



**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TWO OFFSHORE SACs TO COMPLEMENT TWO ENGLISH INSHORE SACs AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIX ENGLISH INSHORE SACs**

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## JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TWO OFFSHORE SACs TO COMPLEMENT TWO ENGLISH INSHORE SACs AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIX ENGLISH INSHORE SACs

**Paper by Neil Golding, Charlotte Johnston and Caroline Turnbull**

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Further to the paper provided to Committee in September 2008 (JNCC 2008), the offshore component of two trans-boundary sites<sup>1</sup> are presented here for Committee to approve for recommendation to Defra. These are Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton and Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge.
- 1.2 The inshore components of these two sites were approved by the Board of Natural England in December 2008 and recommended to Defra. In accordance to agreed process with the Country Agencies and Defra, the offshore component of the trans-boundary sites now requires approval from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee before its recommendation to Defra.
- 1.3 The full (inshore and offshore components) site selection assessment documents, draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations were provided to the Chief Scientists Group for their consideration on 13th February 2009 and were received favourably. This paper provides summaries of the proposed sites.
- 1.4 The context for the selection of these sites was set out in the paper *Progress towards completing the UK network of marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for Annex I habitats, and site proposals for Hatton Bank and Bassurelle Bank (JNCC 08 P14)*, which Joint Committee approved subject to amendments in December 2008. The amended paper was provided on the JNCC website in February '09 (<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-4539>).
- 1.5 The full site proposal documentation is available for review by Committee members upon request and will be made available on the JNCC website if the sites are approved for recommendation to Defra. Documentation was developed in partnership with Natural England; it has regard to the format developed by JNCC (JNCC, 2004), as subsequently improved to incorporate comments made by Committee, and aligns with requirements of JNCC under the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations. It contains all the information required by the Secretary of State under Reg 7 of the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations 2007, in order for him to recommend that the sites be subject to public consultation under Reg 8. The advice within the document is also compliant with Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended).

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<sup>1</sup> The site is being treated as one ecological unit but legally consists of two separate draft SACs, one established under the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations, the other under the England and Wales Habitats Regulations.

- 1.6 Committee is also asked to endorse six English inshore sites as a contribution to the UK network by approving the Addendum to Formal Advice to Government at annex A. These sites have been approved by the Board of Natural England.
- 1.7 Following Committee's approval of these site recommendations, and subsequent approval by Defra, Natural England and JNCC plan to conduct a joint pre-consultation exercise and preparation of socio-economic impact assessments for these two joint inshore:offshore sites, the six inshore English SACs, plus Bassurelle sandbank offshore SAC approved by Committee in December 08. Formal joint public consultation will then follow, subject to Government approval, planned for November 2009.

## **2 Proposal of Special Area of Conservation for Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton**

- 2.1 The Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton complex of sandbanks lies off the north east coast of Norfolk. The main sandbank ridge across the centre of the site is aligned with the curve of the coast and is composed of alternating ridge headland associated sandbanks in a characteristic S-formation (Dyer & Huntley 1999). This ridge is made up of Haisborough Sand, Haisborough Tail, Hammond Knoll, Winterton Ridge and Hearty Knoll. Hewett Ridge and Smiths Knoll form a ridge of sandbanks on the outer site boundary, and inshore there are additional banks including Winterton Shoal and the Newarp Banks. The offshore component of the site contains the eastern halves of Smiths Knoll, Hewett Ridge and Winterton Ridge and the entirety of Hearty Knoll.
- 2.2 Available data suggest that the sandy sediments within the site are very mobile in the strong tidal currents which characterise the area. Large scale bank migration or movement appears to be slow, but within the sandbank system there is a level of sediment movement around and also across the banks, evidenced by megaripple and sandwave formations on the banks. Infauna of the sandy bank tops are consequently impoverished, and made up of small numbers of polychaetes and amphipods which are able to withstand dynamic sediment environments. On the flanks of the banks, and towards the troughs, where there is less water movement, sediments tend to be slightly more stable and gravelly. In these regions of the site, infaunal and epifaunal communities are much more diverse. There are a number of areas where sediment movements are reduced and these support an abundance of attached bryozoans, hydroids and sea anemones. Other tube-building worms such as *Pomatoceros* sp. and *Lanice conchilega* are also found in these areas, along with bivalves and crustaceans.
- 2.3 The draft site boundary (Figure 1) includes the main sandbank ridge of Haisborough Sand, Haisborough Tail, Hammond Knoll and Winterton Ridge. The boundary also includes the outer sandbank ridges of Smith's Knoll and Hewett Ridges and the inner banks of Winterton Shoal and Newarp Banks. Haisborough Gat has a series of low shoal features within an otherwise flat sandy sea bed, and The Would contains level silty areas interspersed with ridged sandy areas. These sandbanks all conform to the topographic description of the Annex I sublittoral sandbank interpretation (CEC, 2007). Annex I habitat to the south of the proposed site has not been included within the draft boundary because there is evidence to suggest that the sandbanks of Cross

