



**IRISH SEAS PROPOSED SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA
ADVICE TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT**

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For further information on marine SPAs visit: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1414>

For further information on Joint Nature Conservation Committee visit:
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=1729>

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Further information on Special Protection Areas, the wider network and protected areas management is available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-162>.

The following documents provide further information about the features, evidence and assessment of the Irish Seas pSPA and should be read alongside this paper:

- Site Selection Document
- Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations

1. Purpose of this document

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are an environmental management tool available to help conserve marine ecosystems whilst supporting sustainable development. Sea users are understandably nervous that any proposal for a new MPA may affect their use of an area. If and how a new MPA may affect sea users, public authorities and the wider public (collectively called stakeholders) influences how people respond to a proposal, particularly through their responses to a public consultation.

This document provides information to support discussions with stakeholders about potential future management of activities associated with the Irish Seas proposed Special Protection Area (pSPA) during the formal consultation. The document describes our current knowledge of where activities that could potentially affect those features take place within the pSPA. It sets out the conservation objectives for the qualifying bird features, as detailed in the draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations document, that provide the starting point for public authorities to consider whether additional management action is required for activities. The document also presents possible management options for each of those activities that are currently considered likely to influence whether the conservation objectives of the protected features are achieved. These options are based on our current understanding of the sensitivities of the qualifying bird species and their supporting habitats to marine activities. The development of site management is an ongoing, iterative process that will continue after classification, building on and adapting to knowledge gained from management actions and their monitoring.

The paper covers a range of different activities but is not exhaustive. It does not attempt to cover all possible future activities or eventualities (e.g. as a result of accidents) and does not consider likely cumulative effects that could result from different types of activities being carried out within the pSPA.

The document encourages stakeholders with an interest in the area to engage with the formal consultation, so that a full understanding can be gained of activities occurring within the pSPA and how these might interact with the listed features. Such knowledge will help ensure that any management actions are proportionate and based on the best available information, such that the Irish Seas pSPA makes a genuine and long-lasting contribution to the protection of our offshore marine environment.

2. Management Options Summary

This section summarises the management options for the Irish Seas pSPA. It focuses on where we consider there could be a risk in terms of achieving the conservation objectives for the protected features. The options aim to **minimise the risk** of the protected features **not meeting their conservation objective** within the pSPA. The full detail on these options is provided in the subsequent sections. Discussions between sea users, scientists and managers will be needed to develop any management measures deemed necessary.

Activity	Management options
Military activities	<p>No change to existing management: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) seeks to manage its activities in a manner that minimises environmental impact. However, without any dialogue there is a risk that the MoD Environmental Protection Guidelines do not sufficiently consider the sensitivity of this feature to a range of military activities.</p> <p>Reduce/limit pressures: Dialogue with the MoD should seek to reduce or limit pressures through the existing mechanisms of the MoD Environmental Protection Guidelines.</p> <p>Remove/avoid pressures: Due to the strategic importance of MoD activities it may not always be possible to remove or avoid these pressures. However dialogue with the MoD should seek to reduce or limit these pressures.</p>

3. Site Summary

The Irish Seas proposed Special Protection Area (pSPA) is located in UK offshore waters c.35 km southwest of the Isle of Man and c.36 km to the northwest of Anglesey (see Figure 1).

This site is located over part of a large tidal front which forms in the spring every year. This tidal front creates an area of very productive sea, with high concentrations of zooplankton leading to large numbers of prey species contributing to the sites importance.

A number of human activities take place in the area within and around the Irish Seas pSPA. Fishing activity within the site includes the use of both mobile and set (fixed) fishing gear types, including demersal otter trawling, beam trawling, pelagic trawling, scallop dredging, demersal seines, set nets. The wider area around the site is a busy shipping area, and two Royal Yachting Association (RYA) cruising routes pass through the site. Telecommunications cables on the seabed go through the pSPA and maintenance activity associated with these cables has potential to cause disturbance. Military activities may take place in this area, it is identified as a military practice area for water column activity.

