – i.e. no obvious areas where the habitat has been lost through damaging activities.  Difficult to measure exactly; summit ridge is c. 30 ha in extent, but includes significant area of eroding blanket bog. Some higher level heath communities on slopes below summit may also conform to the type.
Ericoid Height (cm)	Average ericoid height should be 5 –10 cm.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Dwarf-shrubs should be low growing (usually prostrate or semi-prostrate).
Bare Peat, or ground covered by algal mats (% and DAFOR)	Patches of bare ground greater than 10cm across in sheltered areas should be more or less absent.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bare peat or peat carpeted by <i>Polytrichum</i> spp., <i>Campylopus</i> spp. crust forming lichens or algal mats can occur as a consequence of excessive grazing.
Ericaceous Cover (%)	Dwarf-shrub cover should be greater than 60%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The sward should be composed of a low growing (and usually prostrate or semi-prostrate) dwarf-shrub in combination with abundant mosses and lichens.
Mean Cover of dwarf-shrubs/ <i>Racomitrium</i>	The collective cover of dwarf-shrubs, <i>Racomitrium</i>	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Characteristic species include a dominance of dwarf-shrubs with mosses, mainly <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> ,

<i>lanuginosum</i> and robust lichens. (%)	<i>lanuginosum</i> and robust lichens should compose at least 90% of total vegetation cover.		and robust lichens. The low-growing dwarf-shrub mat is dominated by <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> with <i>Erica tetralix</i> , <i>E. cinerea</i> , <i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i> , <i>Empetrum nigrum</i> , <i>V. vitis-idea</i> , etc.
<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> (DAFOR)	<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> to be constant and forming patches below, or in more open swards beneath the dwarf-shrubs.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> should form a major part of the ground cover for the vegetation to be in favourable condition.
Fine-leaved grass/ <i>Galium saxatile</i> / <i>Potentilla erecta</i> Cover (%)	The collective cover of fine-leaved grasses, <i>Galium saxatile</i> and <i>Potentilla erecta</i> should not exceed 10%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Grasses to include <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> and <i>Festuca ovina/vivipara</i> .
Management - Grazing (% cover)	Signs of moderate or heavy grazing should occupy less than 5% of the montane heath vegetation.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching, uprooting of dwarf shrubs and invasion by <i>Juncus squarrosus</i> etc. indicate moderate and heavy grazing where any one of the above is recorded as more than occasional.
Management - Burning (% cover)	Signs of recent burning should occupy less than 5% of the montane heath vegetation.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> within wider vicinity of the plot; in addition, across feature using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment	Recent burning is represented by areas burnt within the last two years.

Erosion Features associated with human impacts (% and DAFOR)	No bare rock or bare peat associated with more concentrated human impacts (ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of the total area of montane heath, other than very localised instances.	structured walk. Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> within wider vicinity of the plot; in addition, across feature using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Erosion is a natural feature of high mountain slopes. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, mainly hill walking, the heath will not be in favourable condition, except where such erosion is very limited in nature.
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Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

## ANNEX 1

### Feature 5 (SAC) - Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands (Status C)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of siliceous alpine and boreal grassland	Maintain the extent of the siliceous alpine and boreal grassland communities at a minimum of 32 ha. This community includes U10 - <i>Carex bigelowii-Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> moss heath.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the wet heath using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	The montane grasslands should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and condition assessment. Any loss or fragmentation of this habitat is unacceptable. It may be possible to extend siliceous alpine and boreal grassland communities into degraded areas without encroaching into other habitats of scientific interest.
* Height of graminoid/bryophyte/Cladonia/dwarf-shrub mat (cm)	The average depth of the vegetation mat should be greater than 5cm.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Depth should be recorded by the vertical distance an object can be inserted into the vegetation mat until the ground is met. Exclude grass flower spikes from the depth measurement.
* Bare peat, or ground covered by algal mats (% cover)	Bare peat etc (excluding naturally exposed rock surfaces) should occupy less than 5% of the siliceous alpine and boreal grassland surface overall.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	This includes bare peat, but NOT exposed rock attributable to natural exposure effects. Bare ground can be attributed to excessive grazing.
* <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> cover (%)	<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> to be present with 100%	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	<i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> must form a major part of the ground cover for the vegetation to be in

	Frequency and forming patches below, or in more open swards beneath the dwarf-shrubs.		favourable condition.
* Mean cover of graminoid/bryophyte/Cladonia/dwarf-shrub mat (%)	The collective cover of characteristic species should be greater than 90%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Characteristic species include a dominance of mosses, mainly <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> with <i>Carex bigelowii</i> , <i>C. pilulifera</i> robust lichens and dwarf- shrubs. The dwarf-shrubs which are prostrate include <i>Salix herbacea</i> , <i>Vaccinium myrtillis</i> , <i>V. vitis-idea</i> , <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> etc.
* Fine-leaved grass/ <i>Galium saxatile</i> / <i>Potentilla erecta</i> cover (%)	The collective cover of fine-leaved grasses, <i>Galium saxatile</i> and <i>Potentilla erecta</i> should not exceed 10%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Grasses to include <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> , <i>Nardus stricta</i> and <i>Festuca ovina/vivipara</i> .
* Management - Grazing (% cover)	Signs of moderate or heavy grazing by sheep should occupy less than 5% of the siliceous alpine and boreal grassland vegetation within any grazing unit.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching, uprooting of dwarf shrubs, grazing of flower heads and shrubs and invasion by fine-leaved grasses etc. indicate moderate and heavy grazing.
* Frequency and cover of erosion features associated with human impacts (DAFOR and % cover)	No bare rock or peat associated with more concentrated human impacts (ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The extent of man induced erosion should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Erosion is a natural feature of high mountain slopes. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, mainly hill walking, the montain grassland will not be in favourable condition,

	the total area of montane grassland other than very localised instances.		except where such erosion is very limited in nature.
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Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

**ANNEX 1**

**Feature 6 (SAC) - Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation (Status C)**

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
Area of siliceous rocky slopes	Maintain the extent of siliceous rocky slopes at 58.5 ha. These cliff face communities include U21 - ( <i>Cryptogramma crista-Deschampsia flexuosa</i> community).	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the siliceous rocky slopes using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Indicators of current grazing	Less than 50% of live leaves (forbs) or the shoots (dwarf-shrubs) should show signs of having been grazed or browsed.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Non-native species	Less than 1% of vegetation cover should be made up of non-native species.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature	

		as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Cover of Bracken, tress and scrub	Less than 25% of the ground cover should be made up of bracken, trees and shrubs.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	

Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

ANNEX 1

Feature 7 (SAC) - Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Status C)

(\* = Primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
Area of siliceous scree	Maintain the extent of siliceous scree at 17.7 ha. The montane acid scree communities include U21 - ( <i>Cryptogramma crispera</i> - <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i> community).	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the siliceous scree using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Note that it may be possible to extend siliceous scree communities, provided this is into degraded areas and does not encroach into other habitats of scientific interest.
Indicators of current grazing	At least 33% of ground cover should be free from overgrowth by vascular plants  Less than 50% of live leaves (forbs) and/or the shoots (dwarf-shrubs) should show signs of having been grazed or browsed.	Targets assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Non-native species	Less than 1% of vegetation cover should be made up of non-native species.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as	

		much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Cover of Bracken, tress and scrub	Less than 25% of the ground cover should be made up of bracken, trees and shrubs.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Cover of agricultural weeds	Less than 1% of vegetation cover should consist of, collectively, <i>Cirsium arvense</i> , <i>Cirsium vulgare</i> , <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> , large docks (excluding <i>Rumex acetosa</i> ), <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> , <i>Senecio jacobaea</i> , <i>Urtica dioica</i>	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	
Physical structure – indicators of ground disturbance due to herbivore and human activity.	Less than 10% of the <i>ground</i> cover should be disturbed by human or animal paths, scree running, or vehicles.	Target assessed against visual estimate for as much of the feature as is visible while standing at a sample location.	The nature of the scree – i.e. large, block scree – more or less precludes recreational use, and appears to discourage most of the grazing animals.

Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

# LOUGH NEAGH AND LOUGH BEG- SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)

**UK9020091**

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

### Document Details

Title	<i>Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
Approved By	<i>Mark Wright</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V4</i>
Next Review Date	January 2020
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### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	01/04/1996	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### Site relationship

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA partially overlaps with Reas Wood and Farris Bay SAC

The SPA also overlaps with part of the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar site.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone and Londonderry

G.R. J030 700

AREA: 41188 ha.

### 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

Lough Neagh is a large, shallow, eutrophic lake contained within Counties Antrim, Down, Londonderry and Tyrone. Lough Neagh is the largest freshwater lake in the UK and is one of the top ten sites in the UK for wintering waterfowl (based on annual mean numbers). The SPA also includes the smaller lakes, Lough Beg and Portmore Lough. The main habitats within the SPA are open water with beds of submerged aquatic vegetation, species-rich wet grassland, reedbed, islands, swamp, fen and carr woodland. The SPA supports internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl and is internationally important for a number of wildfowl species including Whooper Swan, Bewick's Swan, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Scaup and Goldeneye. It is also internationally important for breeding Common Tern.

## 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The boundary takes in the main waterbodies, including Portmore Lough and Lough Beg, together with all adjoining natural and semi-natural habitat of conservation significance. All islands within Lough Neagh are also included. Adjoining agriculturally improved areas utilised by swans have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type (i.e. habitat or species)	Feature	Population <sup>1</sup>	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Common Tern breeding population <sup>a</sup>	137 individuals (Seabird 2000 data)		200 pairs	185	118
Species	Great Crested Grebe breeding population <sup>a</sup>	500 pairs (Data source unknown)		New feature	500	
Species	Great Crested Grebe passage population <sup>b</sup>	2440 (1995 max count)		New feature	2440	438
Species	Whooper Swan wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1031	1152	923	1031	283
Species	Bewick's Swan wintering population <sup>a</sup>	136	314	251	136	23
Species	Golden Plover wintering population <sup>b</sup>	5334	3625	Not listed	5298	1626
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1431	1173	741	1821	110
Species	Pochard wintering population <sup>a</sup>	26441	31508	32165	26341	19588
Species	Tufted Duck wintering population <sup>a</sup>	22454	19372	23476	22372	17972
Species	Scaup wintering population <sup>a</sup>	3698	1584	2557	3798	1215
Species	Goldeneye wintering population <sup>a</sup>	10781	11521	12479	10776	6700
Assemblage species	Little Grebe wintering population	465	395	390	465	290
Assemblage species	Cormorant wintering population	718	815	781	728	445
Assemblage species	Greylag Goose wintering population	156	120	129	176	7
Assemblage species	Shelduck wintering population	180	142	165	159	107
Assemblage species	Wigeon wintering population	3117	2607	3447	3117	2607
Assemblage species	Gadwall wintering population	166	120	114	166	88
Assemblage species	Teal wintering population	1597	2288	1868	1596	1154
Assemblage	Mallard wintering	5422	5330	4982	5256	3591

species	population					
Assemblage species	Shoveler wintering population	163	169	173	148	43
Assemblage species	Coot wintering population	7018	5979	6676	6993	3062
Assemblage species	Lapwing wintering population	6946	3042	Not listed	6899	2822
Waterfowl assemblage	Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population <sup>a</sup> (Component species: Whooper Swan, Bewick's Swan, Golden Plover, Great Crested Grebe (wintering) Pochard, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Goldeneye, Little Grebe, Cormorant, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Coot, Lapwing)	81827	87049	79915	99221	62352
Habitat <sup>2</sup>	Habitat extent					
Habitat <sup>2</sup>	Roost site locations					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Designation population given as 1995/96 five year running mean of maximum annual WeBS counts (except where stated). Note that for some of the selection features these differ from the figures given in the SPA citation, but have been used as they are considered to be more relevant to future monitoring

<sup>2</sup> Habitat is not a selection feature but is a factor and is more easily treated as if it were a feature. Habitat extent is also used for breeding birds reported as an area. Extent of swamp/tall fen will be used for breeding waterfowl

#### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

## 6.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type (i.e. habitat, species or earth science)	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop'
Habitat	Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Habitat	Wet woodlands (Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Habitat	Reed beds and swamps (Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Habitat	Fens (Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Species	Higher Plant Assemblage (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Species	Breeding waterbird assemblage (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Species	Breeding bird assemblage (wet woodland)	
Species	Breeding wader assemblage	

Species	Little Grebe wintering population	
Species	Cormorant wintering population	
Species	Greylag Goose wintering population	
Species	Shelduck wintering population	
Species	Wigeon wintering population	
Species	Gadwall wintering population	
Species	Teal wintering population	
Species	Mallard wintering population	
Species	Shoveler wintering population	
Species	Coot wintering population	
Species	Lapwing wintering population	
Species	Mute <u>Swan</u> wintering population	
Species	Freshwater and Estuarine fish (Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Species	Invertebrate assemblage (Lough Neagh ASSI)	
Earth Science	Coastal processes - refers to near-shore sand complexes (Lough Neagh ASSI)	

Table 2. List of ASSI features, additional to those that form all or part of SPA selection features. These will be referred to in ANNEX II.

## 7 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

To maintain each feature in favourable condition.

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. Component objectives for Additional ASSI Selection Features are not yet complete. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of Condition Assessment. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8 LOUGH NEAGH AND LOUGH BEG SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Common Tern (B)	94	79	118	96	98	59	97.00	<b>164.41</b>	Favourable
Golden Plover	6475	3129	7097	4047	1539	1626	4457.40	<b>274.13</b>	Favourable
Bewick's Swan	0	0	0	0	0	23	0.00	<b>0.00</b>	Unfavourable
Whooper Swan	515	535	637	388	248	283	464.60	<b>164.17</b>	Favourable
Goldeneye	2993	4626	3684	3003	3437	6700	3548.60	<b>52.96</b>	Unfavourable
Great Crested Grebe (W)	236	1181	733	947	1030	110	825.40	<b>750.36</b>	Favourable
Great Crested Grebe (P)	634	676	nc	561	941	438	703.00	<b>160.50</b>	Favourable
Pochard	8878	8902	5770	9183	5027	19588	7552.00	<b>38.55</b>	Unfavourable
Scaup	4348	5587	6335	2989	2257	1215	4303.20	<b>354.17</b>	Favourable
Shelduck	131	87	193	188	126	107	145.00	<b>135.51</b>	Favourable
Tufted Duck	6336	5845	4995	9167	7669	17972	6802.40	<b>37.85</b>	Unfavourable
Waterbird assemblage	47771	48575	43168	43462	35837	75215	43762.60	<b>58.18</b>	Unfavourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

### 5.1 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

Feature	Component Objective
Common Tern breeding population	As above
Common Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Great Crested Grebe breeding population	As above
Great Crested Grebe breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Great Crested Grebe passage population	As above
Whooper Swan wintering population	As above
Bewick's Swan wintering population	As above
Golden Plover wintering population	As above
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As above
Pochard wintering population	As above
Tufted Duck wintering population	As above
Scaup wintering population	As above
Goldeneye wintering population	As above
Little Grebe wintering population	As above
Cormorant wintering population	As above
Greylag Goose wintering population	As above
Shelduck wintering population	As above
Wigeon wintering population	As above
Gadwall wintering population	As above
Teal wintering population	As above
Mallard wintering population	As above
Shoveler wintering population	As above
Coot wintering population	As above
Lapwing wintering population	As above
Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population	No significant decrease in population against national trends

Feature	Component Objective
Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population	Maintain species diversity contributing to the Waterfowl Assemblage
Habitat	To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species subject to natural processes
Habitat	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Habitat	Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts

Table 3. List of SPA Selection Feature Component Objectives

**Tern nesting localities current and historical (TO BE FINALISED)**

Torpedo platform, Antrim Bay

Table 4. Tern nesting locations within the SPA

**9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES**

Feature	Component Objective
Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures	
Wet woodlands	
Reed beds and swamps	
Fens	
Higher Plant Assemblage	
Breeding Birds	
Freshwater and Estuarine fish	
Invertebrate assemblage	
Coastal processes – refers to near-shore sand complexes	

Table 5. List of Additional ASSI Selection Feature Objectives

**10 MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

**See also Views About Management for relevant ASSIs**

*Owner/Occupier's* – As of October 1995 there were 463 individual landowners within Lough Neagh SPA. These include the Shaftesbury Estate of Lough Neagh, the National Trust, Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland (DANI). There are five National Nature Reserves (NNRs) within the SPA; Lough Neagh Islands, Rea's Wood, Farr's Bay, Oxford Island and Randalstown Forest with a proposed sixth at Blacker's Rock. There are also an additional four management agreements in place for four small landholdings within the SPA.

**11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES**

*Notifiable Operations* - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the schedule could affect the site. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Lough Neagh SPA, or could affect it in the future. Although, features 1, 2, 3, 4 etc, are the qualifying SPA features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**Site/feature management issues**

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
1	Adjoining habitat	Particularly important for swans and geese as well as providing high tide roost locations. Significant changes in land management and disturbance are key considerations. Such areas	Imminent road development through Toome swanfields the effects of which will require monitoring.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
		lie without the site making effective management of developments other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.		
6	Boating activity – commercial	Disturbance and potential for impact from commercial vessels.	No evidence of a significant impact on the selection features of Lough Neagh	Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Consider the collective impact.
7	Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	A major concern during the breeding season, particularly around the Torpedo platform at Six Mile Water.	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.
8	Coastal (shoreline) protection schemes	Where there is no history of this, it impacts on natural beach systems with loss of habitat.	There is ad hoc dumping around the shoreline, in places this is in response to erosion.	Liaise with Planning Service and other parties with an involvement in coastal management.
9	Cull of fledglings/ young	Licensed selective culling of species impacting on ‘more desirable’ species. Licensed by NIEA.	Culling of larger gull species is undertaken to reduce impact on breeding wildfowl and terns.	NIEA to review all licenses. Consider the collective impact.
11	Drainage	Potential impact on water flooding regime. Potentially significant in relation to adjoining habitat if it leads to reduction in traditional areas of flooding.	Routine watercourse maintenance programme by Rivers Agency is referred to NIEA for comment.	Identify key areas and promote site management schemes to protect and enhance site features. Consider the collective impact.
13	Enhanced bird competition	Activities onsite or offsite that influences or results in a shift in balance of species utilising a site.	General issue of gulls during breeding season. Historical high numbers of Black-headed Gull may have been related to access to feeding on a dump site (Denny’s), now closed.	Liaise with Planning Service. Review wider countryside changes.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent ‘competition’ for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Important long-established commercial eel, coarse fish and salmonid fishery. Concern regarding diving duck taken as by-catch in nets either accidentally or deliberately.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authorities as required. Liaise with commercial fishing interests and angling clubs as required. Netting of diving duck as a Wildlife Order offence – action is dependant on evidence.
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Not a concern.	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Water quality is a concern with progressive eutrophication. Longer	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
			term improvement in water quality will reduce productivity and may affect waterfowl populations.	impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
19	Habitat extent and quality-breeding	Alteration of habitat area or quality through inappropriate use or absence of site management.	Terns mainly breed on Torpedo Platform, Six Mile Water, but also on some islands.	Assess needs of breeding species. Liaise with owner or appropriate authority to adjust or introduce site management.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Roach and Ruddy Duck are present, Zebra Mussel must be considered a real threat.	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
22	Power cables	Specifically a problem in relation to swans and geese. Threat is through impact. Need to consider flight lines, as well as feeding and loafing areas, which ideally should be avoided.	Generally lines in the area are well marked. Assess all new proposals and existing network in relation to swan usage..	Liaise with NIE. Minimum need is for line marking based on best current practice. Consider the collective impact.
23	Predation.	Mainly of concern on bird breeding sites.	Impact from large gulls is deemed to be a problem. Care to be taken as breeding Lesser Black-backed Gull are notable.	Must be dealt with as part of wider countryside management considerations. Carry out appropriate site management.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration. Breeding birds, especially seabirds, are vulnerable to disturbance as absence of adults can often result in predation or chilling of young with a reduction/loss in fledging success.	Breeding birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance. Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, sand dredgers, wildfowlers, walkers, dogs etc) may also be a significant factor for wintering bird populations	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties.
25	Research activities.	Census and ringing activities especially have the potential to impact on bird populations, particularly at breeding sites.	Routine winter WEBS counts.	Census and ringing activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. In case of ringers, appropriate license must be held.
26	Sand dredging - commercial	Issue presently limited to Lough Neagh and subject to current (2015) detailed evaluation	Restricted in area but possibly impacting the more diverse invertebrate assemblages. Possibly a limited disturbance issue.	Liaise with commercial operators, Planning Service and other regulatory authorities.
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors	Historical lowering of the lough level reduced considerably the area subject to flooding but	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
		especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	also would have had implications for shore and nearshore morphology particularly the dynamics of sand bar and river mouth shoal complexes. Ongoing sand exploitation could alter lough bed substrate and influence near shore sediment mobility.	authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.
29	Water abstraction	Potential impact on water flooding regime. Potentially significant in relation to adjoining habitat if it leads to reduction in traditional areas of flooding.	Lough Neagh is a major source of drinking water with ongoing abstraction together with proposals for increased volumes taken.	Liaise with Water Service and Rivers Agency.
30	Water level control	Impacts on natural fluctuation of water body. Potentially significant in relation to adjoining habitat if it leads to reduction in traditional areas of flooding.	Lough water level essentially controlled by sluice gates at Toome.	Liaise with Rivers Agency.
31	Wildfowling	Has direct effect through bag sizes/bag species and wider disturbance issue. Issue of regulated (through recognised shooting clubs) and ad hoc shooters. Lead shot on grazing lands.	Generally a good relationship with main gun clubs. Overall perception is that lough is heavily shot.	Liaise with relevant shooting bodies to define areas for wildfowling, the development of Wildfowling Codes of Good Practice and encourage bag returns. Support pressure to stop use of lead shot. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.

