



Selection of the most appropriate seabird hotspots as possible SPAs in offshore waters.

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

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<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=1729>

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1. Background

In 1979 the European Commission adopted the Birds Directive which, amongst other conservation measures, requires Member States to classify Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds listed on Annex I to the Directive and for regularly occurring migratory species.

As part of the UK's work to identify important marine areas, JNCC undertook surveys and an analysis of data on marine birds (seabirds and waterbirds) around the UK to highlight areas where marine birds aggregate. This included an analysis of seabirds in UK waters, looking at the distributions of 31 seabird species at sea ([marine SPAs for seabirds](#)). This analysis identified a number of hotspots which are areas where these species are present in relatively high densities. Hotspots were found in inshore (within 12 nautical miles of coast) and offshore (beyond 12 nautical miles of coast) waters. JNCC is responsible for providing advice regarding appropriate areas for possible classification as marine SPAs in offshore UK waters, whereas Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has this role for Scottish territorial inshore waters, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has this role in Welsh territorial waters, Natural England (NE) has this role in English territorial inshore waters and the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOENI) has this Role in territorial inshore waters in Northern Ireland.

In order to identify which of these seabird hotspots in offshore waters are suitable for proposing as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), JNCC followed the [UK SPA selection guidelines](#). The process is divided into two steps:

Stage 1 – Identification of important areas which could *possibly* be considered for SPA classification

Stage 1 identifies areas which are important for a significant proportion of birds on a regular basis (Stage 1.1 – 1.3), or which are of otherwise outstanding ecological importance for the birds (Stage 1.4)^[1] (see [guidelines](#)). The areas identified under Stage 1 represent all areas which could be proposed as SPAs i.e. areas that meet 1.1-1.3 numerical guidelines plus areas qualifying under 1.4. Stage 2 then considers these areas as a whole to identify “the most suitable territories in number and size” as demanded by the Birds Directive. The different methods used by JNCC to identify areas under Stage 1 are described in documents on [marine SPAs for seabirds](#), for [wintering waterbirds](#), for [large terns](#), for [little terns](#), for [European Shag](#) and for [red-throated divers](#). A large number of important areas which could possibly be taken forward for SPA classification were identified under these different strands of work. Only 21 areas of these were fully or partially in offshore waters (Table 1) and can therefore be considered by JNCC, the statutory advisor in offshore waters, in the subsequent Stage 2 selection of most suitable areas. All of these were possible SPAs identified for seabirds, as only seabirds tend to occur in larger aggregations in offshore waters. This document describes only the Stage 2 selection process for possible SPAs in offshore waters

^[1] The UK SPA Selection Guidelines suggest using the same ecological criteria outlined under Stages 1.4 to identify ecologically important areas, as in Stage 2 to select the most suitable areas. Note that even though the same ecological criteria are used, guideline 1.4 and the Stage 2 process are not identical and serve different purposes: the former is part of the process of identifying a suite of possible sites in a “first sieve” of potentially qualifying areas, while the second refines this to identify “the most suitable territories”. For example, an area could be identified as a possibly important area under 1.4 because it supports an aggregation with comparatively high numbers of a particular species. However, when then compared with other areas under Stage 2 it might not be rated as “most suitable” because there is another area close by, with a comparable number of individuals of the same species, but which is deemed to be more suitable as it supports in addition also a range of other species in considerable numbers.

as carried out by JNCC, areas identified in territorial waters will need to be further considered in the Stage 2 selection by SNH, NE, NRW and DOENI, respectively.

Stage 2 – Selection of the most suitable areas from all possible areas identified under Stage 1

Stage 2 looks at all areas identified by Stage 1 and selects from these the most suitable for becoming SPAs. How suitable an area is depends on several ecological criteria described in the [UK SPA selection guidelines](#), e.g. number of birds it supports compared to other areas, number of different species supported. Stage 2 judgements may be made in slightly different ways depending on the relevant Statutory Advisor, which is JNCC in offshore waters.

In this document, JNCC's application of Stage 2 judgements is described. This process was applied to all seabird hotspots identified by Stage 1 which were fully or partially in offshore waters, and where JNCC has the responsibility to provide advice on possible marine SPAs. In inshore territorial waters, the respective statutory advisors (SNH, NE, NRW and DOENI) will go through a similar selection process. The document [Summary of evidence used for the indicative suite of Scottish marine SPAs](#) provides an example of how e.g. JNCC and SNH have worked together to come to a joint conclusion regarding their selections on possible SPAs in Scottish in- and offshore waters.

2. Site selection of seabird hotspots

Stage 1 (under 1.2 and 1.4) identified 42 marine areas for seabirds in UK waters (see [marine SPAs for seabirds](#) for details on the method, and [Report 461](#) for the results); 21 areas were fully or primarily in offshore waters. Of these, JNCC aimed to select under Stage 2 all areas where a strong and defensible case can be made based on the available scientific evidence.

The selection under Stage 2 took place in four steps, which added - one by one - areas to the final selection of most suitable areas. To be included areas did only have to meet the criterion of a single step.