The Irish Seas pSPA has been identified alongside a wider network of SPA proposals that have been established to help conserve important marine areas for seabirds. This proposal has been identified for the following protected features:

- Manx shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus* (breeding season)

Further information on how these features have been selected and the boundary has been identified can be found in the Site Selection Document for Irish Seas pSPA¹

¹ Available at: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Departmental_Brief_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

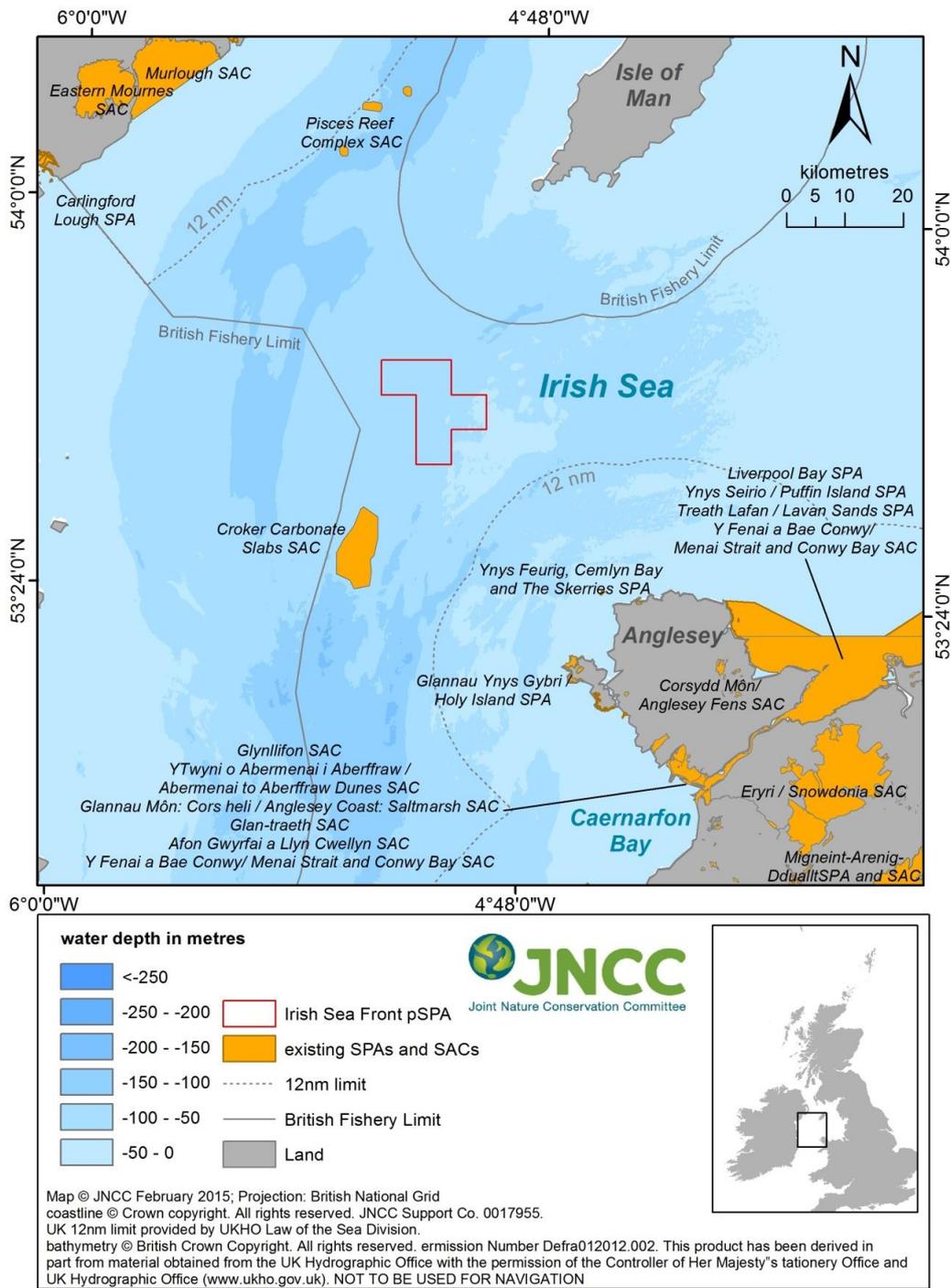


Figure 1: Location of the Irish Seas pSPA.

4. Species distribution within the site

All features of interest are considered to be present across the entire Irish Seas pSPA.

5. Roles

The site occurs entirely within UK offshore waters (beyond 12 nautical miles of coast) and thus the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has advisory responsibilities under The Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 2007 (as amended). The scientific advice will include possible options for managing human activities in the Irish Seas pSPA to enable the features achieve their conservation objectives.

Defra and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) lead the discussions on developing appropriate management actions with stakeholders and other public authorities who have powers to regulate activities, taking account of JNCC's and others' advice. The preferred management option will be identified and if required, specific management measures would then be developed with the relevant authorities. Defra and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) are responsible for making recommendations to Ministers on these measures and any review of site management in the future. Ministers will decide whether to implement these measures. It is expected that licensed activities taking place within, or nearby, the pSPA will continue to be managed through the existing licensing system.