Table 3. List of site/feature management issues

## 12 MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

### 12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY

**1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM)** – to ensure compliance with the SPA/ASSI schedule and identify likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution). This SIM should be carried out once a year.

2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (species, assemblage, habitat, etc). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SPA and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## 12.2 ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.
2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

## 13 SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS

A summary statement of site population trends, together with wider geographical trends. Date of completion is given as well as information sources used. Site trends are reported as % increase/decline from designation population (1995/96) using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WEBS data). For breeding populations the best available data is used. Other trends are generally limited to terms such as ‘consistent increase/decline’, ‘variable with overall increase/decline’, ‘no discernable trend’.

SPECIES	SITE TREND	NI TREND	IRISH TREND	UK TREND	COMMENTS
Common Tern (breeding)	insufficient data	Data unavailable	34% decline between surveys in 1969-70 and 1985-87 (per SPA review)	11% increase between surveys in 1969-70 and 1985-87 (per SPA review)	
Great Crested Grebe	insufficient data	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend (1994-99 Breeding)	

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>IRISH TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
(breeding)				Bird Survey)	
Great Crested Grebe (passage)	insufficient data	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	Data unavailable	
Whooper Swan (wintering)	-10% (1999/2000)	Variable with overall decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Bewick's Swan (wintering)	-41% (1999/2000)	Consistent Decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Golden Plover (wintering)	+6% (1999/2000)	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	Data unavailable	
Great Crested Grebe (wintering)	-11% (1999-2000)	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Pochard (wintering)	-5% (1999-2000)	Variable with overall decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Tufted Duck (wintering)	Stable (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Scaup (wintering)	+9% (1999-2000)	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	Data unavailable	
Goldeneye (wintering)	-29% (1999-2000)	Consistent decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Little Grebe (wintering)	-10% (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Consistent increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Cormorant (wintering)	+89% (1999-2000)	Consistent increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Greylag Goose (wintering)	+114% (1999-2000)	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	Data unavailable	
Shelduck (wintering)	+15% (1999-2000)	Consistent increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Wigeon (wintering)	+8% (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91-	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000	

SPECIES	SITE TREND	NI TREND	IRISH TREND	UK TREND	COMMENTS
		1999/2000 (WeBS)		(WeBS)	
Gadwall (wintering)	-21% (1999-2000)	Variable with overall decline 1990/91- 1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Consistent increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Teal (wintering)	+6% (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91- 1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Mallard (wintering)	+1% (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91- 1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Consistent decline 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Shoveler (wintering)	-31% (1999-2000)	No discernible trend 1990/91- 1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Coot (wintering)	+1% (1999-2000)	Variable with overall increase 1990/91- 1999/2000 (WeBS)	I-WeBS data unavailable	Variable with overall increase 1990/91-1999/2000 (WeBS)	
Lapwing (wintering)	+11% (1999-2000)	Data unavailable	I-WeBS data unavailable	Data unavailable	
Wintering Waterfowl Assemblage (Component species: Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Bewick's Swan, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Shoveler, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Scaup, Goldeneye, Coot, Golden Plover, Lapwing)	-3% (1999-2000)	N/a	I-WeBS data unavailable	N/a	

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Breeding seabirds - waterbirds

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = Optional factors – these can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
*Common Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Common Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected , then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Common Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined
*Great Crested Grebe breeding population	Annual count of breeding pairs Calculate new five year running mean. Plot running five-year means.	No significant decrease in Great Crested Grebe breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected , then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population.
# Great Crested Grebe fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined

### Non-avian factors

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures or breeding sites, where this would lead to different usage by notified species.

### Feature (SPA) – Passage and Wintering waterfowl

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Great Crested Grebe passage population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Whooper Swan wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Bewick's Swan wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Golden Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Pochard wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Tufted Duck wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Scaup wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Goldeneye wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Little Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Cormorant wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Greylag Goose wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
# Shelduck wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Wigeon wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Gadwall wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Teal wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Mallard wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Shoveler wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Coot wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Golden Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
# Lapwing wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Waterfowl assemblage wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Waterfowl assemblage wintering population	Bird numbers	Maintain species diversity contributing to the Waterfowl Assemblage	

### Non-avian factors

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures where this would lead to different usage by notified species.
# Roost sites	Location of roost sites	Maintain all locations of roost sites.	Map roost site locations. Visit once every reporting cycle to ensure sites are available.

## ANNEX II

### Feature (ASSI)

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Wet woodlands (Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Reed beds and swamps (Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Fens (Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Higher Plant Assemblage (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Breeding Birds (Lough Beg and Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Freshwater and Estuarine fish (Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Invertebrate assemblage (Lough Neagh ASSI)			
Coastal processes - refers to near-shore sand complexes (Lough Neagh ASSI)			

MONTIAGHS MOSS SAC  
UK0030214

# CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

## Document Details

Title	<i>Montiaghs Moss SAC Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>R. McKeown</i>
Approved By	<i>P. Corbett</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V2</i>
Next Review Date	Nov 2020
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

## Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials
V1	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2	January 2015	Complete review	RMK

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

## 2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

## 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4. SITE INFORMATION

**COUNTY:** ANTRIM

**GRID REFERENCE:** IJ 091654

**AREA:** 151.28 ha

### 5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

Montiaghs Moss is a cutover lowland raised bog, consisting of an intricate mosaic of peat ramparts, trenches, pools and drains, interspersed with grassland, alder and willow carr and tall hedgerows. These habitats support a wide range of plants and animals, including many rarities.

The area is particularly notable as one of the longest established colonies of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* in NI. The species was first recorded in 1983 and has been recorded annually since 1990 (except for 1997). It is believed that the colony here represents a metapopulation, with a comparatively large core permanent population. 89 webs were counted in 1999.

Further details of the site are contained in the ASSI Citation and Views About Management statement, which are available on the NIEA website ([www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)).

#### 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The boundary is very complex, and reflects the small-scale pattern of past hand-cutting, with piece-meal reclamation interspersed throughout the area. Around the edges of the site some of the deeper peats have been reclaimed for intensive agriculture, and these have been excluded. In the longer-term, restoring semi-

natural vegetation to these areas (which form part of the wider hydrological unit) would be beneficial.

The boundary includes the core peatland area, with all associated semi-natural vegetation (acid grassland, heath, birch and willow scrub, hay meadows, etc), but excludes improved agricultural land. Many of the rare plants occur within the drains, so a significant part of the network of drains has also been included. Pale Moss to the north was excluded, as it was deemed to be too far away from the core area to justify inclusion (several intervening fields to the north of the road have been reclaimed), in addition to parts of it becoming rank and invaded by scrub.

## 6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ pop~
Species	Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	B	89 webs recorded in Aug/Sept 1999
Habitat	Transition mires and quaking bogs	D	1.51
Habitat	Molinia meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (Molinion caenuleae)	D	4.54
Habitat	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	D	25

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

**A** - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

**B** - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

**C** - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

D - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click [here](#) to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Montiaghs Moss SAC.

## 6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

### Montiaghs Moss ASSI

Feature Type	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop~
Species	Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	
Species	Higher Plant Assemblage	6 A, B, C D species
Species	Dragonfly Assemblage	13 breeding species
Species	Invertebrate Assemblage (Coleoptera and Heteroptera)	

Table 2. List of ASSI features.

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The **Conservation Objective** for this site is:

***To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* to favourable condition.***

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

## 8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Global Status	Component Objective
Marsh Fritillary Butterfly <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	B	To maintain (and if feasible enhance) population numbers and distribution.
		To maintain (and if feasible enhance) the extent and quality of suitable Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat, particularly suitable rosettes of the larval food plant <i>Succisa pratensis</i>

## 9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Component Objective
Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Higher Plant Assemblage	To maintain (and if feasible enhance) the populations of notable species, including their abundance and distribution: i.e. <i>Spiranthes romanzoffiana</i> , <i>Hydrocharis morsus-ranae</i> , <i>Lemna gibba</i> , <i>Spirodela polyrhiza</i> , <i>Thalictrum flavum</i> and <i>Cicuta virosa</i> .
Dragonfly Assemblage	To maintain (and if feasible enhance) the diversity of the Dragonfly populations, including their abundance and distribution (13 species recorded).
Invertebrate Assemblage	To maintain (and if feasible enhance) the diversity of the Coleoptera and Heteroptera populations, including their abundance and distribution.

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### Ownership

Montiaghs Moss has been an ASSI since 1997. Given the fact that most of the land is unsuitable for normal agricultural activities, yet requires positive management to maintain the interest features, NIEA has pursued an active policy of acquisition since then. Currently, NIEA owns land within the ASSI.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Montiaghs Moss, or could affect it in the future. Although Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* is the qualifying SAC feature, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.**

### ***Grazing***

Due to the topography, with frequent ditches and old peat cuttings, most of the area is dangerous for livestock. Many farmers are understandably reluctant to graze. As a result, there is a trend towards increasing rankness and scrub encroachment. NIEA is actively encouraging grazing on its own land, where this is feasible. Ponies and hardy varieties of cattle are preferable, in that they tend to consume rough and unpalatable material (such as *Molinia*) that more selective grazers avoid. Sheep should generally be avoided, as they graze selectively on *Succisa pratensis*. The optimum time for *Molinia* control is generally May, when the young growth is present and is marginally more palatable.

Undergrazing is the more likely threat to the interest features; however, it should be noted that the peat soils are fragile and liable to poaching, so over-grazing should also be avoided. It should be noted that Marsh Fritillary larvae generally require large rosettes of *Succisa*. These are normally only present in ungrazed or very lightly grazed situations, yet if such conditions persist, *Succisa* will eventually be eliminated by coarse grasses and scrub. Therefore, a balance between grazed and ungrazed areas should be maintained.

### ***Woodland and Scrub Management – Encroachment, Control and Removal***

Scrub is an essential element in the system, providing shelter from wind and elevated positions for resting. The spread of scrub may be partly the result of natural seral succession, as a result of the build-up of vegetation litter; however, it may also be the result of under-grazing, or long-term hydrological deterioration.

In practical terms, the spread of scrub will lead to the loss of suitable Marsh Fritillary breeding habitat. Until further research indicates what the most appropriate balance should be between scrub and grassland areas, it may be assumed that the current extent of scrub is favourable. Therefore, clearance of well-established stands of woodland and scrub should generally be avoided. However, where recent scrub encroachment has extended into *Succisa* grassland and where there is good reason to believe that good-quality marshy grassland can be restored, control should be initiated. In the absence of grazing, or where the

scrub has become too tall for grazing to eliminate, control by either hand or mechanical methods is the only feasible option.

### ***Turbary***

The area has been extensively cut for turf in the past. Much of the cutting was by hand, using the “puddling” method (i.e. excavating wet peat from open water pools). A limited amount of machine cutting has been undertaken recently.

Currently, there is little active cutting, resulting in the gradual terrestrialisation of open water pools. Although this is probably not a direct factor in the breeding success of the Marsh Fritillary, many of the other interest features depend upon the presence of a range of different pool types, and the loss of this pioneer stage would render the site unfavourable. It is recommended that some existing vegetated pools are re-excavated to provide open-water sites for colonisation by fen vegetation. Since it is unlikely that the work could be carried out by hand, mechanical digger is recommended.

There may also be opportunities to dig open water pools within some of the more extensive stands of monodominant *Molinia*. This would require careful planning to avoid areas that are currently used or that could potentially be used by Marsh Fritillary. However, creating more open water would assist in fire management and would benefit other invertebrates.

### ***Burning***

The area has been burnt in the past on a fairly regular basis, often as a precursor to peat cutting. Even since the ASSI has been declared, several large fires have been started. Although burning may control *Molinia* spread and scrub encroachment to a certain degree, indiscriminate and uncontrolled burning destroys both Marsh Fritillary habitat and larvae. As indicated above, additional areas of open water could help to control fires.

### ***Drainage***

There are several large drains around the edge of the area, and running through the centre (Navvies Drain). It is not thought that these are having a serious effect on the site, as ultimately water levels appear to be controlled by Lough Neagh. However, it would be useful if this could be confirmed by a hydrological survey. This survey could also assist in developing a plan for the manipulation of water levels within NIEA land – such action might be necessary to enhance wetland habitats, if these are shown to be drying out.

In addition, the future clearance of ditches should ideally take place in liaison with the relevant statutory bodies to ensure that the main features of nature conservation interest are taken into consideration and to prevent detrimental effects upon the whole site.

### ***Eutrophication/Water Quality***

The area outside the ASSI is generally in intensive agriculture. Therefore, the area is potentially at risk from eutrophication caused by agricultural run-off from within the catchment. Changes in the vegetation – e.g. increase in nutrient indicators - should be picked up by regular monitoring exercises.

**ACTION: Farmers of the immediate catchment should be approached with details of the NI Countryside Management Scheme in the hope that they adopt nutrient management plans and good practice in slurry disposal.**

### ***Dumping***

Both fly-tipping and more extensive infilling have taken place on the site from many of the roads that cross the ASSI. This has caused the loss of semi-natural habitat. Although the ASSI declaration has stopped infilling, fly-tipping is still a problem. This activity is unsightly and also has the potential for nutrient enrichment, depending upon the type of waste. Gates and fences have been used by NIEA to control the problem within its own property.

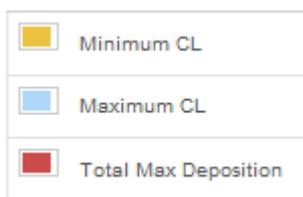
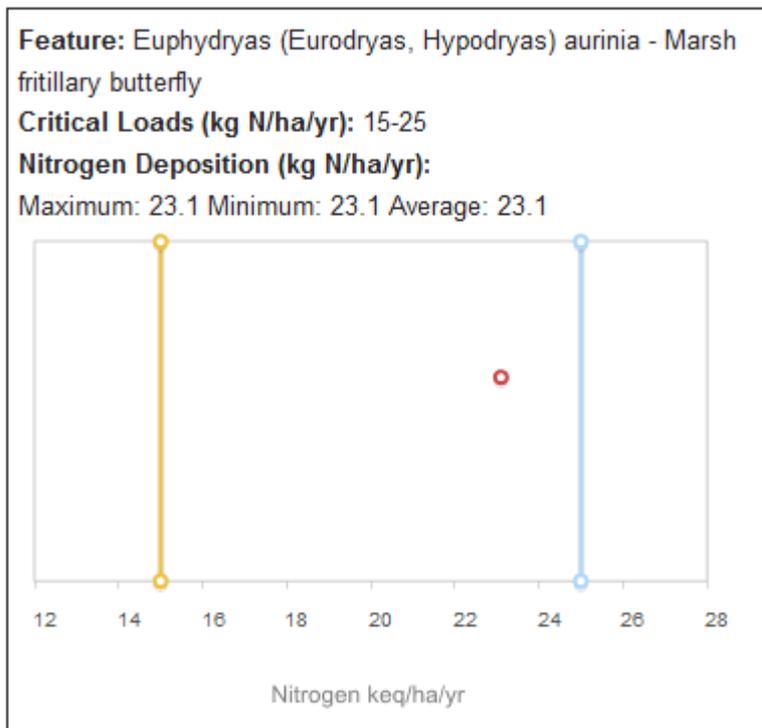
**ACTION: Continue to monitor fly-tipping and initiate appropriate control measures (fencing, etc) as necessary.**

### ***Other activities (Agricultural reclamation/Cultivation/Application of fertiliser/Additions of manure/slurry/Supplementary feeding***

Much of the site is unsuitable for normal agriculture without infilling and subsequent re-seeding. As a result, these activities are unlikely to take place and should be controlled by the ASSI declaration; there should be no reclamation or cultivation of land within the ASSI.

### ***Nitrogen Deposition***

Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for habitats and species present on Montiaghs Moss SAC.



N.B. There is insufficient knowledge to make a judgment of the impact of excess nitrogen deposition on the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. If the habitat on which the species depends on this site (Moist and wet oligotrophic grasslands: *Molinia caerulea* meadows) exceeds the critical Nitrogen load, then there would be cause for concern.

(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- [www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk))

**ACTION: Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.**

#### ***Changes to surrounding land use***

Any changes in local land-use e.g. drainage, road improvements, afforestation, agricultural intensification and development, may be detrimental to the SAC.

**Action: Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.**

### ***Climate Change***

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events.

**ACTION: When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered and appropriate changes made.**

## **12. MONITORING**

Monitoring of SACs takes place using two monitoring techniques.

**Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM)** is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC Schedule. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. dumping, burning, turf cutting, grazing etc.) or will be comparatively slow (e.g. gradual degradation of the habitat).

These longer-term changes will be picked up by monitoring of the feature via **Site Condition Assessment** - this is carried out on a rolling basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland.

### **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

#### **1. Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)**

Check particularly for unauthorised burning (which has taken place in the recent past), and fly-tipping, which is an ongoing problem. Drains to be checked for signs of pollution. This SIM should be carried out once a year.

#### **2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)**

Monitor the key attributes for each of the SAC selection features. This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annex I.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

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ANNEX I

Feature 1 (SAC) – Marsh Fritillary Butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* (Status B)

(\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Population Size	Number of larval webs present in at least one year in six	At least 80 larval webs should be present in at least one year in six  (unless unfavourable meteorological conditions during the flight period occur more often)	Larval webs are a much more reliable measure of the “health” of the colony than flying adults  Note: Figure for Wales is 200 webs per hectare

* Habitat Extent	Extent of suitable marshy grassland	Maintain the extent of suitable marshy grassland at 42 ha <sup>1</sup>  <sup>1</sup> Estimated extent of acid marshy grassland is 18.0 ha, with an additional c. 24 ha occurring as part of a mosaic with other habitats – i.e. 42 ha in total	Definition of suitable marshy grassland - Stands of grassland where <i>Succisa pratensis</i> is present and scrub (>1 metre tall) covers no more than 10% of area  Note: Figure for Wales is 10 hectares of suitable marshy grassland.
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	Extent of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat	<p>Maintain the extent of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat at 4.5 ha<sup>2</sup></p> <p><sup>2</sup> Estimated extent of fen meadow is 4.54 ha – this may not necessarily represent “good marsh fritillary breeding habitat” – some may be rank. On the other hand, some of the acid marshy grassland may be good habitat</p>	<p>Definition of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat - <i>Molinia</i>-dominated grassland where the vegetation height is within the range of 10 to 20 cm, and where <i>Succisa pratensis</i> is present within a 1 m radius of any point</p> <p>Note: Figure for Wales is 4 hectares of good marsh fritillary breeding habitat</p>
* Habitat Mosaic	Extent of other semi-natural habitats	<p>Maintain the extent of other semi-natural habitats which contribute to marsh fritillary breeding success (e.g. woodland and scrub (26.1 ha), wet heath, etc.) –</p> <p>No loss in extent of other semi-natural habitats</p>	<p>The comparatively large extent of the site, with the mosaic of different habitats is believed to contribute to the success of the colony on the site</p>

# OUTER ARDS - SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)

UK9020271

## CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

### Document Details

Title	Outer Ards SPA Conservation Objectives
Prepared By	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
Approved By	<i>Mark Wright</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V4</i>
Next Review Date	January 2020
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	01/12/2002	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### Site relationship

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA adjoins Belfast Lough SPA, Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and Strangford Lough SPA. It is also close to Copeland Islands SPA and adjoins the proposed East Coast Marine SPA.