1. Select all areas from the 21 areas in offshore waters which fully meet the UK SPA selection guidelines under Stage 1.1 – 1.3. These are the strongest areas as these hold the largest numbers of birds on a regular basis.
2. Select all areas from the 21 areas in offshore waters which were identified under Stage 1.4 as areas which could be ecologically important, but which do not regularly hold the number of birds required for fully meeting the guidelines under Stage 1.1 – 1.3. However, the selected areas should hold at least half of the population size required to fully meet the guidelines under Stage 1.1 – 1.3.

The selection of areas in this step is a precautionary measure. This measure was taken as the ESAS analysis provides only approximate estimates of population sizes based on modelled data (“best estimates”, in contrast to precise population estimates), which makes the strict application of the original population thresholds inadvisable.

3. Select all areas from the 21 areas in offshore waters which are contained within or which are substantially overlapping with already selected areas. This step aimed to increase the conservation value of the selected areas as far as possible where no extra ‘cost’ in terms of area protected would be incurred.
4. Select all areas from the 21 areas in offshore waters where expert knowledge indicates - in light of all available evidence - that further investigation is likely to provide a strong case for classification as a UK-wide important area. Expert knowledge could also remove areas from the selection if it suggested that the area may not be very important or regularly used by high numbers of birds, but this was not applied in practice.

3. Outcomes

Selected hotspots which are primarily in offshore waters are shown in Figure 1 below; Table 1 shows the selection process in detail. Where the hotspots overlap other important areas under consideration, e.g. identified for foraging terns or wintering aggregations of waterbirds, they were combined into a composite pSPA boundary.

Where the hotspots selected by the Stage 2 selection overlap between inshore and offshore, the selections of the different statutory advisors (e.g. by JNCC for Scottish offshore waters and by SNH for Scottish inshore waters) were discussed and agreed upon.

Table 1a. JNCC's selection process to select the most suitable areas for seabirds and which are at least partially offshore under Stage 2 of the UK SPA selection guidelines.

Area ⁽¹⁾	species	season	1. areas meet guidelines 1.1 - 1.3	2. areas meet guideline 1.4 and >half of population required	3. areas substantially overlapping	4. Expert additions or removals	final selection	Outcome
1	northern fulmar	breeding						Excluded as only 0.40% of population in area present
2	northern fulmar	winter						Excluded as only 0.07% of population in area present
3	Manx shearwater	breeding	X				X	Currently under consideration as part of the proposed Skomer, Skokholm and the Seas off Pembrokeshire / Sgomer, Sgogwm a Moroedd Penfro dSPA
5	Manx shearwater	breeding						Excluded as only 0.21% of population in area present
6	Manx shearwater	breeding	X				X	Currently under consideration as the proposed Irish Sea Front dSPA
7	northern gannet	breeding	X				X	Currently under consideration as the proposed Seas Excluded as off St Kilda dSPA
8	northern gannet	breeding						only 0.15% of population in area present
10	northern gannet	breeding		X			X	Currently under consideration as part of the proposed Outer Firth fo Forth and St Andrews bay Complex dSPA
12	northern gannet	winter				X ⁽²⁾		Excluded as only 0.22% of population in area present. Expert consideration as it is located within the Mackerel box closure . But not sufficient additional evidence which would indicate increased bird numbers.
16	great skua	breeding	X				X	Currently under consideration as the proposed Seas off Foula dSPA
17	great skua	breeding						Excluded as only 0.18% of population in area present
19	black-legged kittiwake	breeding				X ⁽²⁾		Excluded as only 0.13% of population in area present. Expert consideration as it is within foraging range of several colonies. But not sufficient additional evidence which would indicate increased bird numbers.

(1) Area Number refers to area numbers of JNCC Report 461.

(2) Area considered for expert inclusion. However, corroborative evidence in support of this area is only weak ([additional evidence](#))

Table 1b. JNCC’s selection process to select the most suitable areas for seabirds and which are at least partially offshore under Stage 2 of the UK SPA selection guidelines.

Area ⁽¹⁾	species	season	1. areas meet guidelines 1.1 - 1.3	2. areas meet guideline 1.4 and >half of population required	3. areas substantially overlapping	4. Expert additions or removals	final selection	Outcome
21	black-legged kittiwake	breeding			X		X	Currently under consideration as part of the proposed Outer Firth fo Forth and St Andrews bay Complex dSPA
26	common guillemot	breeding						Excluded as only 0.45% of population in area present
29	common guillemot	winter						Excluded as only 0.08% of population in area present
32	common guillemot	winter						Excluded as only 0.24% of population in area present
33	Atlantic puffin	breeding						Excluded as only 0.20% of population in area present
39	Atlantic puffin	winter						Excluded as only 0.01% of population in area present
40	Atlantic puffin	winter				X ⁽²⁾		Excluded as only 0.01% of population in area present. Expert consideration as more than 40,000 seabirds use the area regularly during the breeding season. But area is not identified as important area for seabird assemblages, so boundary cannot be used for this purpose.
41	seabird assemblage	breeding	X				X	Currently under consideration as part of the proposed Outer Firth fo Forth and St Andrews bay Complex dSPA
42	seabird assemblage	summer		X			X	Currently under consideration as part of the proposed Outer Firth fo Forth and St Andrews bay Complex dSPA

(3) Area Number refers to area numbers of JNCC Report 461.

