

Habitats Regulations Assessment

In accordance with Regulation 43(1) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has considered whether the application or the application (not being directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site) is likely to have a significant effect on the Natura 2000 site.

As part of that consideration, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council has:-

- a) Taken into account the mitigation measures contained in each application, along with all legally enforceable obligations designed to avoid environmental effects; and
- b) Applied the precautionary approach set out in Commission Guidance: Managing Natura 2000 Sites and as required by the European Court of Justice in C 127/02 (Waddenzee).

Stage 1: Test of Likely Significance (Screening)

Screening Matrix

Name of Project or Plan:	Skiffie festival 2026
Name and location of Natura 2000 site:	Strangford Lough SAC/SPA/Ramsar
Natura 2000 site features:	<p>Strangford Lough SAC</p> <p>Annex I habitats that are a primary reason for selection of this site:</p> <p>1140 <u>Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide</u></p> <p>1150 <u>Coastal lagoons</u> * Priority feature</p> <p>1160 <u>Large shallow inlets and bays</u></p> <p>1170 <u>Reefs</u></p> <p>Annex I habitats present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for selection of this site</p> <p>1210 <u>Annual vegetation of drift lines</u></p> <p>1220 <u>Perennial vegetation of stony banks</u></p> <p>1310 <u>Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand</u></p> <p>1330 <u>Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>)</u></p> <p>Annex II species present as a qualifying feature, but not a primary reason for site selection</p> <p>1365 <u>Harbour seal</u> <i>Phoca vitulina</i></p> <p>Strangford Lough SPA</p> <p>This site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive:</p> <p>During the breeding season;</p> <p>Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>, Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>, Sandwich Tern <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>,</p> <p>Over winter;</p> <p>Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>,</p>

	<p>Golden Plover <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>,</p> <p>This site also qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following migratory species:</p> <p>Over winter; Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i> Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i> Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i></p> <p>Assemblage qualification: A wetland of international importance.</p> <p>The area qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by regularly supporting at least 20,000 waterfowl</p>
<p>Description of the Project or Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size and scale; • Land-take; • Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site; • Resource requirements (water abstraction etc); • Emission (disposal to land, water or air); • Excavation requirements; • Transportation requirements; • Duration of construction, operation, de-commissioning etc; • Other. 	<p><u>Size and scale</u> Skiffie Festival 2026 - 31st July – 2nd August 2026</p> <p>International, community, coastal rowing boat competition. The competing boats are 22 ft long traditionally styled, wooden coastal rowing boats. They will number 15 in total.</p> <p>Newry Mourne and Down District Council in partnership with Down Coastal Rowing Association will deploy a modular, floating, pontoon system to berth the boats and allow shore access for crew and officials will be deployed. It will run in a T shape from an access point to the Lough usually used by the Education Authority for youth groups and schemes.</p> <p>The pontoon will comprise Aquadock blocks held in place by delta anchors.</p> <p>The course is 1km long with a line of turning marks to allow for 2km races as required by the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association. The site is the only one identified in the Lough with suitable conditions for this competition.</p> <p>The races will run from 31st July – 2nd August 2026 and during that time members of the public may view the races from Delamont Country Park.</p> <p><u>Land-take</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site</u></p> <p>The races take place within the designated site</p> <p><u>Resource requirements (water abstraction etc)</u></p>

	<p>None</p> <p><u>Emission (disposal to land, water or air)</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>Excavation requirements</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>Transportation requirements</u></p> <p>A small boat will be used to deploy the buoys and pontoon.</p> <p><u>Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning etc</u></p> <p>The Pontoon and marker buoys will be deployed in the week starting 26th July 2026 (4/5 days) and will be removed week starting 2nd August 2026 (2/3 days), weather permitting.</p> <p><u>Other</u></p>
<p>Is the Project or Plan directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site (provide details)?</p> <p>If yes proceed no further.</p>	<p>No but in the long term it is part of proposals to develop sustainable water-based recreation by</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encouraging relatively benign activities which in turn displace unsustainable activities. 2. Engaging the public and water-based recreation users with SLLP and other conservation bodies to raise awareness of and appreciation for the natural environment
<p>Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to effects on the Natura 2000 site.</p>	<p>There is potential for disturbance of seals by boats.</p> <p>There is potential for damage to seabed communities by placing temporary anchors or mooring blocks on the seabed.</p> <p>The potential risk of bio-security through increased visitors accessing the Lough is low and will be minimised through enforcement of the ‘CHECK CLEAN DRY’ message.</p> <p>The dates chosen for the Skiffie Festival event have been those which avoid other sailing regattas in the South of the Lough (other clubs consulted). The 2026 event is in partnership with local clubs which are being encouraged to take ownership and are more involved in organising the event, thus ensuring that there is no clash with any other rowing events on the lough.</p> <p>The usual visiting sailing boat traffic into the Quoile Estuary will be accommodated within the race area (and the normal channel) rather than being pushed towards the islands where seals haul-out or bird’s nest. There will therefore be no cumulative impact on, for example, seal haul-outs.</p>