The SPA boundary also includes the Outer Ards Ramsar site.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Down

Outer Ards ASSI G.R. J628 694

AREA: 1240.82 ha.

Outer Ards SPA G.R. J628 694

AREA: 4753.82 ha.

REVIEW OF ANY ADJOINING OR REMOTE MARINE AREAS WILL BE INFORMED BY JNCC REPORT ON MARINE USAGE BY TERN SPECIES FROM EXISTING SPA'S DESIGNATED FOR BREEDING TERNS.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES WILL BE REVISED AS THESE ISSUE PROGRESS

## 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

The coastal site extends from near Grey Point, Belfast Lough to north of Ballyquintin Point at the southern end of the Ards Peninsula. The site is contiguous with Belfast Lough SPA and Strangford Lough SAC/SPA. It comprises a variety of shoreline types including rock platforms, off-shore islands, boulder, gravel and sand beaches. Coastal relief is low so that no significant cliffs are present. While the wintering waterfowl utilise the open shore, breeding seabirds (tern species) are present on Cockle Island, Groomsport (SPA and Ramsar). A marine area has been included within the SPA adjoining the Cockle Island tern nest site. Limited adjoining habitat is included in the site, principally maritime heath and grassland.

### 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The SPA and Ramsar sites comprise the Outer Ards ASSI together with Ballymacormick Point ASSI. In addition, the SPA includes a sea area adjoining Cockle Island, Groomsport (breeding terns). Such areas adjoining colonies are of importance to an extent for feeding although terns can be wide ranging in their search for food. Landward, the site is generally limited to the head of beaches and rock platforms but in places extends inland where habitat quality justifies this. Major harbour complexes have been excluded. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population (5 year average 1995-2000) except where stated	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Arctic Tern breeding population <sup>a</sup>	260 (current population)	263	263	207	58
Species	Golden Plover wintering population <sup>a</sup>	2927	2109	2109	2079	735
Species	Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population <sup>a</sup>	206	209	209	245	54
Species	Ringed Plover wintering population <sup>a</sup>	452	516	516	545	380
Species	Turnstone wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1084	1210	1210	1241	846
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Roost site locations					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat is not a selection feature but is a factor and is more easily treated as if it were a feature. Habitat extent is also used for breeding birds reported as an area.

### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

## 6.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type (i.e. habitat, species or earth science)	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop'	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Habitat	Coastal saltmarsh			
Habitat	Coastal sand dunes			
Habitat	Intertidal mudflats			
Habitat	Maritime cliff and slope			
Habitat	Intertidal rock			
Species	Fungi assemblage			
Species	Higher plant assemblage			
Species	Cormorant wintering population		221	231
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population		82	4
Species	Eider wintering population		475	438
Species	Curlew wintering population		917	473
Species	Dunlin wintering population		2239	1187
Species	Lapwing wintering population		5379	3099
Species	Oystercatcher wintering population		1623	1593
Species	Purple Sandpiper wintering population		78	54
Species	Redshank wintering population		904	794
Earth Science	Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology			
Earth Science	White House Port Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous			
Earth Science	Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous			
Earth Science	Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy			
Earth Science	Orlock Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Millin Bay Structural Geology			

Table 2. List of ASSI features, additional to those that form all or part of SPA selection features. These will be referred to in ANNEX II.

## 7 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. Component objectives for Additional ASSI Selection Features are not yet complete. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8 OUTER ARDS SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Arctic Tern (B)	205	182	215	191	34	58	165.4	<b>285.17</b>	Favourable
Light-bellied Brent Goose	946	781	593	649	1311	54	856.0	<b>1585.19</b>	Favourable
Golden Plover	1148	721	439	362	181	735	570.2	<b>77.58</b>	Unfavourable
Ringed Plover	125	308	278	265	120	380	219.2	<b>57.68</b>	Unfavourable
Turnstone	930	1037	1000	780	692	846	887.8	<b>104.94</b>	Favourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

Feature	Component Objective
Arctic Tern breeding population	As above
Arctic Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	As above
Golden Plover wintering population	As above
Ringed Plover wintering population	As above
Turnstone	As above

wintering population	
Habitat extent	To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species (1001 ha intertidal area), (breeding areas xx ha) subject to natural processes
Habitat extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roost sites	Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts

Table 3. List of SPA Selection Feature Component Objectives

### Tern nesting localities current and historical (TO BE FINALISED)

Cockle Island – only site currently used
Bird Island
Burial Island
Green Island
South Rock
North Rock

Table 4. Historical tern nesting locations within the SPA

## 9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Component Objective</b>
Coastal mosaic	
Intertidal mud/sand	
Intertidal rock	
Fungi	
Higher Plant Assemblage	
Cormorant wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Eider wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Curlew wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Dunlin wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Lapwing wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Oystercatcher wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Purple Sandpiper wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Redshank wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
White House Port Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Orlock Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Millin Bay Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes

Table 5. ASSI Component objectives

## 10 MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### See also Views About Management for relevant ASSI

**Owner/Occupier's** – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

Approximately 170 individuals/organisations own land within the SPA. Major landowners and leasees within the SPA, relevant to the site management include, Crown Estate Commissioners, National Trust, NIEA, North Down and Ards Council, Commissioner of Irish Lights, RSPB and Private Individuals. There may be conflicts of interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

The proposed new sewage treatment works for the greater Bangor area at Donaghadee and associated infrastructure may impact upon the SPA. Development pressures are significant along the entire SPA. Other threats include coastal protection works particularly in southern region of the site. The area is of importance for recreational activities. These can exist alongside the SPA feature populations but care is needed that activities do not result in any adverse impacts.

There are no management agreements within the SPA.

## 11 MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES

**Notifiable Operations** - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the schedule could affect the site. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Outer Ards SPA, or could affect it in the future. Although, features 1, 2, 3, 4 etc, are the qualifying SPA features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

### Generic site/feature issues

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
1	Adjoining habitat	Particularly important for swans and geese as well as providing high tide roost locations. Significant changes in land management and disturbance are key considerations. Such areas lie without the site making effective management of developments other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Mostly improved agricultural land but provides high tide roosts, most notably for Golden Plover, and additional feeding habitat.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
2	Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried	No licensed sites presently but the area	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license

		<p>out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural littoral and sub-littoral communities through seeding, tray/trestle cultivation, dredging. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.</p>	<p>has been identified as having potential.</p>	<p>applications individually. Consider the collective impact.</p>
3	<p>Bait digging – commercial or ‘recreational’ and shellfish gathering.</p>	<p>Disturbance and impact on sediment and invertebrate fauna – may be positive through making deeper prey items available on surface. Shellfish gathering represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass. Generally unregulated.</p>	<p>Extent unknown</p>	<p>Monitor scale of activity. Consider the collective impact.</p>
4	<p>Beach cleaning</p>	<p>Disturbance consideration. Loss of seaweed and other driftline material especially represents a net loss to the system in terms of habitat and biomass.</p>	<p>Widespread on local authority and amenity beaches, main concern regards seaweed. Destination of gathered seaweed is unknown – should be returned to the system.</p>	<p>Liaise with local authority to limit frequency or timing of beach cleaning, restricting it to key sites through the summer. Consider best use of organic component, ideally returning it to the system.</p>
5	<p>Beach sand and gravel extraction.</p>	<p>Disturbance issue together with loss of biologically active upper sediments. Most beach systems are sedimentologically closed thus material removed may not be renewed making the activity unsustainable. May lead to changed sediment character of beach ultimately impacting on birds.</p>	<p>Apparently widespread especially in Cloghy area. Impact is unclear but practise is unlikely to be sustainable.</p>	<p>‘Permitted’ extraction of beach sand and gravel should be halted through management agreements. Ad hoc removal should be addressed in conjunction with local authorities.</p>
6	<p>Boating activity – commercial</p>	<p>Disturbance and potential for impact from high-speed liners.</p>	<p>Fishing boat activity is widespread, centred on the main harbours. Shipping within the Irish Sea may have a bearing with regard to the potential for pollution incidents. No immediate issues evident.</p>	<p>Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Consider the collective impact.</p>
7	<p>Boating activity – recreational</p>	<p>Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.</p>	<p>Main boating centres are at Bangor and Donaghadee. Probably dispersed activity associated with most beaches also. Most activity is likely to be in the</p>	<p>Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.</p>

			summer period. Implications for seabird nesting sites.	
8	Coastal protection schemes	Where there is no history of this, it impacts on natural beach systems with loss of habitat.	Much of the coastline is highly engineered. Ongoing erosion is a problem locally with ad hoc dumping as a response.	Liaise with Planning Service and other parties with an involvement in coastal management.
9	Cull of fledglings/ young	Licensed selective culling of species impacting on 'more desirable' species. Licensed by NIEA.	Potentially an issue at tern colonies but numbers of breeding large gulls has declined considerably in recent years.	NIEA to review all licenses. Consider the collective impact.
13	Enhanced bird competition	Activities onsite or offsite that influences or results in a shift in balance of species utilising a site.	Future of landfill operations especially in the wider area could impact on breeding seabirds	Liaise with Planning Service. Review wider countryside changes.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent 'competition' for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Scallop dredging and other trawling is ongoing.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
15	Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Loss of habitats through development, changes in coastal processes. Loss of inter-tidal habitat is a critical issue as this is the feeding zone for the majority (numbers and species) of birds.	Main threat is from ad hoc coastal protection schemes.	Assess planning applications. Monitor using aerial photography.
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Not a significant issue	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
17	Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality, invasive species or changes in coastal processes.	No major impact although seaweed cleaning/harvesting and sand/gravel extraction are issues of concern.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Not a significant issue given the sites position in open coastal waters. Impacts are localised.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution

				incidents. Consider the collective impact.
19	Habitat extent and quality-breeding	Alteration of habitat area or quality through inappropriate use or absence of site management.	Habitat management is main issue in context of seabirds. Tern site at Cockle Island	Assess needs of breeding species. Liaise with owner or appropriate authority to adjust or introduce site management.
20	High tide roosts	An essential component of sites hosting waders. Development of adjoining ground or actual traditional roost localities may adversely impact on the sites carrying capacity. Many such sites lie without the site making effective management of developments, other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Localities should be mapped including extent of use of adjoining habitat. It is probable that there is movement of birds between Outer Ards and Strangford Lough.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Extent unknown	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
23	Predation.	Mainly of concern on bird breeding sites.	Extent unknown but Cockle Island is accessible at extreme low tides.	Must be dealt with as part of wider countryside management considerations.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration although vehicle access may also lead to beach compaction and impacts on beachhead habitats. Breeding birds, especially seabirds, are vulnerable to disturbance as absence of adults can often result in predation or chilling of young with a reduction/loss in fledging success.	Widespread in summer with main concerns being access to Cockle Island (this is positively managed but is very vulnerable in terms of position). Sections of shoreline are heavily used for recreational activities. Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, wildfowlers, walkers, dogs etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations impacting on both feeding (inter-tidal) and roosting birds. Mainly an issue during the summer period.	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties. Signage at vulnerable sites should be reviewed.
25	Research activities.	Census and ringing activities especially have the potential to impact on bird populations, particularly at	Routine winter WEBS counts are undertaken. Breeding seabirds are surveyed annually.	Census and ringing activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. In

		breeding sites.		case of ringers, appropriate license must be held.
27	Seaweed harvesting	Either cutting living weed or gathering storm debris. The former, depending on scale and frequency, may fundamentally impact on shore communities and their ability to support waterfowl. The latter, represents a net loss to the system in terms of habitat and biomass.	See issue 4 – beach cleaning. In addition, commercial scale sublittoral seaweed cropping has been discussed.	
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Widespread engineered coastline and other management impacts. Ongoing localised erosion is also an issue. Separate embayments are possibly self-contained. Relationship between sand beaches and offshore sediments are presently unknown.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.
31	Wildfowling	Has direct effect through bag sizes/bag species and wider disturbance issue. Issue of regulated (through recognised shooting clubs) and ad hoc shooters. Lead shot on grazing lands.	Extent unknown – limited quarry species present within the site.	Liaise with relevant shooting bodies (BASC especially) to define areas for wildfowling, the development of Wildfowlers Codes of Good Practice and encourage bag returns. Support pressure to stop use of lead shot. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.

Table 6. List of site/feature management issues

## 12. MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA/ASSI schedule. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel

beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

## **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## **12.2 ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be

necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.

2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

### 13 SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Golden Plover	Fluctuating	-	Slight Fluctuation	-	Golden Plover is not included in the indexing processes
Arctic Tern	-	-	-	-	Not known, to be compiled.
Light-bellied Brent Goose	Stable	Fluctuating	Slight Fluctuation	Not Applicable	
Ringed Plover	Declining	Fluctuating	Stable	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI
Turnstone	Declining	Fluctuating	Increasing	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Breeding Seabirds

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Arctic Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Arctic Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected, apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. . Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Arctic Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined

### Non-Avian Factors – habitat

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures or breeding sites, where this would lead to different usage by notified species.

### **Feature (SPA) – Wintering Waterfowl**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Golden Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Ringed Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Turnstone wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

### **Non-Avian Factors – habitat**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures where this would lead to different usage by notified species.
# Roost sites	Location of roost sites	Maintain all locations of roost sites.	Map roost site locations. Visit once every reporting cycle to ensure sites are available.

## ANNEX II

### Feature 1 (ASSI) –

= primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
Coastal mosaic			
Intertidal mud/sand			
Intertidal rock			
Fungi			
Higher Plant Assemblage			
Cormorant wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Eider wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Curlew wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Dunlin wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Lapwing wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	

Oystercatcher wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Purple Sandpiper wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Redshank wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology			
White House Port Structural Geology			
Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous			
Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous			
Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology			
Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy			
Orlock Structural Geology			
Millin Bay Structural Geology			

REA'S WOOD & FARR'S BAY SAC  
UK0030244

# CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

## Document Details

Title	<i>Rea's Wood &amp; Farr's Bay SAC Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>R. McKeown</i>
Approved By	<i>P. Corbett</i>
Date Effective From	<i>01/04/2015</i>
Version Number	<i>V2</i>
Next Review Date	<i>Nov 2020</i>
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@doeni.gov.uk">cdp@doeni.gov.uk</a>

## Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials
V1	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2	Dec 2014	Complete review	RMK

## Site relationships

To fully understand the conservation requirements of this site, it is necessary to also refer to the Conservation Objectives for Lough Neagh SPA.

The Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay SAC boundary partially overlaps with the boundary of the Lough Neagh SPA.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

## 2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

## 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

### **3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### **4. SITE INFORMATION**

**COUNTY:** ANTRIM

**GRID REFERENCE:** J091872, J142853

**AREA:** 38.02 ha

### **5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION**

Rea’s Wood and Farr’s Bay have developed on a series of shorelines exposed by successive lowerings of Lough Neagh. The former lakebed has an undulating terrain consisting of raised ridges and wet, occasionally flooded hollows, with a resulting variation in the type of woodland cover.

The present foreshore supports inundation Willow/Alder woodland along the shore and Alder swamp woodland in the permanently flooded hollows behind, whilst the drier ridges support base-rich Ash woodland. The diversity of woodland types is reflected in the rich flora and fauna, which includes a large number of rare species.

Further details of the site are contained in the ASSI Citation and Views About Management statement, which are available on the NIEA website ([www.doeni.gov.uk/niea](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea)).

#### **5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE**

The boundary takes in all of Rea’s Wood NNR and Farr’s Bay NR, and part of Randalstown Forest NR. It has been drawn to include the best examples of swamp woodland, in addition to other semi-natural habitats that form part of the natural transition, such as inundation zones, Ash woodland, swamp and fen

vegetation. The site boundary uses permanent boundary features where possible; however, at the eastern side of Farr’s Bay the NR boundary was used.

## 6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion, Alnion incanae, Salicion alvae</i> )	B	26 ha

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

**A** - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

**B** - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

**C** - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

**D** - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click [here](#) to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Rea’s Wood & Farr’s Bay SAC.

## 6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

### Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay ASSI

Feature Type	Feature	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	Wet Woodland	26 ha
Species	Higher Plant Assemblage. <i>Alisma lanceolatum</i> (3), <i>Butomus umbellatus</i> (1), <i>Chenopodium polyspermum</i> (5), <i>Leucojum aestivum</i> (3), <i>Polygonum mite</i> (3), <i>Prunus padus</i> (2), <i>Cicuta virosa</i> (2), <i>Cardamine amara</i> (5), <i>Rorippa sylvestris</i> (1), <i>Lemna polyrhiza</i> (2), <i>Carex elongata</i> (5), <i>C. strigosa</i> (2) and <i>Scirpus sylvatica</i> (2)	ABCD score 36
Species	Invertebrate Assemblage Survey at these two sites has amassed an extensive inventory of the various invertebrate groups present. A number of these groups are extremely rich in species, which include a large number of rare or very locally distributed individual species that have been recorded. Major groups recorded include Nemertea, Mollusca, Diplopoda, Coleoptera, Hemiptera, Lepidoptera, Diptera, Hymenoptera, Crustacea, Opiliones and Odonata	Further research required and the need to set firm selection criteria for invertebrate assemblages.

Table 2. List of ASSI features.

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The *Conservation Objective* for this site is:

To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae*) to favourable condition.

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

## 8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

SAC Feature	Global Status	Component Objective
Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> ( <i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion alvae</i> )	B	Maintain and expand the extent of existing swamp woodland. (There is an area of wetland and damp grassland which have the potential to develop into carr woodland)
		Maintain and enhance swamp woodland species diversity and structural diversity
		Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the swamp woodland, e.g. fen, swamp, especially where these exhibit natural transition to swamp woodland.
		Seek nature conservation management over adjacent forested areas outside the ASSI where there may be potential for woodland rehabilitation.
		Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the ASSI where there may be potential for woodland expansion.

## 9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

ASSI Feature	Component Objective
Wet Woodland	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Higher Plant Assemblage	Map location of rare species
	Maintain abundance and distribution and if feasible enhance population.
	Establish the status of these species and if appropriate draw up further conservation priorities for this species.
Invertebrate assemblage	Map location of rare species
	Maintain abundance and distribution and if feasible enhance population.
	Establish the status of these species and if appropriate draw up further conservation priorities for this species.

## 10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### **Ownership**

Both sections of this site are owned and managed as national nature reserves except for a small parcel of wood at the western end of Farr's Bay, which is in private ownership.

### **Adjoining Land Use**

The extent of inundation is dependent on the level of Lough Neagh during the winter months. This level is regulated at the Toome Weir, which controls flow down the Lower Bann. Winter inundation of the marginal woodland supplies a renewable source of water borne seeds including exotics. Lough Neagh, already a major source of water for NI, will come under greater pressure from continual increase in demand for water resources.

## 11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay, or could affect it in the future. Although Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae*) is the qualifying SAC feature, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.**

### ***Woodland Clearance***

Removal of woodland would lead to a reduction in diversity. No recent significant broadleaved woodland clearance has been recorded, although *ad hoc* clearance continues.

**ACTION: No further removal of woodland from the site.**

### ***Dead Wood Removal***

Dead wood should be left *in situ* if safe or practical to do so. This provides valuable habitat for fungi, invertebrates etc. Removal of wood or fire-wood should be discouraged.