Sands and Caister Sand are separate from the more northerly banks in terms of formation and current sediment supply pathways (Wallingford et al. 2002).

- 2.4 This site is located within the Southern North Sea Regional Sea (Defra, 2004). The proposed site boundary crosses the 12 nm boundary into offshore waters. Approximately 138,700 hectares is within territorial waters (within 12nm) and 46,000 hectares is in offshore waters.
- 2.5 In addition to the features described above, it is intended during the consultation, on the basis of currently available data, to specifically solicit any further information that might support the presence of *Sabellaria spinulosa* reef feature on Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton draft SAC. Should such data indicate that *S. spinulosa* reef warrants feature status, Joint Committee will be asked to endorse this revision.

### **3 Proposal of Special Area of Conservation for Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge**

- 3.1 The Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge site is located off the south Lincolnshire coast in the vicinity of Skegness. The site encompasses a wide range of sandbank types (banks bordering channels, linear relict banks, sinusoidal banks with distinctive subsidiary banks), associated channels and biogenic reef of *Sabellaria spinulosa*. The offshore component of the proposed site contains subtidal sandbank habitat in the features of North Ridge and Dudgeon Shoal.
- 3.2 Inner Dowsing in the west of the site is a sandbank comprising gravelly sand with a distinctive elongate shape. It is thought to be a relict bank sitting on a linear basement layer carved by glacial processes. The tidal currents in the area maintain the feature and probably shape the sand features in the overfalls at the northern end of Inner Dowsing. The Race Bank/North Ridge sandbank system is a good example of a sinusoidal sandbank that also has a complex pattern of smaller sandbanks associated with it. These smaller features form a unique 'comb-like' pattern running east from the main line of the sandbank ridges. The tops of the sandbanks are characterised by low diversity communities dominated by polychaete worms.
- 3.3 The areas between these main sandbank features are composed of mixed sand and gravelly sands and are functionally linked to the sandbanks. They are part of the morphological system that feeds the flood tide into the Wash and over the sandbanks at the entrance to the Wash. In these areas a diverse mosaic of biotopes occur dominated by the ascidian *Molgula* sp. along with a number of nemertean worms and polychaetes of the genera *Pomatoceros*, *Caulleriella*, *Polycirrus*, *Pholoe*, and *Lumbrineris*.
- 3.4 Abundant *Sabellaria spinulosa* agglomerations have consistently been recorded within the boundary of the dSAC (Foster-Smith & Hendrick, 2003). Survey data indicate that reef structures are concentrated in certain areas of the site, with a patchy distribution of crust-forming aggregations across the site. The two main areas of *S. spinulosa* reef are found at Lynn Knock and in the Docking Shoal area.

- 3.5 The boundary (Figure 2 ) encompasses the Inner Dowsing sandbank and the southern part of Silver Pit which is composed of mixed sand and gravelly sand (with some cobble as well). The latter has been included as it forms part of the morphological system that feeds the flood tide into the Wash and over the sandbanks at the entrance to the Wash. The area of Silver Pit outside the boundary has been excluded as it is in deeper water and outside of the sandbank definition. The northern part of the Burnham Flats/Docking Shoal sandbank has been included due to the presence of *S. spinulosa* reef. However the entirety of this sandbank feature has not been included within the boundary as it is already well represented in the existing Wash and North Norfolk SAC. The boundary also encompasses the key *S. spinulosa* reef areas and allows for the natural variability in distribution of *S. spinulosa* reef.
- 3.6 This site is located within the Southern North Sea Regional Sea (Defra, 2004). The proposed site boundary crosses the 12 nm boundary into offshore waters. Approximately 47,400 hectares is within territorial waters (within 12 nautical miles) and 43,200 hectares is in offshore waters.