	There is therefore negligible impact or easily implemented mitigation with regard to cumulative or in-combination effects.
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N2K Feature affected (all features to be assessed at this stage):	Describe any likely direct, indirect effects to the N2K features arising as a result of:	*Effect Significant/Not Significant? Explain why (for each feature below in spaces provided).
Large shallow inlet or bay	No effect	<p>NS – scale insignificant</p> <p>Biosecurity should not be an issue as coastal rowing boats do not carry bilge water, they are in regular use throughout the year or taken out of the water between races and are in race condition so do not have any accumulated species attached. We will also request that every competing club certify that their boat has been washed down before coming to Strangford Lough.</p> <p>The pontoon is stored on-site in the walled garden at Delamont Country Park throughout the year.</p> <p>Initially discussed proposals with Marine Division, who stated that their main concern would be for sea pens which could be damaged by anchors / mooring blocks(2016).</p> <p>QUB were commissioned to undertake a survey of the seabed at the pontoon and turning line. The survey indicated that the works are benign and would not affect the conservation interests. They did not find sea pens for the co-ordinates given. We have previously managed 6 successful events at this location.</p>
Coastal Lagoon	No effect	NS – does not impact on the Dorn
Mud and sand flats not covered by sea water at low tide	No effect	NS – habitat not present at this location
Reefs	No effect	Habitat not present at this location
Annual vegetation of drift lines	No effect	Not present on the area of shore where people will walk which is a small section near the pontoon. The shore is normally

		accessible to the public and is regularly walked.
Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae)	No effect	NS – Not present at this location
Perennial vegetation of stony banks	No effect	NS – not present at this location
Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand	No effect	NS – not crossing mud or sand flats
Common Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Potential effect	Potential effect – Screened to Stage 2 There is potential for disturbance of seals by boats. Mitigations to prevent disturbance will be outlined in ‘Stage 2’.
Waterfowl Assemblage wintering population	Possible disturbance	NS – Event takes place in summer.
Breeding Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns	No effect	NS – Nesting sites not affected.

***Only mitigation measures designed within the application can be considered at this stage. Any conditions that Newry, Mourne and Down District Council would impose must be assessed through the appropriate assessment stage.**

Describe any potential effects on the Natura 2000 site as a whole in terms of: interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site	Effect considered significant/non-significant: Finding of No significant effects Matrix
There is potential for disturbance of seals by boats.	Significant, screened to Stage 2.

Provide details of any other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could (directly or indirectly) affect the site.	Provide details of any likely in-combination effects and quantify their significance -
N/A	

Is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant?	
Alone?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
In-combination with other projects of plans?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

List of Agencies Consulted: Provide contact name and telephone or email address.	Previous consultation with DAERA (DOE), NIEA ██████████ ████████████████████ ████████████████████ ████████████████████
Summary of response to consultation received.	Potential for disturbance to Seals – Stage 2 screening carried out.

Conclusion: Is the proposal likely to have a significant effect on an N2K site?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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IF IT HAS BEEN DETERMINED THAT THE PROPOSAL WILL NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT THEN ASSESSMENT IS COMPLETED.

IF ANY PART OF THE PROPOSAL IS LIKELY TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT AN APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT WILL BE REQUIRED – STAGE 2 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT.