**ACTION: No removal of dead wood from the site.**

### ***Invasion by Exotics***

Exotic species are widespread particularly in Rea's Wood, varying in their degree of impact and threat they pose. Very invasive species such as Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, Indian Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*, Pick-a-Back Plant *Tolmiea menziesii*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia japonica*, Salmon Berry *Rubus spectabilis*, Skunk Cabbage *Lysichiton americanus* and Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* are seen as posing a current threat. Other invasives not seen as an immediate threat due to their limited occurrence, include Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum*, Bamboo *Bambusoideae*, Monkey Flower *Mimulus guttatus*, Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, Monk's-hood *Aconitum napellus*, Ostrich fern *Matteuccia struthiopteris*, Hop *Humulus lupulus*, Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, Black Current *Ribes nigrum* or slow rate of spread Beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Other species which have been established for a long time on the site such as Keeled Garlic *Allium carinatum*, Summer Snowflake *Leucojum aestivum*, Confused Michaelmas-daisy *Aster x salignus*, are not seen as a threat.

**ACTION: The very invasive species require management to control their spread, which in most cases will require the current seed source to be removed from site. This is impractical with those species such as Indian Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* and Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* whose seed supply is partly recruited annually from water borne seeds, here other methods of control will be required. In the case of Indian Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* it will probably be impossible to control its spread and so research should be carried out to identify the effect this species is having on the woodland community. Those species not posing a threat at present should be monitored and in the long-term controlled if required.**

### ***Changes in Water Level***

The past series of lowering Lough Neagh's water levels has had a fundamental impact on the marginal habitats, including woodland. Each lowering of the water

level has resulted in a successional series of shoreline colonisation. Wet woodland which has developed on previously exposed lake bed has changed to dryer woodland community types, with the increasingly elevated shoreline, after each lowering of the loughs water level. The lowering of water levels also creates newly exposed beds which are subsequently colonised by new wet woodland. Proposals to increase water extraction from the Lough will lower the summer water level again but is unlikely to effect winter levels.

**ACTION: Monitor the effects of the increased summer drop down resulting from the increase in water-extraction.**

### ***Drainage of Swamp Woodland***

A series of foreshore ridges, created during past lowering of water levels, previously acted as a natural barrier to drainage resulting in impoundment of water. The impounded areas remained flooded throughout the year, supporting much of the best swamp woodland. A study of the changes in the vegetation of Rea's Wood between 1984 and 1991 by Rachel Shepperson and Brian Rushton, (Applied Ecology Research Group, UUC) found there has been a shift in the composition of the woodland flora in general from characteristic wetland species to those preferring drier conditions. No reasons for this vegetation community shift were proposed during the study. However, it was noted, woodland adjacent to drains that have been cut through these ridges, show pronounced signs of drying out.

**ACTION: Further study should be undertaken to assess the effect of the drains on the impounded areas, to evaluate the impacts of increased rate of water loss. If the effects of drainage are proven significant, the installation of weirs across these drains would allow for controlled retention of water during the summer.**

### ***Fly-tipping***

Water borne material is the major source of rubbish deposited onto the shore line wood, during winter flooding or storms.

**ACTION: Where practical, remove tide-line deposited rubbish from the woods to prevent the build up of debris and to discourage fly-tipping.**

### ***Nitrogen Deposition***

Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay SAC.

**Designated feature/feature habitat not sensitive to eutrophication.**

(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- [www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk))

**ACTION: Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.**

#### ***Changes to surrounding land use***

Activities occurring outside the site (e.g. agricultural intensification, drainage works, and development) may be detrimental to the site through remote affects.

**Action: Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.**

#### ***Climate Change***

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events.

**ACTION:When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered and appropriate changes made.**

## **12. MONITORING**

Monitoring of SACs takes place on using two monitoring techniques.

**Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM)** is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC Schedule. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. woodland clearance, overwintering of stock, dumping etc), or will be comparatively slow. These longer-term changes will be picked up by monitoring of the feature via **Site Condition Assessment** - this is carried out on a rolling basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland.

### **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

#### ***1. Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)***

Complete boundary survey to ensure that walls and fences are still intact.

Ensure that there has been no tree felling, ground disturbance, dumping or inappropriate burning carried out within the SAC boundary. Evaluation of feral goat damage should be carried out throughout the site. SIM should be carried out once a year.

## **2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)**

Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature. This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

### 13. REFERENCES

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European Commission (2014). Establishing conservation measures for Natura 2000 Sites.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) (2013). 3<sup>rd</sup> UK Habitats Directive Report.

## ANNEX 1

### Feature 1 (SAC) – Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae*) (Status B)

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of Wet woodland	Maintain the extent Wet woodland at 26ha.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the woodland using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Loss due to natural processes (e.g. wind-throw during extreme storm) is acceptable
Alder woodland community diversity	Maintain presence of the woodland community, W5 as established at base line survey.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots	
Presence of associated features and semi-natural habitats	Maintain existing associated features and semi-natural habitats.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the ASSI using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Repeat monitoring of plots using GPS should indicate whether mosaics and associated habitats have changed or been lost. Note: Loss of associated habitats to Wet woodland may be desirable in some instances.

* Structural variation (% cover)	Mean canopy cover greater than 50%	Estimate within the visual vicinity of the monitoring plots.	A well structured wood should have a well developed canopy and shrub layer. However, many Wet woodlands do not support a tall canopy or very mature trees.
	Mean shrub cover should be maintained between 15-50%	Estimate within the visual vicinity of the monitoring plots.	
	Maintain current levels of standard variation within reasonable limits for field, herb and moss cover.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	At least the current level of structural diversity should be maintained for field cover, herb cover and moss cover. Limits to be set for each site after the baseline survey. The ground flora may appear sparse, particularly where periodic flooding leaves areas of bare mud etc. Its composition may be variable. Hydrology is difficult to assess given vagaries of climate. The regime should be allowed to revert to a natural one. Negative changes will be picked up in vegetation changes over time but more detailed recording may be necessary
		Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
		Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
Water-filled pools and ditches (or mud) should be at least present in 50% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.		
* Age-class variation (DAFOR)	Young trees (5- 20cm diameter) at least occasional in 25% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	

	Mature trees (20 - 75cm diameter) at least frequent in 75% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	classes present, including young and over-mature trees. Note, that in many cases achieving the set targets is a long term aim. However, providing the correct management practices are in place, this attribute may be recorded as Unfavourable -recovering.
	Over-mature trees (>75cm diameter) at least present in 10% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
* Presence of standing and fallen dead wood (DAFOR)	Standing dead wood at least occasional in 50% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	Dead wood is often abundant but because there tend to be fewer big trees in wet woodland the size of the fallen wood is often small. Flooding may lead to local accumulations with other areas totally lacking fallen wood.
	Fallen dead wood at least occasional in 50% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
* Presence of epiphytes and climbers (DAFOR)	Epiphytes and climbers at least occasional in 50% of plots and at least frequent in 10% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	Epiphytes and climbers are an important component in all woodlands. However, in Wet woodlands, their occurrence is much more sporadic than in other woodland types.
* Presence of Epiphytic bryophytes and lichens (DAFOR)	Epiphytic bryophytes and lichens at least occasional in 70% of plots and frequent in 30% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	Epiphytic bryophytes and lichens are an important component in all woodlands. However, in the extreme south east of Northern Ireland, where the climate is much warmer and drier, the generic limits may be set too high and may need amended for individual sites.
* Regeneration potential (DAFOR)	Regeneration of native seedlings.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	The general aim is for the successful establishment of young stems (i.e. seedlings growing through to saplings to young trees) in gaps or on the edge of a stand at sufficient density to
	Regeneration of native saplings.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	

Maintain current levels of native tree regeneration within reasonable limits for the current structure of the Wet Woodland.			maintain canopy density over a 10 year period. Regeneration of some native species is likely to be slow and sporadic; in some stands, there may currently not be sufficient and/or extensive enough gaps for young trees to regenerate. This does not necessarily indicate unfavourable condition.
* Cover of non-native species (all layers) (presence/absence)	Non-native invasive canopy species should be present in less than 20% of plots, but never frequent.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	The canopy of the Wet Woodland should be largely comprised of Alder and Willow trees with associated native species. Non-native species are undesirable in the canopy, particularly invasive species such as Sycamore.  In addition, non-native invasive species in any one layer is un-desirable. Note that non-invasive species are not viewed as a significant threat, and a low level of occurrence may be acceptable.
	Non-native invasive shrub species should be present in less than 20% of plots, but never frequent.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
	Non-native invasive canopy species seedlings/saplings should be present in less than 20% of plots, but never frequent.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
	Non-native invasive ground flora species should be present in less than 20% of plots, but never frequent.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
* Frequency and cover of eutrophication indicators: (DAFOR)	No one negative species no more than occasional throughout the wood and/or singly or together comprising more than 5% cover.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	

	<p><i>Galium aparine, Urtica dioica, Heracleum spp, Epilobium spp. Rumex obtusifolius</i></p> <p>No more than occasional is equivalent to less than 40% occurrence in recorded plots.</p>		
* Cover of grasses (non-woodland species) (% cover)	The mean cover of grass for the wood should be less than 10%.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	A high cover of grasses indicates past and/or present grazing. Where heavy grazing has been a past management practice, the natural woodland ground flora will take a considerable time to re-establish (time limits for restoration currently unknown). However, providing the grazing pressure has been addressed, and there is evidence that woodland flora is beginning to re-appear, this attribute may be recorded as unfavourable, recovering.
* Grazing (DAFOR)	Grazing should be recorded as no more than occasional over 80% of plots.	Estimate within the visual vicinity of the monitoring plots.	Grazing by domestic stock, where it occurs should be light resulting in minimal damage to the ground flora through poaching and damage to seedlings and saplings.
* Poaching by cattle (DAFOR)	Poaching should be absent, or recorded in less than 20% of plots and frequent or more in less than 10 % of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	

* Frequency of recent goat damage (1-2 years) (DAFOR)	Recent goat damage should be absent, or recorded in less than 20% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
* Frequency of damage to seedlings/saplings (DAFOR)	Damage to seedling/saplings should be absent, or recorded in less than 20% of plots.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	
Frequency of felling/coppicing (within 6 year monitoring cycle) (DAFOR)	There should be no felling or coppicing of native trees or shrubs.	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the ASSI using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Felling non-native species as part of management for conservation is acceptable.
Maintain the diversity of woodland species throughout the wood.	Record the % of plots with each of the wet woodland indicators (W5 community) listed below:- <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> , <i>Galium palustris</i> , <i>Caltha palustris</i> , <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> , <i>Lysimachia. nummularia</i> , <i>Ranunculus repens</i> , <i>Mentha aquatica</i> , <i>Angelica sylvestris</i> , <i>Potentilla palustris</i> , <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> ,	Visual estimate in 10x10m plots.	

	<p><i>Myosotis scorpioides,</i>  <i>Oenanthe crocata,</i>  <i>Lycopus europaeus,</i>  <i>Angelica sylvestris,</i>  <i>Scutellata,</i>  <i>Solanum dulcamara,</i>  <i>Valeriana officinalis</i>  <i>Iris pseudacorus,</i>  <i>Equisetum fluviatile,</i>  <i>Phragmites australis,</i>  <i>Carex rostrata,</i>  <i>C. paniculata,</i>  <i>C. remota,</i>  <i>C. vesicaria.</i></p>		
Indicators of Local Distinctiveness			
Presence of rare or scarce species specific to the site.	<p>Maintain current levels of standard variation within reasonable limits for rare and notable species.</p> <p>If these species are not recorded on any one visit, it does not automatically make the site unfavourable.</p>	Name the species at least present along the length of the Condition Assessment structured walk.	

Frequency -

1-20% = Rare

21-40% = Occasional

41- 60% = Frequent

> 60% = Constant

STRANGFORD LOUGH SAC  
UK0016618

# CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

## Document Details

Title	<i>Strangford Lough SAC Conservation Objectives</i>
Prepared By	<i>R. McKeown</i>
Approved By	<i>P. Corbett</i>
Date Effective From	<i>20/03/2017</i>
Version Number	<i>V4</i>
Next Review Date	<i>November 2020</i>
Contact	<a href="mailto:cdp@daera-ni.gov.uk">cdp@daera-ni.gov.uk</a>

## Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials
V1	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2	January 2015	Complete review	RMK
V3	February 2017	Review marine features	LP
V4	November 2018	Review seal targets	LP

## Site relationships

To fully understand the conservation requirements of this site, it is necessary to also refer to the Conservation Objectives for Strangford Lough SPA and the Strangford Lough and Lecale Heritage Management Strategy 2013-2018.

Strangford Lough SAC boundary overlaps with the boundary for Strangford Lough SPA and adjoins Outer Ards SPA. Strangford Lough SAC and SPA also lie within Strangford Lough Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## 2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as **“the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site”**.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4. SITE INFORMATION

COUNTY: DOWN

**GRID REFERENCE:** IJ 560579

**AREA:** 15398.54 ha

## **5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION**

Strangford Lough is a large (150 km<sup>2</sup>) marine inlet on the east coast of County Down, of which about 50 km<sup>2</sup> lies between high water mark mean tide (HWMMT) and low water mark mean tide (LWMMT). Its northern end lies some 15 km east of Central Belfast (6 km from the outskirts). Downpatrick lies 5 km west of the south west corner. Strangford, Killyleagh, Whiterock, Comber, Newtownards, Greyabbey, Kircubbin and Portaferry are situated on the edge of the Lough. About 60,000 people live around its shores and about one million people live within one hour's drive.

Almost land-locked, Strangford Lough is separated from the Irish Sea by the Ards Peninsula to the east and is bounded to the south by the Lecale coast. It is connected to the open sea by the Strangford Narrows, an 8 km long channel with a minimum width of 0.5 km. The Lough is 30 km long from head to mouth and up to 8 km wide.

This sea inlet is made up of a drowned drumlin field (created by inundation of the landscape which emerged from under the melting ice-sheets of the Ice Age) which is for the most part less than 10 m in depth and a deeper Y-shaped channel (possibly an old river-valley or geological fault-line) which is up to 66 m deep. The underlying rock is largely Silurian. The surface of the bed and shore of the Lough ranges from bedrock in areas with strong currents to fine mud in sheltered waters. The narrow entrance channel is an important feature with extremely strong currents of up to 8 knots (4 m/sec).

The tidal flats of Strangford Lough form extensive deposits around its northern limits in a partially eroded drumlin and late-glacial landscape. The sedimentary dynamics of the contemporary tidal flats are controlled by exposure to waves and tidal currents and vary from current- to wave-dominated sandy areas to suspension-dominated muddy areas. At a number of locations indicators of former sea levels are preserved which offer the opportunity to define the evolution of the area.

The triangular area around the Lough mouth is subject to greater wave energy. It has broad, almost level rock platforms, steeply-shelving rocky shores, sandy beaches and a largely sandy sea-bed. The water in the Lough is virtually fully saline except at the mouths of the two moderate-sized rivers and several streams which drain into it from the catchment of about 900 km<sup>2</sup> where it may be somewhat brackish. The area enjoys an equable climate with low rainfall, infrequent frosts and prevailing west to south west winds.

The Lough supports an impressive range of marine habitats and communities with over 2,000 recorded species. It is important for marine invertebrates, algae and saltmarsh plants, for wintering and breeding wetland birds, and for marine mammals.

Further details of the site are available on the DAERA website (<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/reasons-designation-special-area-conservation-strangford-lough>).

## 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The landward boundary of the SAC is entirely coincident with the landward boundary of the following five Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Strangford Lough Part 1, Strangford Lough Part 2, Strangford Lough Part 3, Killard and Ballyquintin Point. Marine areas below mean low water are also included.

## 6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ pop~
Habitat	Large shallow inlet and bay	A	15090.6 ha
Habitat	Coastal lagoons	B	45.0 ha
Habitat	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide	B	2000.0 ha
Habitat	Reefs	B	1600.0 ha
Habitat	Annual vegetation of drift lines	C	250 km
Habitat	Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> )	C	75.0 ha
Habitat	Perennial vegetation of stony banks	C	30.0 ha
Habitat	<i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand	C	
Species	Harbour (Common) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	C	210

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

**A** - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

**B** - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

**C** - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

D - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click [here](#) to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Strangford Lough SAC.

## 6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

### Strangford Lough ASSI

Feature Type	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop~	Comments
Habitat	Intertidal Rock	1645 ha	
Habitat	Mudflats	2000 ha	
Habitat	Coastal Vegetated Shingle	250km	
Habitat	Coastal Saltmarsh	75 ha	
Habitat	Maritime Cliff & Slope		
Species	Higher Plant Assemblage		
Species	Invertebrate Assemblage		
Species	Waterbird Assemblage		
Species	Harbour (Common) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>		
Earth Science	Contemporary coastal processes – the inter-tidal zone between Greyabbey and Ardmillan Bay		This refers to the entire inter-tidal zone
Earth Science	Holocene sea-level history – buried and semi-buried components within the inter-tidal and adjoining areas		Key localities are at Rough Island, Greyabbey Bay, Ringneill Quay
Earth Science	Pleistocene – Late Glacial Sediments		

Table 2. List of ASSI features

## 7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The *Conservation Objective* for this site is:

*To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the*

- Large shallow inlet and bay
- Coastal lagoons
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide
- Reefs
- Annual vegetation of drift lines
- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- Perennial vegetation of stony banks
- *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand
- Harbour (Common) Seal *Phoca vitulina*

*to favourable condition.*

Maintain implies that the feature is in favourable condition and will, subject to natural change, remain at its condition at designation. Restore implies that the feature is degraded to some degree and that activities will have to be managed to reduce or eliminate negative impact(s). Restoration in the marine environment can refer to natural recovery through the removal of unsustainable physical, chemical and biological pressures, as well as intervention.

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

## 8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Global Status	Component Objective
Large shallow inlet and bay	A	Maintain the extent of the large shallow inlet and bay
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development, structure, function and extent of the large shallow inlet and bay, to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this habitat.

<b>Coastal lagoons</b>	<b>B</b>	Maintain the extent of the coastal lagoons
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development, structure, function and extent of the coastal lagoons, to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this habitat.
<b>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide</b>	<b>B</b>	Maintain the extent of mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development, structure and extent of mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide, to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this habitat.
<b>Reefs</b>	<b>B</b>	To restore the reefs and their characteristic species to favourable condition, allowing for natural change.
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development, structure, function and extent of the reefs, to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this habitat.
<b>Annual vegetation of drift lines</b>	<b>C</b>	Maintain and enhance the extent of annual vegetation of drift lines subject to natural processes
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development and extent of annual vegetation of drift lines to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this community including the presence of notable species

Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> )	C	To restore the Atlantic salt meadows and their characteristic species to favourable condition, allowing for natural change.
		To maintain or enhance, as appropriate, the composition of the saltmarsh communities
		To maintain transitions between saltmarsh communities and to other adjoining habitats
		To permit the continued operation of formative and controlling natural processes acting on the saltmarsh communities
Perennial vegetation of stony banks	C	To restore the perennial vegetation of stony banks and their characteristic species to favourable condition, allowing for natural change.
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development and extent of perennial vegetation of stony banks to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this community including the presence of notable species
<i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand	C	To restore the <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand and their characteristic species to favourable condition, allowing for natural change.
		Allow the natural processes which determine the development and extent of <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand, to operate appropriately
		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the species diversity within this habitat.
Harbour (Common) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	C	Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, the Harbour (Common) Seal population

		Maintain and enhance, as appropriate, physical features used by Harbour (Common) Seals within the site
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## 9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

Feature	Component Objective
Intertidal Rock	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Mudflats	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Coastal Vegetated Shingle	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Coastal Saltmarsh	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Maritime Cliff & Slope	To be finalised
Higher Plant Assemblage	To be finalised
Invertebrate Assemblage	To be finalised
Waterbird Assemblage	See SPA Conservation Objectives.
Harbour (Common) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	See SAC Selection Feature Objective Requirements table.
Contemporary coastal processes – the inter-tidal zone between Greyabbey and Ardmillan Bay	Permit the continued operation of formative and controlling natural processes acting on the inter-tidal system. Maintain natural site morphology subject to natural processes.
Holocene sea-level history – buried and semi-buried components within the inter-tidal and adjoining areas	Maintain the potential for access to buried and semi-buried components necessary for the demonstration of sea-level history as related to this site.
Pleistocene - Late Glacial Sediments	Maintain extent and quality of exposure, together with access to the features subject to natural processes.