#### **4 Confirmation of English inshore sites as a contribution to the network**

- 4.1 Natural England Board has approved and recommended a further six sites to Defra as suitable for classification as SACs. These sites are wholly within English territorial waters. Subject to Committee approval they will be included in the *Addendum to Formal Advice to Government* (previously issued on 8th December 2005) at Annex A and submitted to Defra.



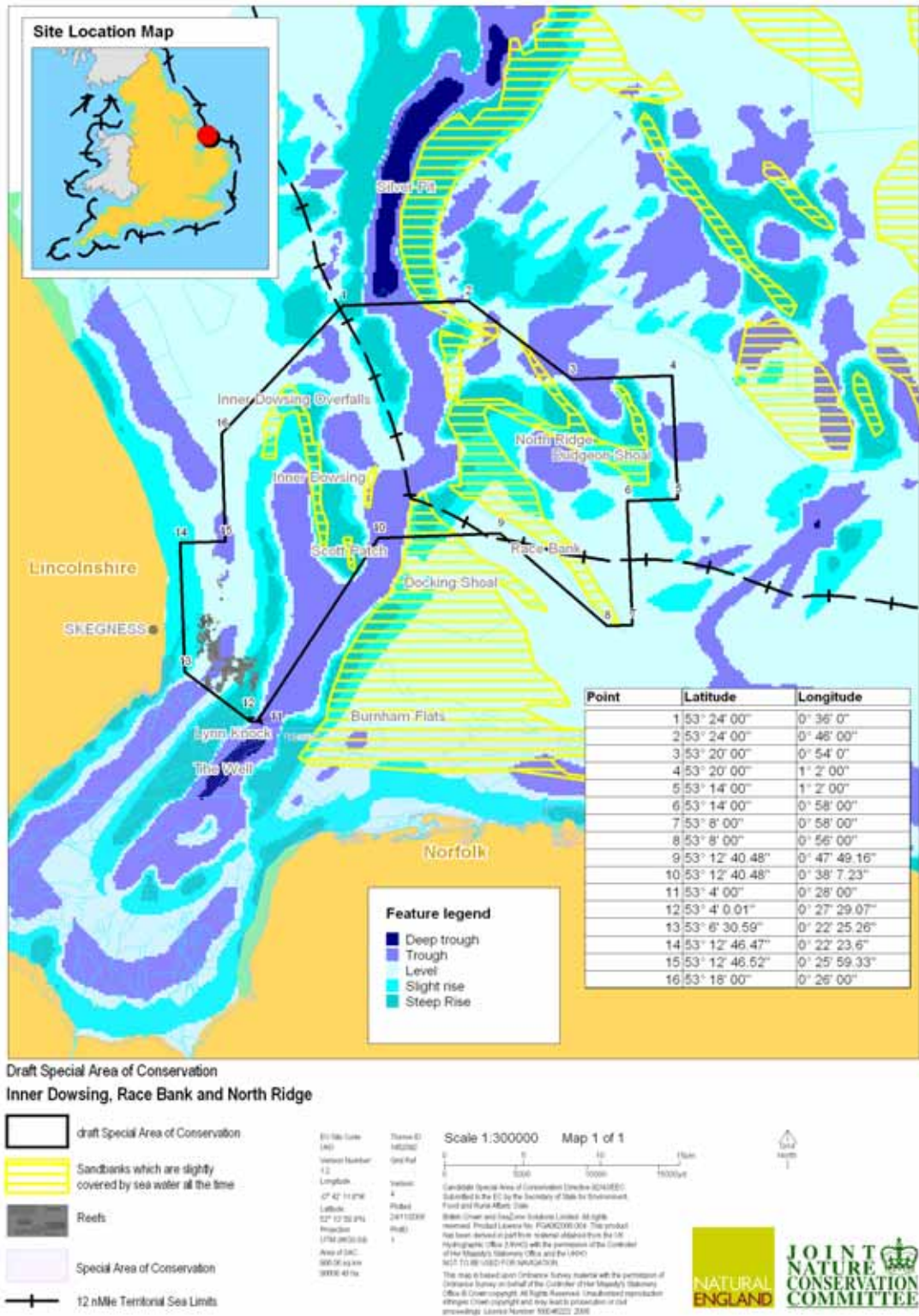


Figure 2: Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge draft site boundary.