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment Report

Assessment of the Effects of the Project or Plan on the Integrity of the Site	
<p>Describe the elements of the project or plan (alone or in combination with other projects or plans) that are likely to give rise to significant effects on the site (from screening assessment)</p>	<p>The Skiffie Festival involves 22 ft long traditionally styled, wooden coastal rowing boats racing in Strangford Lough. They will number 15 in total.</p> <p>As part of the race preparations, a modular, floating, pontoon system to berth the boats and allow shore access for crew and officials will be deployed. It will run in a T shape from an access point to the Lough usually used by the Education Authority for youth groups and schemes.</p> <p>The pontoon will comprise Aquadock blocks held in place by delta anchors.</p> <p>The course is 1km long with a line of turning marks to allow for 2km races as required by the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association. The site is the only one identified in the Lough with suitable conditions for this competition.</p> <p>The races will run from 31st July – 2nd August and during that time members of the public may view the races from Delamont Country Park.</p> <p>The preparations and the addition of the boats to the Lough have potential to disturb Seals.</p>
<p>Set out the Conservation objectives of the site</p>	<p>The Conservation Objective for this site is: To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) • Perennial vegetation of stony banks • Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand • Harbour (Common) Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i> to favourable condition. <p>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.</p>
<p>Describe how the project or plan will affect key species, key habitats and the integrity of the site (determined by structure and function and conservation objectives). Acknowledge uncertainties and any gaps in information.</p>	<p>The addition of extra boats on the lough has potential to disturb seals at their haul out sites. We discussed the potential to impact seals at haul-outs at known locations (previous Skiffie events) with DOE Marine Division. They have advised that this should not be a problem as it is after the main harbor seal pupping season and before the molting season. The event is only for three days and traffic will be greatest between 10- 4pm on the Saturday & Sunday.</p>

	All ancillary motorboats (eg safety boats) will be advised to keep clear of known seal haul-outs. Briefing for coxen and safety boats each morning.
Describe what mitigation measures are to be introduced to avoid or reduce the adverse effects on the integrity of the site. Acknowledge uncertainties and any gaps in information	As this event is only for 3 days it is determined that it will have a less significant effect than the Skiffie Worlds event. Competitors and safety boat operators will be briefed prior to the event on the most up to date SAC seal Haul Out locations.

Appropriate Assessment: Mitigation Measures

List measures to be introduced	Explain how the measures will avoid the adverse effects on the integrity of the site.	Explain how the measures will reduce the adverse effects on the integrity of the site.	Provide evidence of how they will be implemented and by whom.
Map of up to date Seal Haul out locations to be provided to all competitors and safety boat operators prior to the event.	All competitors and operators will be aware of the Seals and their haul out locations.	Competitors and operators will be aware of the seals and avoid them as much as possible.	Event organisers will ensure everyone signs a confirmation document to say they have received the haul out map and information.
Briefing to be held on each morning of the race to re-enforce the seal haul out information and to avoid	The message about Seal disturbance will be re-enforced among all competitors and operators.	Competitors and operators will be aware of the seals and avoid them as much as possible.	Event organisers will ensure everyone signs a confirmation document to say they have received the haul out map and information.
List mitigation measures (as above)	Provide evidence of the degree of confidence in their likely success	Provide time-scale, relative to the project of plan, when they will be implemented	Explain the proposed monitoring scheme and how any mitigation failure will be addressed
Map of seal haul out locations to be provided to all competitors and safety boat operators prior to the event.	The map will help competitors and operators avoid these areas	During the competition	Event organisers will monitor the routes taken by competitors and advise if any have gone too close to haul outs.
Briefing to be held on each morning of the race to re-enforce the seal haul out information and to avoid	Briefings will re-enforce the message about avoiding disturbance to the Seals	On each morning before the race	Event organisers will monitor the routes taken by competitors and advise if any have gone too close to haul outs.

Data collected to carry out the assessment

Who carried out the assessment?	NMDDC Biodiversity Officer
Sources of data	SPA and SAC Conservation Objectives Documents Consultation with SLLP Office and Strangford Lough Rangers Group ,National Trust.
Level of assessment completed	Stage 2
Where can the full results of the assessment be accessed and viewed?	NMDDC
Conclusion reached/Response to consultation	No significant impact if mitigation measures are carried out.