## 10. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Strangford Lough SAC, or could affect it in the future.

Although Reefs, Large shallow inlet and bay, Coastal lagoons, Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide, Atlantic salt meadows, Perennial vegetation of stony banks, Annual vegetation of drift lines, *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand and Common Seal *Phoca vitulina* are the qualifying SAC features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

**NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.**

### ***Changes in Surrounding Land Use Impacts***

Activities occurring outside the site (e.g. land surrounding Strangford Lough such as agricultural intensification, coastal engineering, and development) may be detrimental to the site through remote affects – some of these outside impacts are considered, as follows:

### ***Housing and Industrial Development***

Pressure for development around the Lough is evident from the number of planning applications submitted in recent years. Substantial housing developments have proceeded at Portaferry, Greyabbey, Kircubbin and Killyleagh and others are under consideration. The area also attracts applications for individual houses in rural locations which may be effect wildlife or landscape.

Development close to the shore may have adverse effects on areas of saltmarsh and other habitats or lead to disturbance of feeding and nesting birds. The cumulative effect of such development is difficult to assess accurately but is unlikely to be insignificant. There are also indirect impacts associated with development, for example the increased load on sewage treatment plants or additional septic tanks and the effects of storm water drainage.

Shoreline housing may also create demand for further sea defences, causeways and boat slips.

### ***Coastal Engineering***

Much of the larger scale sea defences are located in the northern end of the Lough. The sea defences at Newtownards have recently been repaired and improved. A monitoring programme has been set up by the Rivers Agency to assess the effects of these major repair works on the ecology of the Lough.

In recent years rock armouring has been a favoured strategy for road protection against erosion. Unlike the traditional sea walls, armouring helps to dissipate wave energy with less drawdown of sediment. However, it is rarely aesthetically pleasing and tends to encroach onto the shore. There have also been attempts by some landowners to prevent erosion by using rocks and boulders from the intertidal area.

Coastal engineering works have affected a number of shallow bays, saltmarshes and areas of tidal flat around the Lough. Causeways, boat slips and other restrictions have modified current and tidal flow patterns and, in turn, affected sediment transport patterns. In some cases this has resulted in the incidental creation of new habitat including saltmarsh, brackish ponds and wetlands.

The effect of rising sea levels and changing weather patterns in the long-term may create a desire for new or additional flood defences at existing settlements.

### ***Sand and Gravel Extraction***

Traditional rights to remove sand, gravel and shingle from the shores are attached to the folios of some land-holdings in the area. These materials were formerly extracted by shovel and horse-drawn cart for use on the land. Nowadays tractors, trailers and earth-moving machinery are more likely to be used. The removal of intertidal sediments increases the risk of erosion by removing some of the wave-absorbing materials and altering the beach profile. The exercise of extraction rights is not, however, currently a major issue within the SAC/SPA.

### ***Farming***

Farmers and landowners have helped to shape the Strangford Lough landscape and its habitats and contributed to the conservation interests around the Lough. For example, many of the islands which are important for wildfowl or nesting terns are grazed by sheep or cattle. By and large farmers have tolerated the habit of Brent Geese to graze agricultural land when eelgrass is in short supply. Some farming practices, however, can cause localised damage.

Livestock which are free to wander onto the shore may result in damage to strandline vegetation and saltmarsh. Their trampling can seriously poach the ground and exacerbate erosion. The practice of sand-ploughing on the shore to clean the plough can have damaging effects both on eel-grass beds and on invertebrates in the sand. Recovery from this seemingly harmless activity can take years in some situations.

**ACTION: Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use appropriate assessments, through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.**

### ***Recreational & Educational Impacts***

#### ***Tourism***

Areas of high scenic and amenity value such as Strangford Lough are an important part of Northern Ireland's tourism product. Investment in tourism capital projects and support systems such as environmental and heritage visitor centres has helped bring employment and new prosperity to rural towns and presents diverse business opportunities for local communities. As the trend towards activity and special interest holidays increases, Strangford Lough's environmental designations may provide additional impetus to the promotion of the marine life as a tourist attraction.

Increasing pressure from the public for access to the water and the surrounding countryside for recreation and enjoyment has to be balanced with the need to sustain the environment and the fabric of local communities.

#### ***Informal Recreation***

Strangford Lough is an attractive and popular venue for a variety of informal recreational pursuits, such as walking (often with dogs), bathing and wildlife watching.

Individuals or small groups of walkers rarely cause any problems for conservation. Walkers can, however, cause considerable disturbance to bird-life in certain sensitive locations. Localised problems have been experienced with dogs disturbing birds, particularly on the upper shore at low tides and at nesting islands. The problem is particularly acute with loose dogs and at certain periods of the year critical to the bird's feeding cycles.

Efforts to keep beaches suitable for recreation often include the removal of drift seaweed along with litter. Seaweed is an important component of the marine ecosystem and in most instances is better left in place unless there are compelling reasons for its removal. There have been proposals to create or extend sandy beaches for bathing. In addition to loss of natural foreshore, such efforts can be counterproductive if they fail to take account of the local sediment regime. There may also be a desire to provide amenities such as promenades and car parking areas. These are likely to increase the numbers of people using the area with the consequent risk of increased disturbance.

The Lough's international reputation for waterfowl is underlined by the number of bird-watchers who are attracted to the area, many from Britain or overseas. The National Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust have provided hides from which the birds may be observed by the public. Seal watching from the car park at Cloghy Rocks is also popular.

The observation of wildlife for enjoyment is a popular activity. However some enthusiasts fail to consider either owners' property rights or the welfare of the wildlife. Disturbance can prevent wildlife feeding and can cause desertion of nests with eggs or young birds. Litter and discarded angling materials are unsightly and may cause injury to wildlife. There has been an increase in charter boats specialising in wildlife watching trips, which without appropriate training may cause disturbance to protected species.

### ***Boating and Sailing***

About 2000 yachts are located around the Lough and there are approximately 5000 active boaters. Most yachting is organised through the eleven clubs around the Lough. Club races and regattas take place throughout the summer with frequent all-Ireland and international events for particular classes. Yachting instruction takes place at several centres and clubs have their own cadet classes.

Most cruisers are moored on permanent swing moorings close to club premises. There are also a few public moorings and scattered private moorings elsewhere. Some craft are mud-berthed and a few are berthed at marina type jetties. Some areas, particularly Whiterock, are popular for water-skiing. There is limited public access to the shore for boats. Cook Street Pier owned by Ards Borough Council and the pontoons at Portaferry are the two main areas.

Windsurfing (sailboarding) has become increasingly popular over recent years, particularly at Cunningburn, Kircubbin and Whiterock. Little depth of water is required and insulating suits enable enthusiasts to sail throughout the year when weather permits. Jet skiing has developed on a small scale on the Lough notably at Whiterock.

Although generally a benign activity, boating may result in a number of potentially harmful impacts on the Lough and its wildlife. It may cause physical disturbance to the seabed and shore, particularly at moorings and where slipways and jetties are built. It is often difficult to maintain water quality at anchorage's and harbours. Boating may also cause noise and general disturbance to wildlife, particularly to breeding or over-wintering birds. Fast powered craft including jet-skis tend to be the worst in this regard. Windsurfing during the winter could potentially conflict with wildlife in refuges.

### ***Diving***

Strangford Lough is one of the principal areas in Northern Ireland used by recreational divers for training, exploring wrecks and observing marine life. The Lough's sheltered waters are ideal as training areas for novice divers, while also affording some of the most challenging dives to be found in Northern Ireland for the more experienced.

The study of the seabed by divers is in harmony with conservation interests provided no damage is done. Over-collection of marine life could, however, prove damaging to the populations of certain species. The Strangford Lough Regulation of anchoring, mooring and diving byelaws 2012 () prohibit anchoring, mooring or diving within a restricted zone at any time. This byelaw applies to all waters deeper than 10m below chart datum in the restricted zone which is bounded by a Northern Limit and a Southern Limit. Diving for the purposes of monitoring condition and recovery of the designated features within the zone may be permitted by the Department following an assessment of the proposed methodology and qualifications of the Dive Team. Any such Permit will be time bounded and require the production of a detailed survey report.

### ***Horse Riding***

Newtownards, Mount Stewart and Ballyhornan are the most popular areas for horse riding on the foreshore. Firm beaches provide uninterrupted gallops for exercising horses.

The areas most sensitive to horse riding are wildlife refuges over the winter months and areas supporting Eelgrass. Birds may not be unduly disturbed by riders hacking across the shore, but are more likely to move where several horses are using the same stretch of shore as a gallop. There is some conflict with displacement of wildfowl from the shore at Castle Espie where there is a bird watching hide. Otherwise there are few significant problems at present.

### ***Wildfowling***

There is a very long tradition of wildfowling on Strangford Lough. The five wildfowling clubs around the Lough, (all affiliated to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation), co-ordinate their activities through the Joint Council of Strangford Lough Wildfowling Associations. Wildfowling on the foreshore and on adjacent lands owned or controlled by the National Trust is subject to controls under the Wildlife Scheme. A system of refuges has been established where wildfowling is either banned or restricted to certain times of year and where efforts are being made to minimise all forms of disturbance. Bag returns provide information on the

composition of birds shot and their location. Mallard is the main quarry species, followed by teal.

Wildfowling inevitably causes some disturbance to the birds though this is minimised by the wildfowlers. Participants try to reach their positions unseen, and shoot birds on a flightline, rather than on the feeding grounds. Dogs retrieving birds may cause some disturbance to feeding birds, but with well-trained animals this is minimal.

The revised system of refuges, including time-share zones and shooting regulated zones, has been designed to increase the birds' opportunity to feed and roost undisturbed, so maintaining the Lough's attraction for them. Work to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of the current refuge system is on-going.

### ***Aircraft***

Newtownards Airfield lies adjacent to the SAC/SPA. Light aircraft, gliders and small helicopters use the airfield, mostly for recreation. An annual fund-raising air-show attracts large crowds.

The evidence to date suggests that birds generally become accustomed to the movements of light aircraft. Microlites and helicopters cause greater disturbance.

### ***Education and Research***

The Lough provides a natural laboratory for carrying out marine biological and oceanographic research and this is evident from the number and diversity of research projects that it supports. Strangford Lough is much used for field studies at all levels of education, with many school groups visiting the interpretative centres which have been established around the Lough. In addition, residential centres bring Primary and Secondary school parties to the Lough for study and training.

Generally speaking these activities have little lasting impact on the Lough's ecology. There is, however, a risk of disturbance from large parties repeatedly using sensitive areas. Repeated collecting at favoured sites may also lead to local depletion of species in that area.

**ACTION: The increasing recreational pressure needs to be continuously monitored and assessed for any possible adverse impacts on the loughs SAC/ASSI habitats and associated species. Recreational pressure also needs to be considered in appropriate assessments when assessing the possible adverse impacts of proposed recreational developments, on or around the lough.**

### ***Operations Affecting Water Quality***

Anthropogenic inputs entering Strangford Lough include those from sewage outfalls, watercourses, recreational and commercial craft and associated facilities, and the open sea. They include nutrients from effluent discharges, organic wastes and fertiliser run-off; some particulate material including bacteria; small amounts of petroleum and oils; some metal ions and other more complex chemicals derived from industrial processes; fuel additives, pesticides, anti-fouling paints, slip-way treatments etc.; and plastic and other floating waste. Some fly-tipping of refuse

onto the shore also takes place, which may result in chemicals leaching into the Lough.

Sewage effluent is discharged directly into Strangford Lough from eight main outfalls. In addition, treated sewage effluent from a number of neighbouring settlements is discharged into the Quoile system. Slurry, silage effluent, effluent from septic tanks and leachate from landfill sites may enter the rivers and some of the smaller streams, particularly the Quoile. A certain amount of agricultural run-off enters the Lough directly from adjacent fields, or indirectly via watercourses.

Effluent discharged from in-board toilets on boats may cause localised pollution.

Water quality in the Lough is generally good, although there be locally significant effects from discharges of storm water and sewage from peripheral housing areas. High nutrient levels from sewage outfalls can adversely modify the local biota though such inputs may increase productivity and carrying capacity. Some forms of wildlife thrive in nutrient enriched areas but nutrient overload can also lead to some species having a blanketing effect on the habitat. Enrichment tends to result in an increase in the abundance of a few tolerant species such as ragworms and in the growth of green algae.

Nutrication may be having a detrimental effect particularly at the northern end of the Lough. Increases in the suspension of organic or inorganic material in the water column increases turbidity and reduces light levels, which along with changes in sedimentation may be affecting the growth of eelgrass.

The potential exists for any spillage from shipping in the Irish Sea to enter the Lough system. The scale of impact would depend on the amount of spill, its location and type of oil etc.

**ACTION: The ongoing water quality monitoring of the lough should identify any potential water quality problems. In the case of accidental oil spills from shipping in the Irish Sea, there needs to be an up to date Oil Spill Contingency Plan, in place, to deal with such an eventuality.**

### ***Commercial Fisheries Impacts***

#### ***Commercial Fishing***

Fishing on a commercial scale can affect the seabed in a variety of ways. Several studies of the impact of fishing operations on the seabed were undertaken during the 1990s. These studies concluded that only those areas where fishing boats could not easily gain access remained unmodified. Following concerns about a serious decline in the biogenic reef (*Modiolus modiolus*) in Strangford Lough, Queen's University Belfast were commissioned by EHS to undertake a wide ranging investigation into the probable causes of this decline. The final report (Strangford Lough Ecological Change Investigation) identified trawling and dredging for scallop species as the main cause for the demise of the *Modiolus* biogenic reef structure. Subsequently, DARD Fisheries Division introduced the Strangford Lough

(Prohibition of Fishing for Shellfish) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 which prohibits the use of mobile fishing gear within the Lough.

In 2008, DOE and DARD developed a comprehensive restoration plan for the *Modiolus* biogenic reef, which was submitted to and accepted by the European Commission. This included surveying the extent and condition of the remaining biogenic reef, identification of sites in good condition, investigation of practical methodologies and introducing total protection measures where required. The Restoration plan was modified and resubmitted to the European Commission in October 2012. As part of the restoration plan DARD brought forward proposals to prohibit, through regulations, fishing in two areas of Strangford Lough, known to contain *Modiolus* biogenic reef. These regulations (The Strangford Lough (Sea Fishing Exclusion Zones) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012) came into operation in January 2013 and prohibit all fishing within two zones at a depth of 10m or more below chart datum.

Potting takes place mainly in the Narrows and the periphery of the Lough. There is pot fishing of Dublin Bay Prawns and more recently of Shore Crabs, Velvet Swimming Crabs, Common Whelks and Lobsters are also taken. Fishing effort can disturb sediment and over-fishing of some species might affect the conservation interests.

#### ***Harvesting of Wild Shellfish***

Though economically viable beds of the Native Oyster were worked out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, other shellfish are still gathered. Cockles are gathered by hand raking the sediment. While the collection of Common Mussels and Winkles for personal use is unlikely to have a significant impact on the designated features of the Lough, there has been an increase in unregulated shellfish harvesting by large groups or 'gangs'. Some commercial harvesting may be sustainable but large-scale harvesting may be detrimental. Mechanical harvesting of cockles for example would be very likely to severely damage other fauna and flora that live in the mudflats. Eelgrass may be physically damaged and harvesting may interfere with birdlife such as oystercatchers, for which cockles are a major food source.

People on the shore engaged in such activities may reduce bird feeding times and increase their energy requirements as they fly to other areas. Common and Grey seals hauled out onto rocks within the intertidal area may also be disturbed by people harvesting wild shellfish.

#### ***Seaweed Harvesting***

Historically in Strangford Lough seaweeds have been both harvested and cultured. Drift wrack and kelp (brown seaweeds) were used on the land as fertiliser. Up to the Second World War seaweed - in particular the Knotted Wrack - was extensively cut for fertiliser and for burning to produce a powder used in glass-making. At certain sites, for example around Greyabbey, large boulders were placed on sandy areas of shore for seaweeds to attach and create a crop of material.

The red algae known as Dulse is also a traditional crop, being cut from the stipes of kelp, on which it grows particularly in the Narrows, then dried for human consumption.

Were extensive commercial exploitation of seaweed to take place in Strangford Lough the loss in ecological terms would be likely to be on a significant scale. Research has indicated that large scale commercial harvesting would probably alter populations over a wider area with consequent decline in larval supply, increase in sediment mobility and loss of organic material from the inshore system.

There is interest in the cultivation of seaweed in Strangford Lough which may have implications for the features.

### ***Bait Digging***

Bait digging has traditionally taken place on a small scale in many places around the Lough and today digging for Lugworm and Ragworm is commonplace at Island Hill. Small-scale bait digging by anglers for individual use may be insignificant in its effect in many situations but if undertaken in sensitive habitats, at certain times of the year or on a commercial scale, it may be incompatible with the aims of nature conservation. It may damage eelgrass beds and large numbers of bait diggers are likely to cause disturbance to waterfowl. Raking or digging for burrowing invertebrates buries oxygen-rich surface sediments often killing the animals they contain.

### ***Aquaculture***

There has been a steady growth in interest in shellfish cultivation in Strangford Lough in recent years. Some 350 hectares of seabed and intertidal area within the Lough are now subject to shellfish culture licences. A number of different techniques are used for growing oysters, mussels, clams and scallops. Oyster farming is the most economically important fishery in the Lough with an annual turnover in excess of that from commercial fishing. Both Native Oyster and Pacific Oyster are cultivated in the Lough; these are grown in mesh sacks on trestles at low water and finished on ground mats.

Shellfish culture is generally regarded as an activity that has relatively low negative impact on the environment. A high standard of water quality is required and no chemicals or antibiotics are used in shellfish production. It can, however, cause loss or modification of habitat, disruption of sediment movement, and disturbance to wildlife. Care has to be taken to avoid the accidental introductions of other species with commercial shellfish. Imports of juvenile shellfish for cultivation are therefore routinely inspected by the Department.

The impact of areas set aside for the shellfish cultivation on bird feeding is generally limited. Sown areas cover only a small proportion of the foreshore and are usually well spaced. Harvesting and net cleaning occurs only during periods of spring tides. However, harvesting does occur during the winter months when bird feeding may be at its most intense. The cumulative impacts of shellfish cultivation on all designated features should be considered, in particular with each new application.

Caged fin-fish farming is presently considered to be an inappropriate practice in Strangford Lough for various environmental reasons including risks to native

marine life from waste products and parasite treatments, incompatibility with predator species and its impact on maintaining visual amenity.

**ACTION: Commercial fisheries operations need to be constantly monitored and reviewed to assess the sustainability of the operations to prevent any adverse impacts on the loughs water-quality and foodchain ecology.**

### ***Wildlife watching trips***

Wildlife watching trips (boat and land based) have the potential to cause disturbance to species if operators are not appropriately trained in how to approach species while minimising potential disturbance. In addition, damage to sensitive habitats may occur through lack of knowledge of their location. Various wildlife training courses are available which teach best practice when dealing with wildlife.