6. Conservation Objectives

The conservation objectives set out the essential elements needed to ensure that the qualifying features of the site make an appropriate contribution to the EC Birds Directive. They form the framework for establishing appropriate management options and assessing all future plans and projects that have the potential to affect the qualifying features of the site.

Conservation objectives are set for all protected features within each pSPA. The conservation objectives for the protected feature within the Irish Seas pSPA are proposed to be:

Site conservation objective:

To avoid significant deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, subject to natural change, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained in the long term and makes an appropriate contribution to achieving the aims of the Birds Directive for the qualifying species.

This contribution would be achieved through delivering the following objectives for the sites qualifying feature:

- A. Avoid significant mortality, injury and disturbance of the qualifying feature, so that the distribution of the species and ability to use the site are maintained in the long-term;
- B. Maintain the habitats and food resources of the qualifying feature in favourable condition.
- C. Ensure access to the site from linked breeding colonies.

More information on the conservation objectives can be found in the Irish Seas pSPA Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations document².

7. Management Options

The management options set out below provide a starting point for discussing any management actions that might be required for the site's feature to achieve the conservation objectives. Should the site be classified, discussions on any management will be led by the relevant authority and will involve stakeholders.

This document does not represent any formal management advice or decisions on management actions. Instead it presents general options based on an assessment of the sensitivities of species to pressures and existing activities/exposure levels. Management options were developed for each pSPA where we consider that some form of active management intervention may be necessary to achieve the conservation objective for each protected feature. We adopted a risk-based approach to identify appropriate management options; i.e. our advice is focused where we believe there is a risk of the protected features not achieving their conservation objective due to ongoing activities. The best available evidence and information on protected features and relevant activities have been used, and also our understanding of the relationships between the protected features and activities. The management options may be further informed by discussion with stakeholders. If new information becomes available during the consultation, the management options may be revised.

The presented information (at pre-classification stage) is general and not exhaustive, and is provided to assist and focus stakeholders and authorities in their consideration of the management of these operations. All of the management options provided are based on the best available evidence of existing activities taking place within the pSPA. All new plans and projects will still need to be considered by the relevant competent authority, and detailed advice from JNCC will be provided on such proposals on a case-by-case basis. Any impact on the site's features will depend on the location, scale, nature and intensity of the relevant activity.

Sensitivities of protected features to activities

The management options focus on those activities that cause a pressure to which a protected feature has a medium or high sensitivity³, and if that activity is likely to be relevant in scale to the features of the site. The protected features of a pSPA are considered sensitive to activities that could adversely affect their conservation value, especially if they are unable or are very slow to recover from the effect. Pressures can be physical, chemical or biological (e.g. removal of non-target species). Different activities may cause the same pressure, e.g. shipping and military activities can both disturb seabirds although the scale and intensity of the disturbance pressure can vary between activities.

An assessment of sensitivity of bird features to various pressures and activities is provided in a [Sensitivity Assessment for Bird Features database](#). This database provides an assessment of species specific seabird sensitivity to anthropogenic activities that can occur in the marine environment. These sensitivities reflect our current general understanding of the associations between activities, pressures and features, and support the first steps of the assessment of risk to the features in the pSPA.

² Available at:

http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Conservation_Objectives_and_Reg_18_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

³ In this context sensitivity has been defined as a measure of tolerance (or intolerance) to changes in environmental conditions (Tillin *et al.* 2010).

Overlap of activities with protected feature distributions

Risks to a feature not achieving its conservation objectives were identified where there is an overlap between protected features and those activities expected to exert a pressure to which the features are sensitive. Management options are recommended for each activity with specific details provided in the following sections. The text focuses on interactions in terms of physical overlap but the assessment of risk in the future should also take account of the intensity and frequency of the activities occurring within, or nearby, the pSPA.

The advice in relation to disturbance is not about preventing or reducing the disturbance of individual animals *per se*, but about ensuring that any disturbance that does occur is not at a level that disrupts or prevents the key life-cycle activities of the proposed qualifying species within the site. It will include considering whether disturbance affects a species continued access to the site and access to the resources upon which they depend to complete those key life-cycle activities.

Three management options have been identified that may be applied:

- management action to remove or avoid pressures;
- management action to reduce or limit pressures;
- no additional management action is required.

Where an option suggests to ‘reduce or limit’ pressures, there are choices around how this could be achieved for a given activity. For example, management action could reduce the intensity of an activity and/or limit the activity to only certain parts of a site, possibly at certain times of the year.

