

## **Offshore Special Area of Conservation: Stanton Banks**

### **Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations**



(MESH North Western Shelf Consortium survey 2006)\*

**Version 3.0 (10<sup>th</sup> September 2007)**

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\* Cover photo illustrates circalittoral boulder and bedrock reef habitat with *Mycale lingua* recorded on Stanton Banks (MESH, 2006)

## Document version control

Version and date	Amendments made	Issued to and date
StantonBanks_ConservationObjectives +AdviceonOperations_3.0.doc (10 <sup>th</sup> September 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stand alone Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations (SAC Selection Assessment moved to separate document)</li> <li>- Sensitivity, exposure and vulnerability assessments modified</li> <li>- Summary of Advice on Operations moved to front of document</li> </ul>	UK Marine Biodiversity Policy Steering Group and Competent Authorities (September 07)
StantonBanksDossier_2.0_Draft.doc (26 <sup>th</sup> August 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Document structure modified: Conservation objectives and Advice on Operations combined with SAC selection assessment.</li> <li>- Map layout revised (boundary not changed)</li> <li>- Sensitivity/exposure/vulnerability assessments added (<i>former document contained provisional management statements only</i>)</li> <li>- Advice on Operations amended</li> </ul>	Defra (25 <sup>th</sup> September 2006)
Stanton Banks Proforma and provisional management action statements: JNCC 05 P10 <sup>1</sup> (September 2005)		JNCC Committee (September 2005)

## Further information

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<sup>1</sup>The Stanton Banks site was formally advised to Defra in December 2005 (without accompanying selection assessment)

## Summary of Draft Advice on Operations for Stanton Banks Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

This advice is based on information on the SAC presented in JNCC's 'Stanton Banks: SAC Selection Assessment' (version 3.0 May 2007). JNCC's Advice on Operations is site and feature specific, and has been developed using best available scientific information and expert interpretation as at September 2007. The Advice is generated through a coarse grading of sensitivity and exposure of site interest features to physical, chemical and biological pressures associated with human activity. Sensitivity and exposure have been combined to give a measure of the vulnerability of an interest feature to operations which may cause damage or deterioration, and which therefore require management.

The exact impact of any operation will be dependent upon the nature, scale, location and timing of events. This Advice on Operations for the Stanton Banks site will be kept under review and will be periodically updated to reflect changes in both sensitivity and exposure.

Management actions should enable the biological communities associated with the Reefs to achieve their full natural biological diversity and the underlying physical structure of the interest feature to be maintained. This will require assessment and management of human activities likely to affect these adversely, and of activities likely to impact the functioning of natural processes upon which the features are dependent.

To fulfil the conservation objectives for the **Annex I Reefs**, the competent authorities for this area are advised to manage human activities within their remit such that they do not result in deterioration or disturbance of this feature through any of the following:

- i) **Physical damage** by Physical disturbance or abrasion (demersal fishing);
- ii) **Biological disturbance** by Selective extraction of species (demersal fishing).

Within the Stanton Banks SAC, the following offshore activity may result in damage to the interest features, and is not subject to prior authorisation or licensing. It is, therefore, currently considered to pose a medium-high risk of damage to the interest feature:

- **Demersal fishing**

Competent Authorities are advised to consider management actions that might need to be taken to reduce the risk of damage to the features associated with this activity.

The above list is not a catalogue of prohibitions but rather indicates where some form of management measure(s) may be required or further measures where actions are already in force. This advice is indicative and does not remove the need for formal consultation on individual plans and projects.

# Stanton Banks SAC: Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations

## Introduction

Under the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 2007, JNCC is required to notify Competent Authorities of the conservation objectives for offshore Special Areas of Conservation and to advise them of operations which may adversely affect the integrity of the site. This requirement applies once a site has been advised to the European Commission. This advice is also required under the Offshore Petroleum Activities (Conservation of Habitats) Regulations (as amended in 2007); the Environmental Impact Assessment and Natural Habitats (Extraction of Minerals by Marine Dredging) Regulations 2007.

### 1) Conservation Objectives for Stanton Banks SAC interest features

The following Conservation Objectives set out what needs to be achieved at the site in order to fulfil the aims of the Habitats Directive. They are a starting point from which management of activities and monitoring of the conservation features of the site may be developed. Only qualifying interest features are considered in this section.

#### The Conservation Objectives for the Stanton Banks 'Reefs' are:

Subject to natural change, maintain\* the Reefs in favourable condition, such that:

- The natural **environmental** and **ecological processes** of reefs are maintained.
- The **extent, distribution, diversity** and characteristic species composition of biological communities representative of bedrock reef on the Scottish continental shelf are maintained.

\* Maintain implies restoration if the feature is currently not in favourable condition

#### Definition of terms:

- **Environmental processes:** the natural processes which may affect the water quality, turbidity or physical systems of the site
- **Ecological processes:** the biological interactions within communities and the overall productivity and diversity of the biological system
- **Extent:** the area covered by the habitat and communities
- **Distribution:** the geographical location of habitats and communities within the site
- **Diversity:** the number of different biological communities

Conservation objectives for inshore SACs have been provided in association with a 'favourable condition' table, which outlines how to recognise favourable condition status for the interest features in question. However, for offshore sites, there is presently insufficiently detailed information on i) the existing conditions of qualifying interest features and ii) the preferred or target condition of interest features in offshore waters. This currently limits the identification of measures and associated targets for condition monitoring. It is anticipated that further information on the condition of interest features will be obtained through baseline surveys and monitoring.

