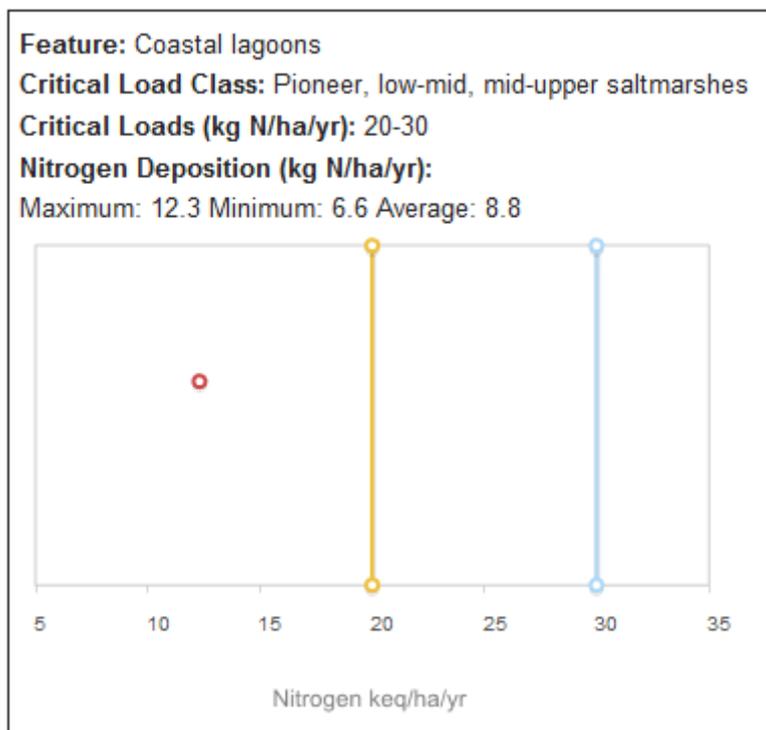
### ***Nitrogen Deposition***

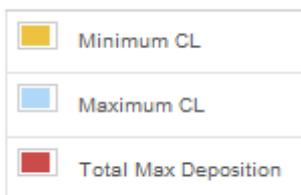
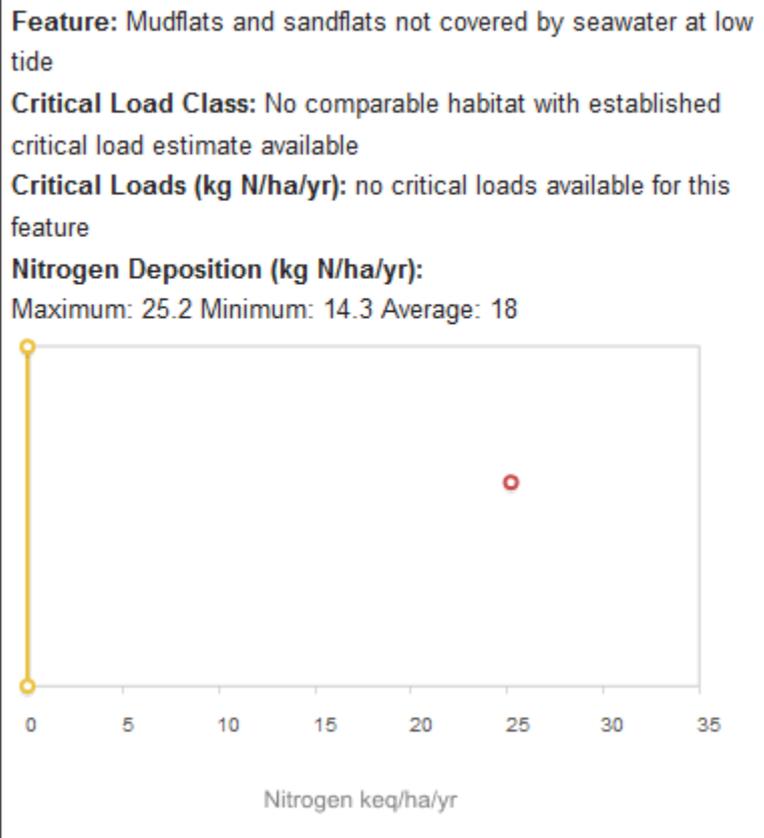
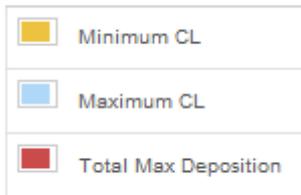
Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for Strangford Lough SAC.

**Large Shallow Inlets and Bays** - Designated feature/feature habitat not sensitive to eutrophication.

**Reefs** - Designated feature/feature habitat not sensitive to eutrophication.

**Annual Vegetation of Drift Lines** - Designated feature/feature habitat not sensitive to eutrophication.





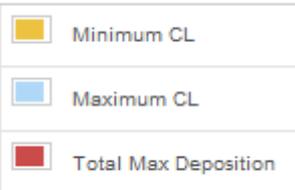
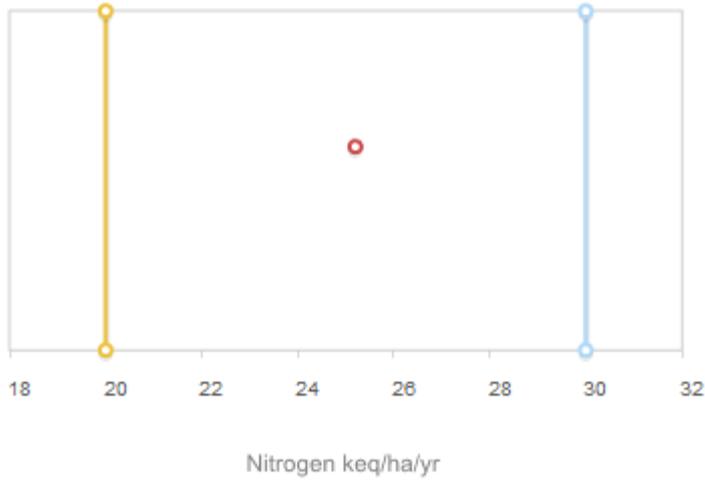
**Feature:** Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)

**Critical Load Class:** Pioneer, low-mid, mid-upper saltmarshes

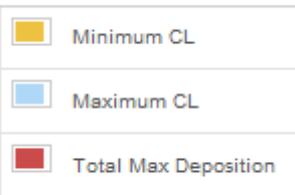
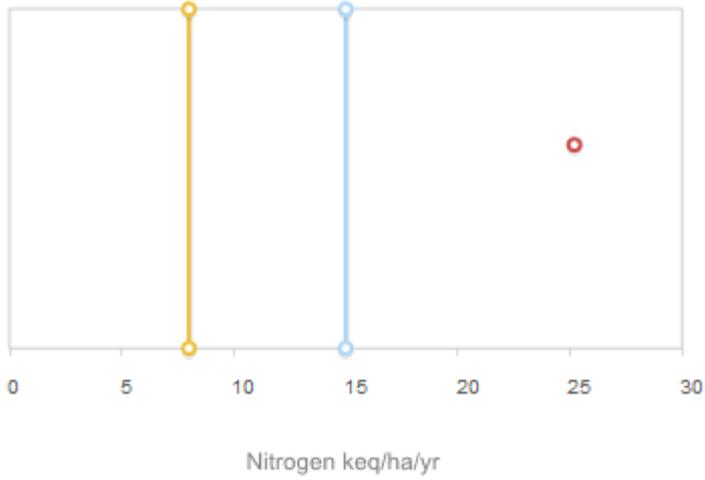
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 20-30

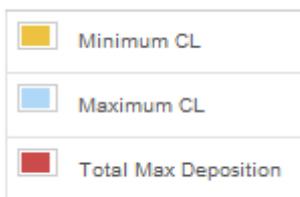
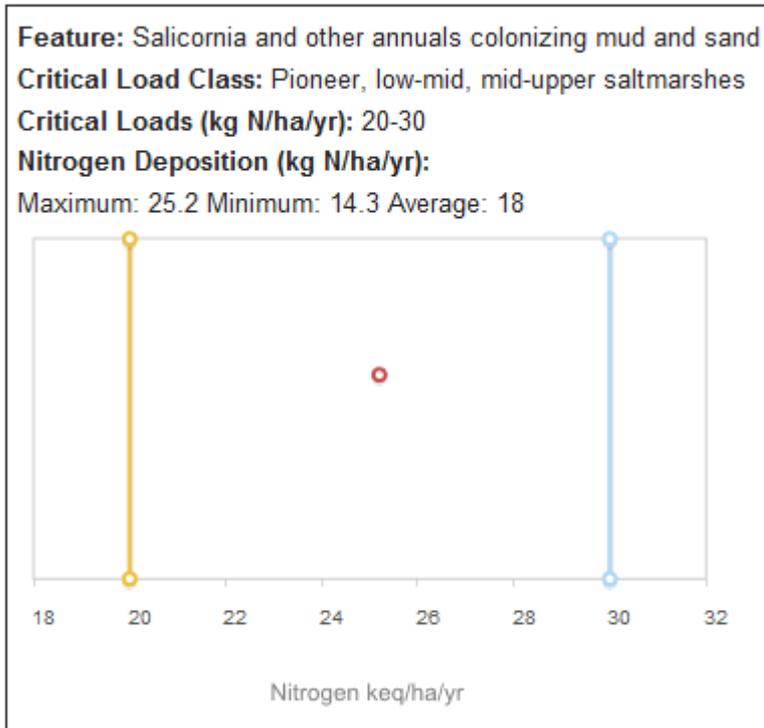
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**

Maximum: 25.2 Minimum: 14.3 Average: 18



**Feature:** Perennial vegetation of stony banks  
**Critical Load Class:** Coastal stable dune grasslands  
**Critical Loads (kg N/ha/yr):** 8-15  
**Nitrogen Deposition (kg N/ha/yr):**  
Maximum: 25.2 Minimum: 14.3 Average: 18





(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- [www.apis.ac.uk](http://www.apis.ac.uk))

**ACTION:** Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.

#### ***Changes to surrounding land use***

Any changes in local land-use e.g. agricultural intensification, drainage works and development) may be detrimental to the SAC.

**ACTION:** Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.

#### ***Climate Change***

Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events. The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme was published in January 2014. This contains the Northern Ireland Executive's response to the risks and opportunities identified in the Climate Change Risk Assessment for Northern Ireland (published January 2012) as part of the overall UK Climate Change Risk Assessment. The Adaptation Programme provides the strategic objectives in relation to adaptation to climate change, the

proposals and policies by which each department will meet these objectives and the timescales associated with the proposals and policies identified in the period up to 2019.

**ACTION: When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered.**

## 11. MONITORING

The SACs are surveyed using two forms of monitoring:

**Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM)** is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC conservation objectives. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. dumping, burning, turf cutting, grazing etc.) or will be comparatively slow (e.g. gradual degradation of the habitat). In addition, potentially damaging activities may be picked up through the active marine ranger programme or by members of the public raising concerns with the Department. These reports are followed up through consultation with the relevant competent authorities.

**Site Condition Assessment** of the designated features is carried out on a rolling 6 year basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature and to ensure that the conservation objectives are being met.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland. For marine features, condition assessments include a variety of techniques such as diving, remote cameras, sediment sampling and acoustic seabed mapping. Marine mammal monitoring programmes also contribute.

### 11.1 MONITORING SUMMARY

#### 1. *Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)*

This SIM should be carried out at least once every year.

#### 2. *Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)*

Monitor the key attributes for each of the SAC selection features. This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annex I.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex I is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

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## ANNEX I

The marine Annex I habitats are very broadly defined habitats that are often represented by large and complex sites. To effectively describe, monitor and manage such complex features, it has been necessary to divide some of them into smaller units called *sub-features*. Sub-features are distinctive biological communities (e.g. eelgrass beds, maerl beds, horse-mussel reefs), or particular structural or geographical elements of the feature. Due to the broad nature of marine Annex I features, it has often proved helpful, both in the development of conservation objectives, and of monitoring programs, to separate the feature into a number of constituent sub-features, and then to identify attributes and targets for the sub-features. The use of sub-features has been found to be particularly helpful for those marine Annex I features that represent whole physiographic units, and permits a level of flexibility in the application of the UK's Common Standards Monitoring which has been found necessary when applying the standards at the site level.

### Feature 1 (SAC) - Large shallow inlet and bay (Status A)

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
	Extent	Area (ha) of the large shallow inlet and bay, measured once per reporting cycle.	No decrease in extent from an established baseline, subject to natural change.	
	Water clarity	Light attenuation measured on a monthly basis from March to September.	Seasonal light attenuation should not deviate from the baseline, subject to natural change.	The extent and diversity of plant and algal communities is affected by water clarity. Clarity is reduced through increases in the suspension of organic or inorganic material in the water column.

	Water salinity & temperature	Salinity and water temperature measured on a monthly basis.	Temperature & salinity should not deviate significantly from the long-term trends, subject to natural change.	Temperature and salinity are characteristics of the overall hydrography of the area, thus the overall functioning of the Lough.
	Nutrient status	Phytoplankton concentration in summer measured annually.	No significant increase in phytoplankton concentration from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Nutrient enrichment stimulating excessive growth of phytoplankton is a common factor contributing to a reduction in water clarity. Single species-dominated phytoplankton blooms can also be harmful.

**Feature 1 (SAC) - Large shallow inlet and bay (Status A) – continued.**

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
Subtidal Sand and Gravel Communities	Characteristic biotopes at sites chosen so as to provide some indication of the distribution and extent of the Sub-Feature.	Presence of selected biotopes at selected sites measured once during the reporting cycle	Results should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Changes in extent and distribution may indicate long term changes in the physical conditions at the site.
Subtidal Fine Sand and Mud Communities				Previously, AFBI was involved in a range of mapping exercises (ROXANN) to produce habitat maps, however, the complex heterogeneity of Strangford Lough seabed has rendered this maps of limited use. In 2015 AFBI produced a comprehensive bathymetric and habitat map ( <a href="https://www.afbini.gov.uk/sites/afbini.gov.uk/files/publications/strangford_lough.pdf">https://www.afbini.gov.uk/sites/afbini.gov.uk/files/publications/strangford_lough.pdf</a> ) and the Department is engaged in follow-up monitoring in ground truthing to further refine the precision of this map.
	Species composition of selected biotopes at monitoring sites.	Species composition of selected biotopes measured once during the reporting cycle.	Composite species of selected biotopes should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Species composition will be used to determine the biotope classification. The species composition of some biotopes may provide further information on changes/trends in these communities. A list of selected indicator species identified by both spyball and diving surveys will be utilised to determine the achievement of the conservation objectives through presence/absence at monitoring sites .

**NOTE: As they are all part of the single system, the condition of other features which occur within a large shallow inlet and bay will also contribute to the overall assessment of the large shallow inlet and bay**

Feature 2 (SAC) – Coastal Lagoons (Status B)

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
<b>Tide-swept communities (The Dorn Sill)</b>	Characteristic biotopes at sites chosen so as to provide some indication of the distribution and extent of the Sub-Feature.	Presence of selected biotopes at selected sites measured once during the reporting cycle	Results should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Baseline survey was carried out as part of the Northern Ireland Littoral Survey between 1984 and 1987 by Heriot-Watt University. Changes in extent and distribution may indicate long term changes in the physical conditions at the site
	Species composition of selected biotopes at monitoring sites.	Presence and abundance of composite species, measured during summer, once per reporting cycle.	Presence and abundance of composite species should not deviate significantly from an established baseline, subject to natural change.	Tide-swept communities are characteristic of inlet lagoons and are therefore integral to the structure and function of such lagoons. A list of selected indicator species identified by field surveys will be utilised to determine the achievement of the conservation objectives through presence/absence at monitoring sites.
	Extent	Area (ha) measured once per reporting cycle.	No decrease in extent from an established baseline, subject to natural change.	Use of aerial photographs and subsequent ground truthing to determine this.

**Feature 3 (SAC) - Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide (Status B)**

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
	Morphological naturalness (extent, mobility and substrate)	Ensure that any loss in extent and change in system dynamics is only due to natural processes	No human induced developments impacting on the natural system.	This habitat occupies a naturally dynamic position in coastal systems. Provided that no human developments result in direct loss of habitat, or change the site dynamics, then the attribute should be deemed to be in favourable condition. Substrate supply and distribution should be regulated by natural coastal processes.  Aerial photos can be used to monitor natural movement of channels and any encroachment from unregulated planning.
Intertidal Sand and Gravel Communities  Intertidal Fine Sand and Mud Communities	Characteristic biotopes at sites chosen so as to provide some indication of the distribution and extent of the Sub-Feature.	Presence of selected biotopes at selected sites measured once during the reporting cycle	Results should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Baseline survey was carried out as part of the Northern Ireland Littoral Survey between 1984 and 1987 by Heriot-Watt University. Changes in extent and distribution may indicate long term changes in the physical conditions at the site
	Species composition of selected biotopes at monitoring sites.	Species composition of selected biotopes measured once during the reporting cycle.	Composite species of selected biotopes should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Species composition will be used to determine the biotope classification. The species composition of some biotopes may provide further information on changes/trends in these communities. A list of selected indicator species identified by field surveys will be utilised to determine the achievement of the conservation objectives through presence/absence at monitoring sites.

<p><i>Zostera</i> Spp Beds</p> <p>(<i>Z noltii</i>, <i>Z. angustifolia</i> <i>Z. marina</i>)</p>	Distribution of <i>Zostera</i> beds.	Distribution of <i>Zostera</i> beds, measured during autumn once during the reporting cycle.	Distribution should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	<p>The distribution of the beds is of key importance to their conservation condition.</p> <p>It is important that any consideration of <i>Zostera</i> within the context of these conservation objectives fits with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for Seagrass Beds.</p> <p>A considerable amount of data has recently been collated regarding this attribute. A target value and consequently limits, will be derived from this data.</p> <p>The Department is currently gathering data on the distribution, extent and quality of subtidal <i>Zostera marina</i> beds (at present these are located at Ballyhenry and Strangford Harbour, but others may be found through subtidal survey).</p>
	Extent.	Area (ha) of <i>Zostera</i> spp. Beds	Extent should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	A considerable amount of data has recently been collated regarding this attribute. A target value and consequently limits, will be derived from this data.

Feature 3 (SAC) - Mudflats and sandflats not covered by sea water at low tide (Status B) – continued.

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
Zostera Spp Beds  ( <i>Z noltii</i> , <i>Z. angustifolia</i> <i>Z. marina</i> )	Taxonomic composition	Presence of selected taxa	Taxonomic species should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	A considerable amount of data has recently been collated regarding this attribute. A target value and consequently limits, will be derived from this data.
	Density	Measuring <i>Zostera</i> shoot density	Target: Average shoot density should not deviate significantly from the long term average.	An early indicator of seagrass under stress is a reduction in the number of plants and loss of plants on the lower shore. This will probably concentrate only on <i>Z. angustifolia</i> which, being a larger plant, is found at lower densities than <i>Z. noltii</i> .

#### Feature 4 (SAC) - Reefs (Status B)

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
Subtidal Rock and Boulder Communities  Subtidal Rocky Reef Communities  Intertidal Rock and Boulder Communities	Characteristic biotopes at sites chosen so as to provide some indication of the distribution and extent of the Sub-Feature.	Presence of the selected biotopes at selected sites measured once during the reporting cycle.	Results should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change	<p>AFBI was involved in a range of mapping exercises (ROXANN) to produce habitat maps, however, the complex heterogeneity of Strangford Lough seabed has rendered these maps of limited use. In 2015 AFBI produced a comprehensive bathymetric and habitat map (<a href="https://www.afbini.gov.uk/sites/afbini.gov.uk/files/publications/strangford_lough.pdf">https://www.afbini.gov.uk/sites/afbini.gov.uk/files/publications/strangford_lough.pdf</a>) and the Department is engaged in follow-up monitoring in ground truthing to further refine the precision of this map.</p> <p>For intertidal rock and boulder communities, baseline surveys were carried out as part of the Northern Ireland Littoral Survey between 1984 and 1987 by Heriot-Watt University. Changes in extent and distribution may indicate long term changes in the physical conditions at the site.</p>
	Species composition of selected biotopes at monitoring sites	Species composition of the selected biotopes measured once during the reporting cycle.	Composite species of selected biotopes should not deviate significantly from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	Species composition will be used to determine the biotope classification. The species composition of some biotopes may provide further information on changes/trends in these communities. A list of selected indicator species identified by field surveys will be utilised to determine the achievement of the conservation objectives through presence/absence at monitoring sites.