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- JNCC 2008. Progress towards completing the UK network of marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for Annex I habitats, and site proposals for Hatton Bank and Bassurelle Bank (JNCC 08 P14), *as amended*.

## Annex A



### Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (92/43/EEC) – The Habitats Directive

**A comprehensive list of candidate, possible and draft marine Special Areas of Conservation in the United Kingdom**

**Addendum to Formal advice to Government issued on 8 December 2005**

10 March 2009

#### **Prepared by:**

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (on behalf of the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage)

#### **For:**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
The Northern Ireland Department of the Environment  
The Scottish Government  
The Welsh Assembly Government



**This document supplements the formal advice to Government issued on  
8<sup>th</sup> December 2005.**

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**Section 1: Changes to UK site list since submission of formal advice to Government on 8 December 2005**

Section 1 lists candidate SACs, possible SACs and draft SACs in UK waters which have been reported to Defra and/or the Devolved Administrations since 8<sup>th</sup> December 2005.

Name of new site	Country	Administrative area(s)	Qualifying interest(s)	Change since advice in December 2005
Severn Estuary/ Môr Hafren	England/ Wales	Bro Morgannwg/ Vale of Glamorgan; Caerdydd/ Cardiff; Casnewydd/ Newport; City of Bristol; Fynwy/ Monmouthshire; Gloucestershire; North Somerset; South Gloucestershire	Estuaries Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ) Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time Reefs	New cSAC (as of August 2007)
Dee Estuary/ Aber Dyfrdwy	England/ Wales	Cheshire; Sir y Fflint/ Flintshire; Wirral	Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ) Estuaries Annual vegetation of drift lines Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts Embryonic shifting dunes Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ('white dunes') Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('grey dunes') * priority feature Humid dune slacks	New cSAC (as of August 2007)
Humber Estuary	England	City of Kingston upon Hull; East Riding of Yorkshire; Lincolnshire; North East Lincolnshire; North Lincolnshire	Estuaries Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time Coastal lagoons * priority feature <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand Atlantic salt meadows ( <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i> ) Embryonic shifting dunes Shifting dunes along the shoreline with <i>Ammophila arenaria</i> ('white dunes') Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('grey dunes') * priority feature Dunes with <i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i>	New cSAC (as of August 2007)
Margate & Longsands	England	English Territorial Waters	Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time	New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Outer Morecambe Bay, Shell Flat & Lune Deep	England	English Territorial Waters	Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time Reefs	New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Lyme Bay to Poole Bay	England	English Territorial Waters	Reefs	New dSAC

**Addendum to a comprehensive list of possible and candidate Special Areas of Conservation in the UK**

				Seacaves		(Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Prawle Point to Plymouth Sound & Eddystone	England	English Territorial Waters		Reefs		New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Lizard Point	England	English Territorial Waters		Reefs		New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Lands End and Cape Bank	England	English Territorial Waters		Reefs		New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008)
Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge	England & UK Offshore Waters	English Territorial Waters and Offshore Marine Area		Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time Reefs		New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008; Approved by Chief Scientist Group February 2009)
Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton	England & UK Offshore Waters	English Territorial Waters and Offshore Marine Area		Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time		New dSAC (Approved by NE Board December 2008; Approved by Chief Scientist Group February 2009)
Braemar Pockmarks	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Submarine structures made by leaking gases		New cSAC (as of August 2008)
Darwin Mounds	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Reefs		New cSAC (as of August 2008)
Haig Fras	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Reefs		New cSAC (as of August 2008)
Scanner pockmark	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Submarine structures made by leaking gases		New cSAC (as of August 2008)
Stanton Banks	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Reefs		New cSAC (as of August 2008)
North Norfolk Sandbanks and Saturn Reef	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time Reefs		New pSAC (as of December 2007)
Wyville Thomson Ridge	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Reefs		New pSAC (as of December 2007)
Bassurelle Sandbank	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area		Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time		New dSAC (as of December 2008)
Hatton Bank	UK	Offshore Marine Area		Reefs		New dSAC (as of December 2008)

**Addendum to a comprehensive list of possible and candidate Special Areas of Conservation in the UK**

	Offshore Waters				
Dogger Bank	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area	Harbour porpoise ( <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> )		Inclusion of Harbour porpoise ( <i>Phocoena phocoena</i> ) as a qualifying interest feature (September 2008) within the previously advised Dogger Bank dSAC.
North West Rockall Bank	UK Offshore Waters	Offshore Marine Area	Reefs		New dSAC (March 2008)