(4) Area considered for expert inclusion. However, corroborative evidence in support of this area is only weak ([additional evidence](#))

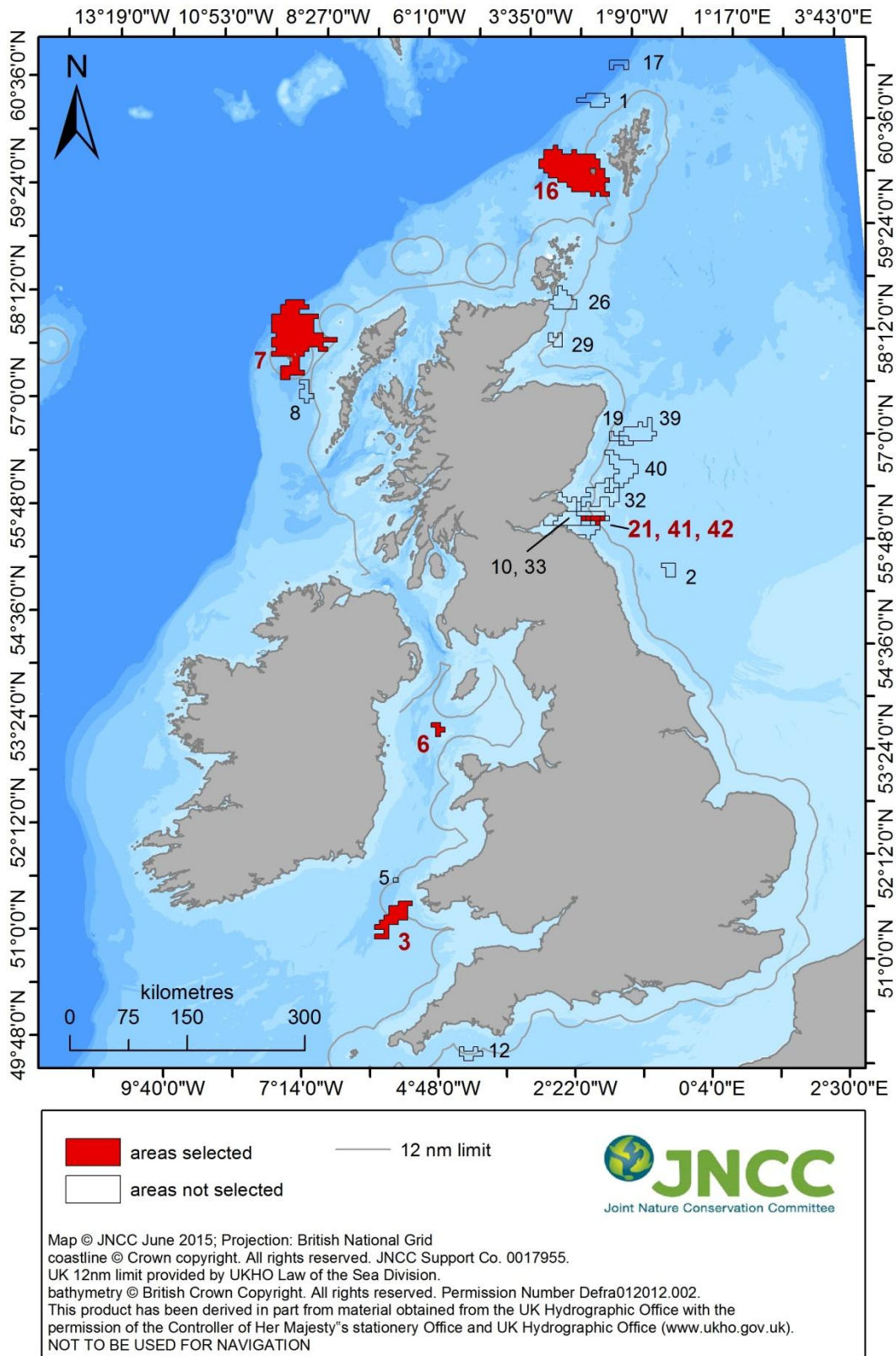


Figure 1. Site selection outcomes for areas which are at least partially offshore.

Version	Date	Amendments made	Includes comments from
1.0	16/06/2014	First draft	Internal JNCC comments
1.2	22/06/2014	Extend to inshore/offshore overlapping ESAS site selection	Internal JNCC comments
2	07/07/2015	Comments adopted	Marine Scotland comments
3	12/05/2016	Comments adopted.	More JNCC internal comments
3.1	17/05/2016	Comments adopted	
3.2	24/06/2016	Final version	