Feature 4 (SAC) - Reefs (Status B) - continued

SUB-FEATURE	ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
<p><i>Modiolus modiolus</i> Beds</p>	<p>Distribution of <i>Modiolus</i> beds.</p>	<p>Distribution of <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> biotope SCR.ModCVar and biotopes with <i>Modiolus /Ophiothrix</i> measured once during the reporting cycle.</p>	<p><i>Modiolus</i> beds (SCR.ModCVar) and other biotopes should be present in those areas of the Lough where they historically occurred.</p>	<p>The <i>Modiolus beds</i> are currently in unfavourable condition and are subject to a restoration plan which has been agreed with the EU Commission and all relevant stakeholders. It has been agreed that no direct intervention (by way of transplants etc.) will be conducted, instead favouring a natural resettlement of the feature, facilitated by enhanced fishery management plans. Periodic monitoring for indicators of natural restoration will be conducted by the Department and others but natural restoration is likely to take decades.</p>
	<p>Extent and percentage cover of <i>Modiolus</i> beds.</p>	<p>Extent and percentage cover occupied by <i>Modiolus</i> beds i.e biotope SCR.Mod.Cvar and biotopes with <i>Modiolus/Ophiothrix</i> measured once during the reporting cycle.</p>	<p>This target will reflect the potential for natural recovery of <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> beds in areas where it has been impacted.</p> <p>Lower limit: No decrease in extent or percentage cover from established baseline, subject to natural change.</p>	<p>It will be important to ensure that the beds do not become further reduced or fragmented even if the distribution does not change significantly.</p> <p>A considerable amount of data has recently been collated and is being updated regarding this attribute. Periodic monitoring for indicators of natural restoration will be conducted by the Department and others but natural restoration is likely to take decades.</p>

	Species index of <i>Modiolus</i> beds.	The diversity (number of species and their abundance) of the mussel beds is a key measure of its health.	Species index of the <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> beds should not deviate from the established baseline, subject to natural change.	<i>Modiolus</i> beds are a habitat for many other species. A list of selected indicator species identified by field surveys will be utilised to determine the achievement of the conservation objectives through presence/absence at monitoring sites.
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**Feature 5 (SAC) - Annual vegetation of drift lines (Status C)**

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Morphological naturalness (extent, mobility and substrate)	No human induced developments impacting on the natural system.		This community occupies a naturally dynamic position in coastal systems. Provided that no human developments result in direct loss of habitat or of areas with the potential to develop this habitat, or change the site dynamics, then the attribute should be deemed to be in favourable condition. Both inorganic and organic substrates are important precursors to development of annual vegetation of drift lines. Substrate supply should be regulated by natural coastal processes.
* Characteristic species	Maintain the presence and broad distribution of stands of <i>Honckenya peploides</i> – <i>Cakile maritima</i> SD2 community and the SD3 <i>Matricaria maritima</i> - <i>Galium aparine</i> community together with other local variants across the feature. Assessments will need to be made during late summer(July/August)		These communities are found in a narrow strip at the extreme high water mark. Changes in the frequency and abundance of these species should be expected to occur seasonally as a result of storm events, but the communities are also sensitive to disturbance by human activities. Some communities on coarse substrates do not match well with SD 2 but are important as regional variants. Such communities are dominated by <i>Beta</i> and <i>Atriplex</i> spp. and show affinities to MC 6 <i>Atriplex hastata</i> - <i>Beta vulgaris</i> ssp <i>maritima</i> Sea-bird cliff community.
Disturbance	No increase in area where vegetation colonisation/recolonisation is prevented by human activity		To be assessed once per reporting cycle in late summer (July/August)
Rare and notable species	To maintain the presence of notable species at localities with historical records.		Check historical records to determine applicability

**Feature 6 (SAC) - Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) (Status C)**

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Target	Method of assessment	Comments
* Area of saltmarsh	Subject to natural processes, maintain the overall extent of saltmarsh vegetation.	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots and across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs and SIM. The area should be measured once per reporting cycle (6 years) during the summer months of June, July, August or early September.	Judgements in changes to extent/area will have to take particular care to distinguish changes as a result of natural erosion vs. anthropogenic actions.
* Mobility	No increase in either the linear extent or the area constrained by introduced structures or landforms.	Visual inspection of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition assessment structured walk. Check for any new physical structures that may impact on this community.	Introduction of physical constraints would reduce the extent of this community and affect its structure.
Physical structure: creeks and pans	Realignment of creeks absent or rare. No further anthropogenic alteration of creek patterns or loss of pans compared to an established baseline.	Visual inspection of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition assessment structured walk. Check for man-made influences on creeks and pans.	Creeks and pans vary in size and density. Creeks absorb tidal energy and assist with the delivery of sediment into saltmarshes. Major erosion of saltmarsh is indicated by internal dissection and enlargement of the drainage network.

* Saltmarsh community diversity	Maintain presence of saltmarsh communities SM10, SM13, SM16, SM18, SM19, SM20 and SM28 as established at baseline survey.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	
* Presence of associated semi-natural habitats	Maintain other saltmarsh communities and transitions to freshwater/flush and grassland - e.g. some of the samples to contain open SM8 communities with <i>Salicornia</i> ; S21 communities with <i>Scirpus maritimus</i> ; and S4d communities with <i>Phragmites</i>	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots	<i>Zostera</i> and <i>Ruppia</i> beds (SM1 and SM2) and stands of <i>Salicornia</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> (SM8 and SM9) are included within other Annex 1 habitat types. Where they occur with saltmarsh communities, their presence should be recorded.
* Maintain frequency of positive indicators for low-level marsh (SM10)	At least 5 of the indicator species listed below at least occasional, of which 3 are at least frequent throughout the sward: <i>Suaeda maritima</i> , <i>Salicornia</i> agg., <i>Puccinellia maritima</i> , <i>Aster tripolium</i> , <i>Limonium humile</i> , <i>Glaux maritima</i> , <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i> , <i>Plantago maritima</i> , <i>Triglochin maritima</i> <i>Armeria maritima</i> .  At least occasional is equivalent to greater than	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots	Ensure species-poor/rank communities/sub-communities do not increase at the expense of other sub-communities.  <b>Note:</b> <i>Zostera</i> and <i>Ruppia</i> beds (SM1 and SM2) and stands of <i>Salicornia</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> (SM8 and SM9) are included within other Annex 1 habitat types/ ASSI selection features.

	<p>21% occurrence in recorded plots.</p> <p>At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plot.</p>		
* Sward Height (SM10)	<p>Maintain short sward in areas of species-rich vegetation.</p> <p>Maintain mean sward height at less than 12 cm.</p>	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	Measure during summer (July/August/early September)
* Maintain frequency of positive indicators for low-level marsh (SM13a, b, c and d)	<p>At least 5 of the indicator species listed below at least occasional, of which 3 are at least frequent throughout the sward:  <i>Suaeda maritima</i>,  <i>Salicornia</i> agg., <i>Puccinellia maritima</i>, <i>Aster tripolium</i>,  <i>Limonium humile</i>, <i>Glaux maritima</i>, <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i>, <i>Plantago maritima</i>, <i>Triglochin maritima</i>, <i>Armeria maritima</i>.</p> <p>At least occasional is equivalent to greater than 21% occurrence in recorded plots.</p> <p>At least frequent is equivalent to greater than</p>	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	<p>Ensure species-poor/rank communities/sub-communities do not increase at the expense of other sub-communities.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> <i>Zostera</i> and <i>Ruppia</i> beds (SM1 and SM2) and stands of <i>Salicornia</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> (SM8 and SM9) are included within other Annex 1 habitat types/ ASSI selection features..</p>

	41% occurrence in recorded plot.		
* Sward Height (SM13a, b, c and d)	Maintain short sward in areas of species-rich vegetation. Maintain mean sward height at less than 15 cm.	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	Measure during summer (July/August/early September)
* Maintain frequency of positive indicators for middle marsh communities (SM16b, c, d and e)	At least 6 of the indicator species listed below at least occasional, of which 4 are at least frequent throughout the sward: <i>Puccinellia maritima</i> , <i>Aster tripolium</i> , <i>Limonium humile</i> , <i>Glaux maritima</i> , <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i> , <i>Plantago maritima</i> , <i>Triglochin maritima</i> , <i>Armeria maritima</i> , <i>Festuca rubra</i> , <i>Juncus gerardii</i> , <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> , <i>Trifolium repens</i> , <i>Leontodon autumnalis</i> , <i>Carex flacca</i>  At least occasional is equivalent to greater than 21% occurrence in recorded plots.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plot.	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	Ensure species-poor/rank communities/sub-communities do not increase at the expense of other sub-communities.  <b>Note:</b> <i>Zostera</i> and <i>Ruppia</i> beds (SM1 and SM2) and stands of <i>Salicornia</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> (SM8 and SM9) are included within other Annex 1 habitat types/ ASSI selection features.

* Sward Height (SM16b, c, d and e)	Maintain short sward in areas of species-rich vegetation. Maintain mean sward height at less than 20 cm.	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	Measure during summer (July/August/early September)
* Maintain frequency of positive indicators for upper marsh communities (e.g.SM18a, SM19 and SM20 and SM28)	At least 6 of the indicator species listed below at least occasional, of which 4 are at least frequent throughout the sward: <i>Juncus maritimus</i> , <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> , <i>Festuca rubra</i> , <i>Glaux maritima</i> , <i>Juncus gerardii</i> , <i>Triglochin maritima</i> , <i>Plantago maritima</i> , <i>Armeria maritima</i> , <i>Aster tripolium</i> , <i>Elymus repens</i> , <i>Atriplex prostrata</i> , <i>Potentilla anserina</i> , <i>Phragmites australis</i> , <i>Blysmus rufus</i> , <i>Eleocharis uniglumis</i>  At least occasional is equivalent to greater than 21% occurrence in recorded plots.  At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plot.	Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots	Ensure species-poor/rank communities/sub-communities do not increase at the expense of other sub-communities.
Sward Height (Upper marsh communities)	Maintain mean sward height less than 1m.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots	Measure during summer (July/August/early September)

			As upper saltmarsh communities are tall, often mono-dominant stands of vegetation, the height of the vegetation is not critical.
* Frequency and/or % cover of <i>Spartina</i> encroachment into the saltmarsh communities (% Cover)	<p><i>Spartina</i> be should be recorded as absent or rare across the saltmarsh communities.</p> <p>Mean cover should be less than 2 %.</p> <p>No more than rare is equivalent to less than 20% occurrence in recorded plots</p>	Visual estimate within a 10x10 m radius of monitoring plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.	<i>Spartina</i> is extremely invasive across all saltmarsh communities and its occurrence should be carefully recoded to ensure that it does not pose a threat to these valuable communities.
* Frequency and % cover of negative indicators excluding <i>Spartina</i> (DAFOR and % cover)	<p>Negative indicators no more than occasional across the saltmarsh communities</p> <p>Mean cover should be less than 2 %.</p> <p>No more than occasional is equivalent to less than 40% occurrence in recoded 2x2m plots.</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots	
* Frequency and % cover of scrub/tree encroachment into transitional communities (DAFOR and % cover)	<p>Scrub encroachment no more than occasional in transitional communities.</p> <p>Mean cover should be less than 5 %.</p>	Visual estimate within a 10x10 m radius of monitoring plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and	

	No more than occasional is equivalent to less than 40% occurrence in recoded 10x10m plots.	Condition Assessment structured walk.	
* Cover of litter/thatch accumulation (% cover)	Less than 25% mean cover.  Lower thresholds may be appropriate for short SM 10 communities.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	More than 25% litter cover indicates insufficient removal of biomass by grazing, particularly in middle and upper saltmarsh communities such as SM13 and SM16. A lower threshold for thatch should be set - perhaps 10% For SM10 communities (to be determined).
* % cover of bare ground	Bare areas resulting from trampling by stock or human activity (vehicle use, etc.) should account for less than 10 % of the extent of all communities with the exception of SM 10.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Saltmarsh can be severely affected by persistent heavy trampling Note: UK CSM suggests 25% upper limit for poaching – a lower limit is recommended for SM13 and SM16 at most saltmarsh areas in N. Ireland.
Lack of disturbance	There should be no management activities leading to erosion.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Saltmarsh can be severely affected by persistent heavy trampling Lower marsh communities naturally have higher cover of bare ground than middle and upper marsh communities.
Lack of pollution	No evidence of oil or other forms of pollution	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and	

		Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Saltmarsh hydrology	Artificial drainage channels adversely affecting hydrology are absent or rare,	Visual estimate across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	
* Maintain distinctive elements at current extent/levels and/or in current locations	Maintain distinctive elements at current extent/levels and/or in current locations (e.g. maintain existing populations of notable species, important structural attributes or notable transitions between habitats)	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk. Check for presence of species/structural attributes, and/or transitions.	This attribute is intended to cover any site-specific aspects of this habitat feature which are not adequately covered by the previous attributes.

Frequency -  
1-20% = Rare  
21-40% = Occasional  
41- 60% = Frequent  
> 60% = Constant

**Feature 7 (SAC) - Perennial vegetation of stony banks (Status C)**

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Target	Method of assessment	Comments
* Extent	<p>Subject to natural processes, maintain the overall extent of the vegetation at 1.92 ha.</p> <p>Gransha Point - 1.02 ha Mid Island (at least partially on shingle) – 0.9 ha</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2 x 2m plots and across the extent of the community using SIM and aerial photos.</p> <p>Measured once per reporting cycle.</p>	<p>Although the habitat on Strangford Lough (and at Ballyquintin Point in particular) is comparatively stable, there may be some natural variation as a result of dynamic coastal processes at Gransha Point, which appears to be active in places.</p>
* Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply	<p>No increase in either the linear extent or the area constrained by introduced structures or landforms.</p>	<p>Visual inspection of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	<p>Potentially relevant to Gransha Point.</p>
Sward Height	<p>Sward height should be between 5-15 cm over at least 75% of the sample plots within grassland habitats</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.</p>	<p>Grassland makes up the bulk of the community at Gransha Point; requires sufficient (but not excessive) grazing to maintain it.</p>
Litter	<p>Average litter cover (i.e. dense thatch-like material in a more or less continuous layer) should be less than 10 %.</p> <p>May be distributed either in patches or in one larger</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.</p>	<p>Excessive build-up of litter indicates inadequate grazing levels.</p>

	area within grassland areas.		
Bare ground	Bare areas resulting from disturbance should account for less than 10 % of the extent of any of the habitat  No management activities leading to erosion.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	Note that some parts of the site are naturally bare, with only a rudimentary cover of lichens over the stable cobbles.
* Zonation of vegetation	The current range of NVC communities and their approximate distribution should be maintained – i.e.  shingle banks (SD2, SD3), saltmarsh (SM9, SM10, SM13, SM14, SM16 and SM28), grasslands (SD8, MC8, MC9, MG1, MG11 and MG12) and scrub (W23,W24).  In particular, there should be no loss in extent of the more species-rich communities.	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	Ballyquintin Point has a mosaic of different habitats and vegetation types. Gransha Point is much more limited in communities present on shingle – essentially saltmarsh, strandline and grassland.  Note: 1. Gransha Point was mapped as SD8 (NI Coastal Survey), but perhaps should more accurately be described as MC8/9  2. only a limited range of these communities are actually <b>perennial</b> vegetation on shingle
* Presence of positive indicator species in the dry grassland plots	Frequency of community character species. At least four of the following at least frequent and four at least occasional throughout the sward:	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	

	<p><i>Agrostis</i> spp., <i>Aira</i> spp.,  <i>Armeria maritima</i>, <i>Carex panicea</i>, <i>Centaurea nigra</i>,  <i>Cladonia</i> spp., <i>Danthonia decumbens</i>, <i>Festuca rubra</i>,  <i>Galium saxatile</i>, <i>Galium verum</i>, <i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>, <i>Jasione montana</i>,  <i>Koeleria macrantha</i>, <i>Lotus corniculatus</i>, <i>Molinia caerulea</i>, <i>Plantago lanceolata</i>, <i>Polypodium</i> agg., <i>Potentilla erecta</i>,  <i>Rumex acetosella</i>, <i>Scilla verna</i>, <i>Sedum</i> spp., <i>Succisa pratensis</i>, <i>Thymus praecox</i></p>		
Agricultural weed species :	<p>No more than one negative species should more than frequent; or singly or together contribute more than 5% cover: -  <i>Cirsium arvense</i>, <i>Cirsium vulgare</i>, <i>Senecio jacobaea</i>,  <i>Urtica dioica</i>,  <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i></p>	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	
Bracken	<p>Less than 5% <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> over the area as whole</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the feature using Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Indicators of Improvement	<p>Mean cover values from the sample plots for eutrophic broad-leaved grasses (i.e.</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	

	<i>Lolium perenne</i> , <i>Holcus lanatus</i> , <i>Dactylis glomerata</i> .) should be less than 10% cover		
Trees/shrubs	Trees and/or shrubs no more than occasional on W-Walk, with seedlings rare or absent  Less than 10 % tree or shrub cover (over the area as a whole)	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the feature using Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Presence of Dung	Dung no more than occasional (as recorded in monitoring plots)	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	
Presence of Tracks	Tracks no more than occasional (over the total area)	Visual estimate across the extent of the feature using Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Stock Feeding	No evidence of stock feeding (over the total area)	Visual estimate across the extent of the feature using Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Stone Removal	No evidence of stone removal (over the total area)	Visual estimate across the extent of the feature using Condition Assessment structured walk.	

**Frequency -**

**1-20% = Rare**

**21-40% = Occasional**

**41- 60% = Frequent**

**> 60% = Constant**

NOTE: “Perennial vegetation of stony banks” occurs on Strangford Lough at two discrete and rather different locations. Gransha Point is still an active shingle bank, and the importance of ensuring that active processes are maintained is one of the fundamental aims here. In contrast, Ballyquintin Point is no longer an active system, so coastal processes are not particularly relevant, except for occasional storm events which may cause some erosion.

The “habitat” at both sites is actually a complex of many different habitats, and the main aim is to maintain the full range of communities represented at both sites. Particular issues of note are grazing levels (leading to scrub encroachment over more valuable grassland communities) and enrichment.

**Feature 8 (SAC) - *Salicornia* and other annuals colonising mud and sand (Status C)**

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

Attribute	Target	Method of assessment	Comments
* Extent	Subject to natural processes, maintain the overall extent of the vegetation.	<p>Visual estimate in 2 x 2 m plots and across the extent of the community using SIM.</p> <p>Aerial photographs can be useful if taken at the appropriate scale and time of year.</p> <p>Measured once per reporting cycle, preferably during the summer months of July or August</p>	<p>These communities are important precursors to more stable vegetation of low to mid marsh. Communities may be dynamic in their distribution and are linked with the physical processes operating on the site - e.g., topography, creek patterns, sea-level rise etc.</p>
* Mobility/Coastal Processes	No increase in either the linear extent or the area constrained by introduced structures or landforms.	<p>Visual inspection of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition assessment structured walk. Check for any new physical structures that</p>	<p>Colonisation of mud and sand by saltmarsh plants will only occur if adequate sediment is accreting - this is influenced by extent of fronting mudflat which can dissipate wave energy and affect availability of suspended sediment. Introduced structures could interfere with these processes.</p>

		<p>may impact on this community.</p> <p>Aerial photographs are particularly valuable for this, if available.</p>	
* Vegetation composition	<p>Maintain extent and species composition of low-level marsh communities <i>Salicornia</i> and <i>Suaeda</i> (SM8 and SM9) –</p> <p>At least 1 of the species below recorded as frequent and at least a further 2 as occasional or rare:</p> <p><i>Salicornia</i> agg.,  <i>Suaeda maritima</i>,  <i>Zostera</i> spp.,  <i>Ruppia</i> spp.,  <i>Puccinellia maritima</i>,  <i>Aster tripolium</i>,  <i>Spergularia media</i>,  <i>Limonium humile</i>,  <i>Cochlearia officinalis</i></p> <p>At least occasional is equivalent to greater than 21% occurrence in recorded plots.</p> <p>At least frequent is equivalent to greater than 41% occurrence in recorded plot.</p>	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots.	

<p>* Frequency and/or % cover of <i>Spartina</i> encroachment into the <i>Salicornia</i> communities</p>	<p><i>Spartina</i> be should be recorded as absent or rare in <i>Salicornia</i> communities.</p> <p>Mean cover should be less than 2 %.</p> <p>No more than rare is equivalent to less than 20% occurrence in recoded plots</p>	<p>Visual estimate within a 10x10 m radius of monitoring plots <u>and</u> across the feature using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	<p><i>Spartina</i> often invades these lower marsh communities and its spread needs to be controlled.</p>
<p>* Vegetation Structure</p>	<p>Area and thickness of algal mats should not deviate significantly from an established baseline, subject to natural change</p>	<p>Area and thickness of algal mat, measured during summer periodically (frequency to be determined).</p>	<p>Algal mats are often associated with the pioneer saltmarsh communities, and are important primary producers. However, they can be affected by changes to water quality – nutrient enrichment/eutrophication may lead to expansion and smothering of vegetation. On the other hand, pollution can cause a decline, leading to destabilisation of sediment surfaces and initiate erosion. An increase in algal cover can also indicate a decline in grazing invertebrates.</p>
<p>* % cover of bare ground</p>	<p>Bare areas resulting from trampling by stock or human activity (vehicle use, etc.) should account for less than 10 % of the extent of the habitat</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2m plots and across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.</p>	<p>Lower marsh communities naturally have higher cover of bare ground than middle and upper marsh communities.</p> <p><i>Salicornia</i> communities on mud and sand can be severely affected by persistent heavy trampling</p>
<p>Lack of disturbance</p>	<p>There should be no management activities leading to erosion.</p>	<p>Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent</p>	

		of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	
Lack of pollution	No evidence of oil or other forms of pollution	Visual estimate in 2x2m plots <u>and</u> across the extent of the saltmarsh using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Check for direct and indirect evidence of pollution.