Stakeholders can provide local environmental knowledge and detailed information on activities, including in relation to intensity, frequency, and methods. Such additional information will help to develop more specific management options, focused on interactions between features and activities. Defra and the relevant regulatory body will agree any management measures for the pSPA with stakeholders following classification of the SPA.

Overview of activities

Table 1 below lists those human activities that are thought to currently take place (May 2016) within or close to the Irish Seas pSPA. Those activities to which the protected features are thought to be sensitive are explored in detail, activities to which the protected features are thought to be not sensitive (i.e. any interaction between the activity and the protected features is considered to be minimal) will not be considered further within this document. Any future change in the activities listed in Table 1, or the introduction of other activities not identified within the table, would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to establish any appropriate management actions. Future improvements to our understanding of the sensitivity of features to pressures might mean that existing activities which are not considered likely to affect the protected features would need to be re-considered.

Table 1: Overview of existing activities believed to take place within or close to the Irish Seas pSPA.

Activities occurring which are considered that may affect the protected features	Activities not considered likely to affect the qualifying features (other than insignificantly)
Military activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disturbance caused by military activity.	Fishing activity (both mobile and set (fixed) fishing gear types)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Removal of non-target species (by-catch). <p>Submarine cables or pipelines (telecommunications cables)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance during maintenance activity. <p>Shipping activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbance caused by shipping. • Disturbance caused by RYA cruising, recreational boating.
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The initial advice provided in this document does not preclude the requirement for all new projects and plans to undergo a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) by the relevant competent authority. Equally it does not preclude the requirement for competent authorities to carry out a review of existing consents, permissions and/or licences. We would however anticipate that existing activities where we have identified no additional management based on our understanding of current operations can be scoped out at an early stage of the HRA. Early engagement with the relevant competent authority is recommended to ensure HRA requirements for plans and projects are scoped appropriately and unnecessary costs are avoided. Furthermore, management action may change where our understanding of the interaction between the listed features and activities develops over time.

1.1 Ministry of Defence activity

Some military activity occurs in the area of the Irish Seas pSPA. The MoD produces Environmental Protection Guidelines for the Marine Environment. These guidelines help the MoD manage military activities in a way that will reduce risk of the features not achieving their conservation objectives.

Activities such as low-flying aircraft, firing munitions and exploding ordinance, high speed vessel manoeuvres or military exercises could cause disturbance to marine birds. Some further dialogue with the MoD may be appropriate to ensure that contingency arrangements are in place to avoid excessive disturbance, coordinated through the Ministry of Defence Environmental Protection Guidelines.

As part of its Marine Environment and Sustainability Assessment Tool (MESAT), the Royal Navy produce a layer for its electronic charts to provide advice to personnel on how military activities in the vicinity of designated marine protected areas may impact features. These electronic charts are used by Navy Commanders and other operational planners to ensure that military activities in the marine environment minimise their environmental impact. Environmental Protection Guidelines (Maritime) (latest version of the EPG(M)⁴) have been developed over the past few years in consultation with JNCC on behalf of the UK Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs). These charts offer guidance for the whole UK marine area.

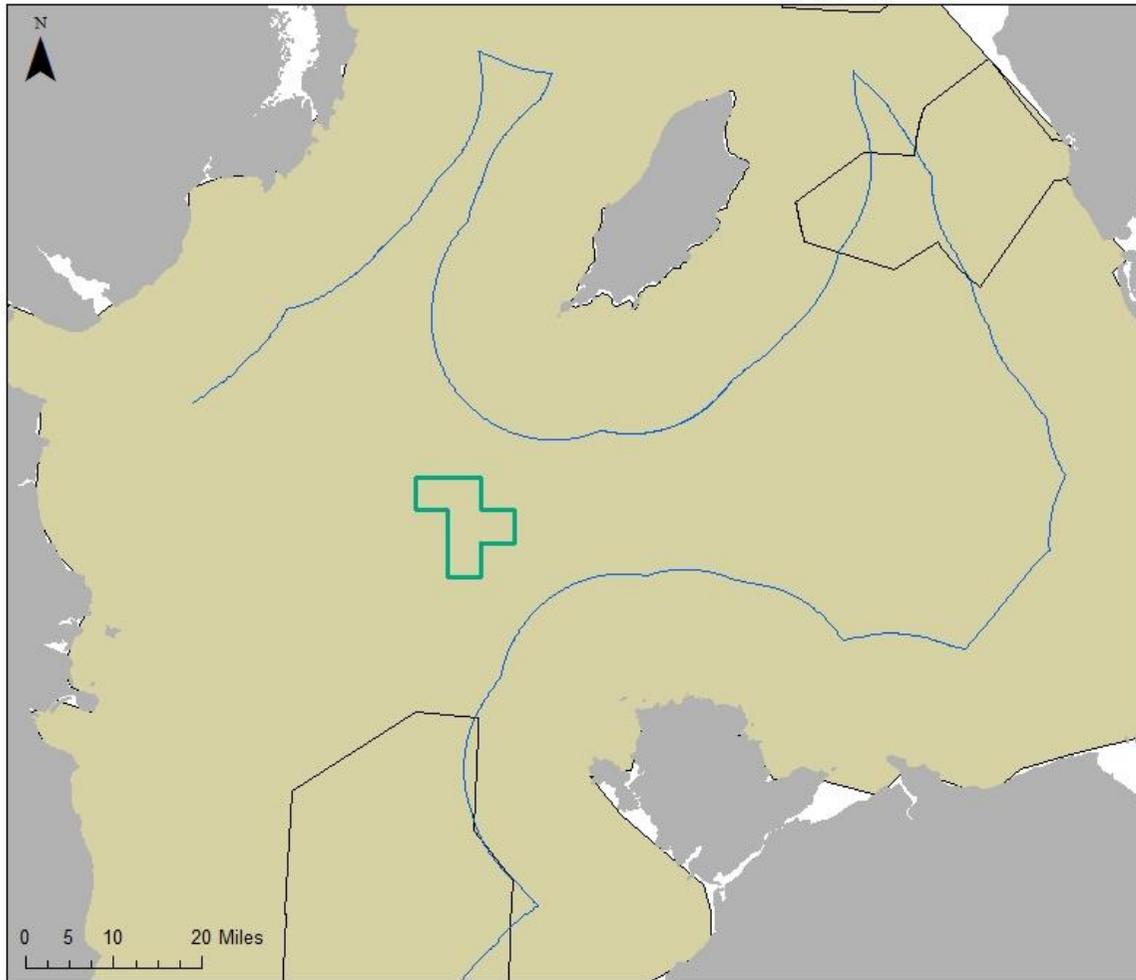
⁴ [www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/Environmental%20Protection%20Guidelines%20\(Maritime\)%20v2.1.pdf](http://www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/Environmental%20Protection%20Guidelines%20(Maritime)%20v2.1.pdf)

Management options
Military activity:
(e.g. Military practice areas)

No change from existing management: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) seeks to manage its activities in a manner that minimises environmental impact. However, without any further dialogue there is a risk that the sensitivity of features to a range of military activities is not sufficiently addressed within the MoD Environmental Protection Guidelines, thus creating a risk that the features may not achieve their conservation objectives.

Reduce / limit pressures: Dialogue with the MoD should seek to reduce or limit pressures through the existing mechanisms of the MoD Environmental Protection Guidelines. Update the MoD Environmental Protection Guidelines to encompass the Irish Seas pSPA, noting any seasonal sensitivity of the protected feature to minimise the risk that the features may not achieve their conservation objectives.

Remove / avoid pressures: Due to the strategic importance of MoD activities it may not always be possible to remove or avoid these pressures. However dialogue with the MoD should seek to reduce or limit these pressures as described above.



-  Irish seas pSPA
-  Military practice area
-  UK Territorial Waters (12nm)
-  Land

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Figure 2: Location of the Ministry of Defence practice areas in relation to the Irish Seas pSPA.

8. Conclusions and further recommendations

Where management measures are required, the development of these would be undertaken via discussion with the relevant industries and scientific organisations. The relevant authority will lead the development of specific management measures.

Defra and the MMO will make recommendations to Ministers on any management measures that may be required for the protected features to achieve their conservation objectives. Any such measures will be developed through discussion with stakeholders following classification of the SPA. Any statutory measures will be subject to consultation and the processes normally required by the legislation will be used. Where fisheries management measures are necessary, an application will be made for appropriate measures using the mechanisms of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. This process will include consultation on the measures at the EU level.

9. References

Common Fisheries Policy 2013. Regulation 1380/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, 2013.

TILLIN, H.M., HULL, S.C., & TYLER-WALTERS, H. 2010. Development of a Sensitivity Matrix (pressures-MCZ/MPA features). Report to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from ABPMer, Southampton and the Marine Life Information Network (MarLIN) Plymouth: Marine Biological Association of the UK. .Defra Contract No. MB0102 Task 3A, Report No. **22**.