Frequency -  
1-20% = Rare  
21-40% = Occasional  
41- 60% = Frequent  
> 60% = Constant

**Feature 9 (SAC) - *Phoca vitulina* Harbour (Common) Seal (Status C)**

(\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition)

ATTRIBUTE	MEASURE	TARGETS	COMMENTS
*Population	Number of Harbour Seals counted during the autumn moult period.	Maintain a population of at least 210 Harbour Seals.	<p>The minimum population declared at the time of designation was 210. The target should be calculated as a mean maximum count over the 6 year rolling cycle. When monitoring Harbour Seal numbers, ideally 2 counts would be performed during the moult season and 2 counts would be performed during the pupping season each year to give a reasonable estimate of the population.</p> <p>The population within this area could be influenced by factors including population trends within the wider Irish Sea, food availability and disturbance.</p> <p>Strangford Lough data to be considered in the context of both long-term trends and existing seal numbers in Co. Down, all Ireland, UK and North East Atlantic.</p>
Number of Pups	Percentage of pups in relation to number of seals counted in the moult period.	Maintain a pup percentage of at least 25%.	
*Haul-outs	Integrity of haul-outs.	Maintain integrity of traditional haul-outs.	Changes to traditional haul-outs should only be through natural processes e.g. coastal erosion/deposition.
Disturbance	Disturbance events	Contain disturbance events to a level which do not significantly impact the population.	Disturbance can result in injury to pups, separation of pups from their mothers and reduced opportunities to feed and rest. Disturbance events reported previously within this SAC include recreational activities on the shore and on water. Deliberate disturbance by boating activities has also been reported. Incidents reported to DAERA should be logged and investigated where practicable.

# **STRANGFORD LOUGH - SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)**

**UK9020111**

## **CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

### Document Details

<b>Title</b>	Strangford Lough SPA Conservation Objectives
<b>Prepared By</b>	<i>Ian Enlander</i>
<b>Approved By</b>	<i>Mark Wright</i>
<b>Date Effective From</b>	<i>01/04/2015</i>
<b>Version Number</b>	<i>V4</i>
<b>Next Review Date</b>	January 2020
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### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	09/03/1998	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### **Site relationship**

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA overlaps with Strangford Lough SAC and adjoins Outer Ards SPA and the proposed East Coast Marine SPA.

The SPA also includes the Strangford Lough Ramsar site.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Down

G.R. J560 579

AREA: 15580 ha.

REVIEW OF ANY ADJOINING OR REMOTE MARINE AREAS WILL BE INFORMED BY JNCC REPORT ON MARINE USAGE BY TERN SPECIES FROM EXISTING SPA'S DESIGNATED FOR BREEDING TERNS.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES WILL BE REVISED AS THESE ISSUE PROGRESS

### 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

Strangford Lough is a large (150 km<sup>2</sup>) marine inlet on the east coast of County Down, of which about 50 km<sup>2</sup> lies between high water mark mean tide (HWMMT) and low water

mark mean tide (LWMMT). It is connected to the open sea by the Strangford Narrows, an 8 km long channel with a minimum width of 0.5 km. The Lough is 30 km long from head to mouth and up to 8 km wide. The tidal flats of Strangford Lough form extensive areas around the northern and north-eastern shorelines. The Lough supports an impressive range of marine habitats and communities with over 2,000 recorded species. It is important for marine invertebrates, algae and saltmarsh plants, for a range of wintering and breeding waterbirds, and for marine mammals.

## 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The landward boundary of the SPA is entirely coincident with the landward boundary of the following five Areas of Special Scientific Interest: Strangford Lough Part 1, Strangford Lough Part 2, Strangford Lough Part 3, Killard and Ballyquintin Point. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat, together with those agriculturally improved areas utilised by swans and geese, have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population (5 year average 1995-2000) except where stated	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline (min. peak 1991/92-1997/98)
Species	Sandwich Tern <sup>a</sup>	1405 (current population 2003)		593	593	346
Species	Common Tern <sup>a</sup>	894 (current population 2003)		603	603	560
Species	Arctic Tern <sup>a</sup>	272 (current population 2003)		210	210	47
Species	Golden Plover <sup>b</sup>	8401	7570	8277	6526	3123
Species	Bar-tailed Godwit <sup>b</sup>	1452	1587	1058	882	291
Species	Light-bellied Brent Goose <sup>a</sup>	12141	14400	10527	10527	8367
Species	Shelduck <sup>b</sup>	3081	1271	2358	3871	1755
Species	Knot <sup>a</sup>	9191	12294	8723	8723	4200
Species	Redshank <sup>a</sup>	3748	2591	3176	3176	2336
Assemblage species	Great Crested Grebe	102	35	94	90	40
Assemblage species	Cormorant	219		Not listed	183	123
Assemblage species	Greylag Goose	352	265	420	419	173
Assemblage species	Wigeon	2183	6655	1975	1921	1630
Assemblage species	Gadwall	82	107	110	108	63
Assemblage species	Teal	2021	905	1662	1435	1133
Assemblage species	Mallard	1441	188	1562	1633	1238

Assemblage species	Pintail	264	196	214	209	159
Assemblage species	Shoveler	143	135	140	147	101
Assemblage species	Goldeneye	249	479	298	335	157
Assemblage species	Red-breasted Merganser	290	274	338	328	191
Assemblage species	Coot	414	898	510	392	222
Assemblage species	Oystercatcher	6621	3542	8248	5243	4125
Assemblage species	Ringed Plover	244	197	305	291	134
Assemblage species	Grey Plover	282	114	284	194	48
Assemblage species	Lapwing	9971	12644	9108	8359	3779
Assemblage species	Dunlin	7885	6220	6900	5317	2403
Assemblage species	Curlew	1761	1838	1980	1911	1344
Assemblage species	Turnstone	261	446	350	401	207
Waterfowl Assemblage	Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population <sup>a</sup> (Component species: Golden Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Shelduck, Knot, Redshank, Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Greylag Goose, Wigeon, Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pintail, Shoveler, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Coot, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Lapwing, Dunlin, Curlew, Turnstone)	55097	72880	70200	60220	35667
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Roost site locations					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat is not a selection feature but is a factor and is more easily treated as if it were a feature. Habitat extent is also used for breeding birds reported as an area.

### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

## 6.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES SEE STRANGFORD LOUGH SAC CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

	Feature Type (i.e. habitat, species or earth science)	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop'
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Table 2. List of ASSI features, additional to those that form all or part of SPA selection features. These will be referred to in ANNEX II.

## 7 FEATURE OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. Component objectives for Additional ASSI Selection Features are not yet complete. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8 STRANGFORD LOUGH SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Sandwich Tern (B)	1092	1137	1528	1398	1994	346	1429.8	<b>413.24</b>	Favourable
Common Tern (B)	1104	962	832	650	1174	560	944.4	<b>168.64</b>	Favourable
Arctic Tern (B)	582	663	628	316	645	47	566.8	<b>1205.96</b>	Favourable
Light-bellied Brent Goose	21885	24658	30487	25605	26041	8367	25735.2	<b>307.58</b>	Favourable
Bar-tailed Godwit	1378	529	1305	969	1158	291	1067.8	<b>366.94</b>	Favourable
Redshank	4099	3632	4029	4969	4488	2336	4243.4	<b>181.65</b>	Favourable
Shelduck	4201	3346	6084	5583	2825	1755	4407.8	<b>251.16</b>	Favourable
Knot	6220	5193	7360	6376	7452	4200	6520.2	<b>155.24</b>	Favourable
Waterbird assemblage	77553	66955	87771	86292	79823	54080	79678.8	<b>147.34</b>	Favourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

- To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species
- Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
- To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species
- To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;
- To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and
- To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:
- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
  - Distribution of the species within site
  - Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
  - Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Component Objective</b>
Sandwich Tern breeding population	As above
Sandwich Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Common Tern breeding population	As above
Common Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Arctic Tern breeding population	As above
Arctic Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Golden Plover wintering population	As above
Bar-tailed Godwit wintering population	As above
Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	As above
Shelduck wintering population	As above
Knot wintering population	As above
Redshank wintering population	As above
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As above
Cormorant wintering population	As above
Greylag Goose wintering population	As above
Wigeon wintering population	As above
Gadwall wintering population	As above
Teal wintering population	As above
Mallard wintering population	As above
Pintail wintering population	As above
Shoveler wintering population	As above
Goldeneye wintering population	As above
Red-breasted Merganser wintering population	As above
Coot wintering population	As above
Oystercatcher wintering population	As above
Ringed Plover wintering population	As above
Grey Plover wintering population	As above
Lapwing wintering population	As above
Dunlin wintering population	As above
Curlew wintering population	As above
Turnstone wintering population	As above
Waterfowl Assemblage	No significant decrease in population against national trends
Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population	Maintain species diversity contributing to the Waterfowl Assemblage
Habitat Extent	To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species (3781 ha intertidal area), (breeding areas X ha) subject to natural processes

Habitat Extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roost sites	Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts

Table 3. SPA Component objectives

**Tern nesting localities current and historical (TO BE FINALISED)**


Table 5. Tern nesting locations within the SPA

**9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES  
SEE ALSO STRANGFORD LOUGH SAC CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

	<b>Feature</b>	<b>Component Objective</b>
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Coastal saltmarsh	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Sealevel history	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Coastal processes	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Common Seal	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Intertidal mud/sand	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Intertidal rock	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Large shallow inlets and bays	
Strangford Lough Part 1 (North)	Higher Plant Assemblage	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Coastal saltmarsh	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Common Seal	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Inter-tidal rock	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Coastal vegetated shingle	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Intertidal mud/sand	
Strangford Lough Part 2	Coastal mosaic	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Coastal vegetated shingle	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Higher Plant Assemblage	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Sealevel history	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Coastal processes	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Coastal mosaic	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Intertidal mud/sand	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Intertidal rock	
Strangford Lough Part 3	Common Seal	

Table 4. ASSI Component objectives

**10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

**See also Views About Management for relevant ASSIs**

*Owner/Occupier's* – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

The ownership details for Strangford Lough were not complete at time of designation. However, based on available information there are approximately 260 individuals/organisations who own lands within the SPA. Major landowners and leasees within the SPA, relevant to the site management, include The National Trust, Crown Estate Commissioners, RSPB, NIEA, DARD and Private Individuals. There may be conflicts of

interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

Recreational activities can cause disturbance throughout the year, particularly to feeding wintering wildfowl and breeding seabirds. The sewage treatment works at Ballyrickard, Portaferry and Killyleagh may impact upon the SPA. Development pressures are significant along the entire SPA. Other threats include coastal protection works particularly in southern region of the site.

There are a number of management agreements within the SPA.

## 11 MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES

**Notifiable Operations** - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the schedule could affect the site. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Carlingford Lough SPA, or could affect it in the future. Although, features 1, 2, 3, 4 etc, are the qualifying SPA features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

### Generic site/feature issues

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
1	Adjoining habitat	Particularly important for swans and geese as well as providing high tide roost locations. Significant changes in land management and disturbance are key considerations. Such areas lie without the site making effective management of developments other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Not utilised by feature species but management can have a bearing on transitional habitat.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
2	Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural littoral and sub-littoral communities through seeding, tray/trestle cultivation, dredging/control of pest species. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.	Widespread especially in the Ardmillan area. Represents a change of substrate in areas important for wintering wildfowl. Spread of Sargassum is assumed to be associated with introduced shellfish stock.	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license applications individually. Consider the collective impact.
3	Bait digging – commercial or ‘recreational’	Disturbance and impact on sediment and invertebrate fauna – may be positive	Commercial cockle harvesting at the north end of the lough could	Monitor scale of activity. Consider the collective impact.

	and shellfish gathering.	through making deeper prey items available on surface. Shellfish gathering represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass. Generally unregulated.	potentially be a serious impact through direct disturbance of bird and sediment mobility. Scale of other activities unknown.	
5	Beach sand and gravel extraction.	Disturbance issue together with loss of biologically active upper sediments. Most beach systems are sedimentologically closed thus material removed may not be renewed making the activity unsustainable. May lead to changed sediment character of beach ultimately impacting on birds.	Ongoing at Killard through exercising permitted rights. Position elsewhere is unclear.	‘Permitted’ extraction of beach sand and gravel should be halted through management agreements. Ad hoc removal should be addressed in conjunction with local authorities.
7	Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	Recreational boating is an important activity on the lough. Main consideration would be impacts on nesting tern colonies. Winter disturbance probably limited.	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.
8	Coastal protection schemes	Where there is no history of this, it impacts on natural beach systems with loss of habitat.	Widespread especially along the north and east shores. Ongoing monitoring of impacts of the Newtownards seawall construction.	Liaise with Planning Service and other parties with an involvement in coastal management.
9	Cull of fledglings/ young	Licensed selective culling of species impacting on ‘more desirable’ species. Licensed by NIEA.	Control of large gull nests may have been undertaken at the tern colonies. To be continued as necessary.	NIEA to review all licenses. Consider the collective impact.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent ‘competition’ for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Commercial trawling is undertaken but unlikely to impact on inter-tidal areas.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
15	Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Loss of habitats through development, changes in coastal processes. Loss of inter-tidal habitat is a critical issue as this is the feeding zone for the majority (numbers and species) of birds.	Unlikely to be an ongoing issue. There has been encroachment onto the inter-tidal zone from coastal defence and housing developments. Future issues probably related to marina developments. Aquaculture cultivation is also a	Assess planning applications. Monitor using aerial photography.

			consideration.	
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Minimal concern.	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
17	Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality, invasive species or changes in coastal processes.	Principle issue is from alien species – especially Spartina and Sargassum. Progressive loss of inter-tidal mudflats and impact on saltmarsh habitat.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Other than sewage discharges causing localised problems, not a major issue. Upgrading of STW is ongoing.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
19	Habitat extent and quality-breeding	Alteration of habitat area or quality through inappropriate use or absence of site management.	Ongoing management of the islands hosting tern colonies will be required with regard to vegetation succession.	Assess needs of breeding species. Liaise with owner or appropriate authority to adjust or introduce site management.
20	High tide roosts	An essential component of sites hosting waders. Development of adjoining ground or actual traditional roost localities may adversely impact on the sites carrying capacity. Many such sites lie without the site making effective management of developments, other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Localities should be mapped.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Issue of Spartina and Sargassum. See 17.	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
23	Predation.	Mainly of concern on bird breeding sites.	Need to assess large gull impact on tern colony. See culling issue above.	Must be dealt with as part of wider countryside management considerations. Carry out appropriate site management.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration although vehicle access may also lead to beach compaction and impacts on beachhead habitats. Breeding birds,	Areas of the lough are heavily used by walkers and dogs, horse riders, boats, windsurfers, kite surfers etc.	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties.

		especially seabirds, are vulnerable to disturbance as absence of adults can often result in predation or chilling of young with a reduction/loss in fledging success.	Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, wildfowling, walkers, dogs etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations impacting on both feeding (inter-tidal) and roosting birds	
25	Research activities.	Census and ringing activities especially have the potential to impact on bird populations, particularly at breeding sites.	Routine WEBS counts (high and low tide) and nesting tern surveys. A wide range of ongoing research is undertaken on Strangford, generally unrelated to birds.	Census and ringing activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. In case of ringers, appropriate license must be held.
27	Seaweed harvesting	Either cutting living weed or gathering storm debris. The former, depending on scale and frequency, may fundamentally impact on shore communities and their ability to support waterfowl. The latter, represents a net loss to the system in terms of habitat and biomass.	Some permitted rights are exercised. Position overall is unclear.	
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Historical reclamation at the north end of the lough especially. Locally extensive aquaculture represents an alteration to substrate. New sea defences in the Newtownards area could influence mudflat behaviour. The eastern shoreline especially is heavily engineered. Mechanised cockle harvesting could also affect sediment mobility.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.
31	Wildfowling	Has direct effect through bag sizes/bag species and wider disturbance issue. Issue of regulated (through recognised shooting clubs) and ad hoc shooters. Lead shot on grazing lands.	Managed under the Strangford Wildlife Scheme through National Trust.	Liaise with relevant shooting bodies (BASC especially) to define areas for wildfowling, the development of Wildfowling Codes of Good Practice and encourage bag returns. Support pressure to stop use of lead shot. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the

				collective impact.
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Table 3. List of site/feature management issues

## 12 MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA/ASSI schedule. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

### 12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## **12.2 ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.
2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

## **13 SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS**

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering

populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Golden Plover	Stable	-	Slight Fluctuation	-	Golden Plover is not included in the indexing processes
Bar-tailed Godwit	Increasing	Declining	Large Fluctuation	Stable/Declining	High Alert for NI
Sandwich Tern	-	-	-	-	Not known, to be compiled.
Common Tern	-	-	-	-	Not known, to be compiled.
Artic Tern	-	-	-	-	Not known, to be compiled.
Light-bellied Brent Goose	Stable	Fluctuating	Slight Fluctuation	-	
Shelduck	Increasing	Fluctuating/Increasing	Slight Fluctuation	Stable	
Knot	Fluctuating	Fluctuating	Large Fluctuation	Stable	High Alert for NI. Medium Alert for UK.
Redshank	Increasing	Fluctuating/Increasing	Stable	Stable/Fluctuating	
Great Crested Grebe	Stable	Increasing	Moderate Fluctuation	Increasing/Stable	
Cormorant	Stable	Increasing	Stable	Increasing/Stable	
Greylag Goose	Declining	-	Moderate Fluctuation	Increasing/Stable	
Wigeon		Fluctuating	Stable	Stable	
Gadwall	Declining	Fluctuating	Increasing	Increasing	Medium Alert for NI.
Teal	Increasing	Fluctuating	Increasing	Increasing	
Mallard	Fluctuating	Stable	Stable	Stable	Declining since 1990 in UK. Medium Alert for UK.
Pintail	Fluctuating	Fluctuating	Stable	Stable	
Shoveler	Stable	Stable	Stable	Stable	
Goldeneye	Declining	Declining	Moderate Fluctuation	Fluctuating	
Red-breasted Merganser	Fluctuating	Stable	Stable	Fluctuating/Increasing	
Coot	Fluctuating	Fluctuating	Moderate Fluctuation	Stable	
Oystercatcher	Increasing	Increasing	Stable	Stable	
Ringed Plover	Declining	Fluctuating	Stable	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI.
Grey Plover	Fluctuating	Stable	Moderate Fluctuation	Increasing	
Lapwing	Stable	-	Slight Fluctuation	-	Lapwing is not included in the indexing processes.
Dunlin	Fluctuating	Stable	Slight Fluctuation	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK.
Curlew	Stable	Stable	Slight Fluctuation	Stable	
Turnstone	Declining	Fluctuating	Increasing	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI.

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Breeding Seabirds

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Sandwich Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Sandwich Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Sandwich Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined
* Common Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Common Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Common Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined

* Arctic Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Arctic Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected, then apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Arctic Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined

### Non-Avian Factors – habitat

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	No significant decrease in bird populations against national trends, caused by on-site factors.	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures or breeding sites, where this would lead to different usage by notified species.

## Feature (SPA) – Wintering Waterfowl

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Golden Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Bar-tailed Godwit wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site
* Shelduck wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site
* Knot wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Redshank wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

# Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Cormorant wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Greylag Goose wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Wigeon wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Gadwall wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Teal wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Mallard wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Pintail wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

# Shoveler wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Goldeneye wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Red-breasted Merganser wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Coot wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Oystercatcher wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Ringed Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Grey Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Lapwing wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Dunlin wintering	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends

population		national trends	through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Curlew wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Turnstone wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
*Waterfowl assemblage wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
Waterfowl assemblage wintering population	Species diversity	Maintain species diversity contributing to the Waterfowl Assemblage	

### Non-Avian Factors – habitat

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures where this would lead to different usage by notified species.
# Roost sites	Location of roost	Maintain all locations of roost sites.	Map roost site locations. Visit once every reporting cycle to ensure sites

	sites		are available.
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## ANNEX II

### Feature (ASSI) –

= primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments