

Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy 2026-2035



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'
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an' Kintra Matthers**

Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy 2026-2035

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Front cover image credit: DAERA – Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*)

Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to publish the first ever Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy. Our coastline and waters are home to internationally significant seabird populations, including many iconic and much-loved species, such as puffin, gannet and razorbill.

Seabirds are in decline globally, and in Northern Ireland many of our seabirds are in trouble and continue to be impacted by a range of pressures including food shortages, invasives non-native species and climate change. Furthermore, recent outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza have had devastating effects on seabird populations. Urgent action is required to halt the further decline of seabirds, improve resilience, and make steps towards recovery. We can take hope from the work of the Life Raft project which is a truly inspiring nature restoration project. The ongoing effort to eradicate rats and ferrets will have a transformative impact on the fortunes of seabirds showing that by working together we can turn the tide on nature decline.

The Strategy has been developed in response to the many challenges facing our seabirds and will support the recovery of seabird populations within our marine area. Alongside the Seabird Strategies for England, Scotland and Wales, it aims to restore and improve the conservation status of seabird populations across the UK.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to all stakeholders for their valuable contributions to the co-design process through the Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group, and to everyone who has taken the time to engage with the consultation. As we move towards implementation, it is essential that we work together to translate this collaborative effort into meaningful action at scale, supporting the recovery of our seabird populations and the wider marine environment.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Muir". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long, horizontal stroke.

Andrew Muir MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

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Introduction

Background

Northern Ireland hosts internationally important populations of seabirds and waterbirds, many of which are declining or under threat of decline. During the summer breeding season, 22 species of seabird currently breed on our coastline, on islands, cliff faces, and harbours, as well as at inland lakes (loughs) and in urban areas. These include a diverse range of species such as Gulls, Terns and Auks which arrive to colonies in terrestrial habitats during the spring and summer to nest. Adults forage in the sea to provide for their growing chicks until fledging in the late summer. After the chick-rearing period, the seabirds will disperse from breeding colonies around the coast, out to open sea or migrate across the globe until the following spring.

In the non-breeding season, waterbirds, waders and wildfowl migrate from across the globe to overwinter in Northern Ireland's loughs and estuaries due to the rich feeding opportunities and mild climate. The range of birds present around our coast is dependent on a healthy and varied environment to provide food and suitable habitats.

As top predators, seabirds play a vital role in regulating healthy marine ecosystems and provide an indicator of ocean health. Additional to this ecological value, they also have wider societal benefits: seabird colonies attract large numbers of visitors engaging in wildlife watching. This Seabird Conservation Strategy (hereafter 'the Strategy') outlines what action is required to address seabird population decline and help facilitate their recovery.

Purpose

Seabird populations are under threat and declining both nationally and globally. In the last **UK Marine Strategy** assessment, seabirds have been assessed as not meeting Good Environmental Status (GES)¹. Furthermore, the 2023 **OSPAR** Quality Status Report² indicated that marine bird abundance and breeding productivity for the Celtic Sea regions were in poor status (with the exception of water-column feeder and grazing feeder abundance). Seabirds Count³, a census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland from 2015 to 2021, showed a mixed picture for breeding seabird populations at a Northern Ireland level (presented in [Annex C](#)). Four species showed a greater than 10% decline in breeding numbers while nine species showed a greater than 10% increase in breeding numbers. Six species remained stable, while for the remaining eight species a change could not confidently be assessed.

1 [Marine strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

2 Marine Bird Abundance <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/qsr-2023/indicator-assessments/marine-bird-abundance/>

3 Burnell, D., Perkins, A.J., Newton, S.F., Bolton, M., Tierney, T.D. & Dunn, T.E., 2023. Seabirds Count: a census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland (2015-2021). Lynx Nature Books, Barcelona.

Urgent action is required to reduce the further decline of seabirds, improve resilience, and make steps towards recovery. Seabirds have the potential to be impacted by a wide range of anthropogenic activities and pressures across the globe including infrastructure development⁴, prey reduction⁵, bycatch⁶ and pollution⁷. Climate change⁸ is predicted to have an enormous impact on our seabirds' breeding and feeding habitats and the wider marine environment in the coming decades, and recent studies have shown the impacts of increased storm frequency and intensity to our seabird populations⁹, further highlighting the need for urgent action.

Outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) have presented new challenges to seabird populations. Non-breeding birds in winter 2021/ 22 were heavily impacted and unusually the outbreak continued into the summer breeding season 2022, decimating a number of seabird breeding colonies around the UK with large impacts seen in Gannet, Common Guillemot, Terns and Great Skua. In 2023, HPAI continued to affect seabirds with significant impacts recorded for Black-headed Gulls, Common- and Sandwich Terns, Kittiwakes and Guillemots. Despite fewer cases in the UK during winter 2023/2024, and no serious outbreaks reported in Northern Ireland for breeding seabirds in 2024 or 2025¹⁰, the ongoing global occurrence of HPAI still poses a risk to UK birds.

DAERA has reviewed the current information on Northern Ireland's seabird populations, outlined pressures and activities which have the greatest impact on species (where evidence is available), and developed an Action Plan to address key evidence gaps and potential management going forward.

The strategy has been developed alongside similar strategies for England¹¹, Scotland¹² and Wales¹³ to restore and improve the conservation status of seabird populations in the UK as outlined in the UK Marine Strategy programme of measures¹⁴. Furthermore, this will help us deliver international obligations to protect and preserve the marine environment under the OSPAR **North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy**¹⁵ and will contribute to actions within the OSPAR Regional Action Plan for Marine Birds 2024-2030¹⁶.

4 Peschko, V., Mendel, B., Muller, S., Markones, N., Mercker, M., & Garthe, S. 2020. Effects of offshore windfarms on seabird abundance: Strong effects in spring and in the breeding season. *Marine Env. Research* vol 162.

5 Votier, S.C., Sherley, R.B., Scales, K.L., Camphuysen, K. and Phillips, R.A., 2023. An overview of the impacts of fishing on seabirds, including identifying future research directions. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 80(9).

6 Ramirez, I., Mitchell, D., Vulcano, A., Rouxel, Y., Marchowski, D., Almeida, A., Arcos, J.M., Cortes, V., Lange, G., Morkūnas, J., Oliveira, N. and Paiva, V.H.(2024), Seabird bycatch in European waters. *Anim Conserv*, 27: 737-752.

7 [Birds and pollution | BTO - British Trust for Ornithology](#)

8 Burton, N.H.K., Daunt, F., Kober, K., Humphreys, E.M. and Frost, T.M. (2023) Impacts of Climate Change on Seabirds and Waterbirds in the UK and Ireland. *MCCIP Science Review 2023*, 26pp

9 Laurenson, K., Wood, M. J., Birkhead, T. R., Priestley, M. D. K., Sherley, R. B., Fayet, A. L., Guilford, T., Hatchwell, B. J., & Votier, S. C. (2025). Long-term multi-species demographic studies reveal divergent negative impacts of winter storms on seabird survival. *Journal of Animal Ecology*, 94, 139–153

10 [northern-ireland-seabird-report-2025.pdf](#)

11 [English Seabird Conservation and Recovery Pathway \(ESCaRP\) - ME6044](#)

12 [Introduction - Scottish seabird conservation action plan - gov.scot](#)

13 [Welsh seabird conservation strategy | GOV.WALES](#)

14 [Marine strategy part three: UK programme of measures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

15 [Strategy of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic 2030](#)

16 <https://www.ospar.org/documents?v=58061>

Scope

The Northern Ireland marine area comprises the 'inshore' and 'offshore' regions¹⁷. Northern Ireland's waters abut those of Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man and Ireland. While this strategy applies to the Northern Ireland inshore region (Figure 1) as defined in Section 2 of the **Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013** ('the Marine Act')¹⁸, it is recognised that many seabird species will use a much wider area, both inland and in other jurisdictions. This is particularly relevant for those migratory birds that return to Northern Ireland to breed or to over-winter. Implementing measures along coastal zones and within the inshore region will enhance resilience among seabird populations.

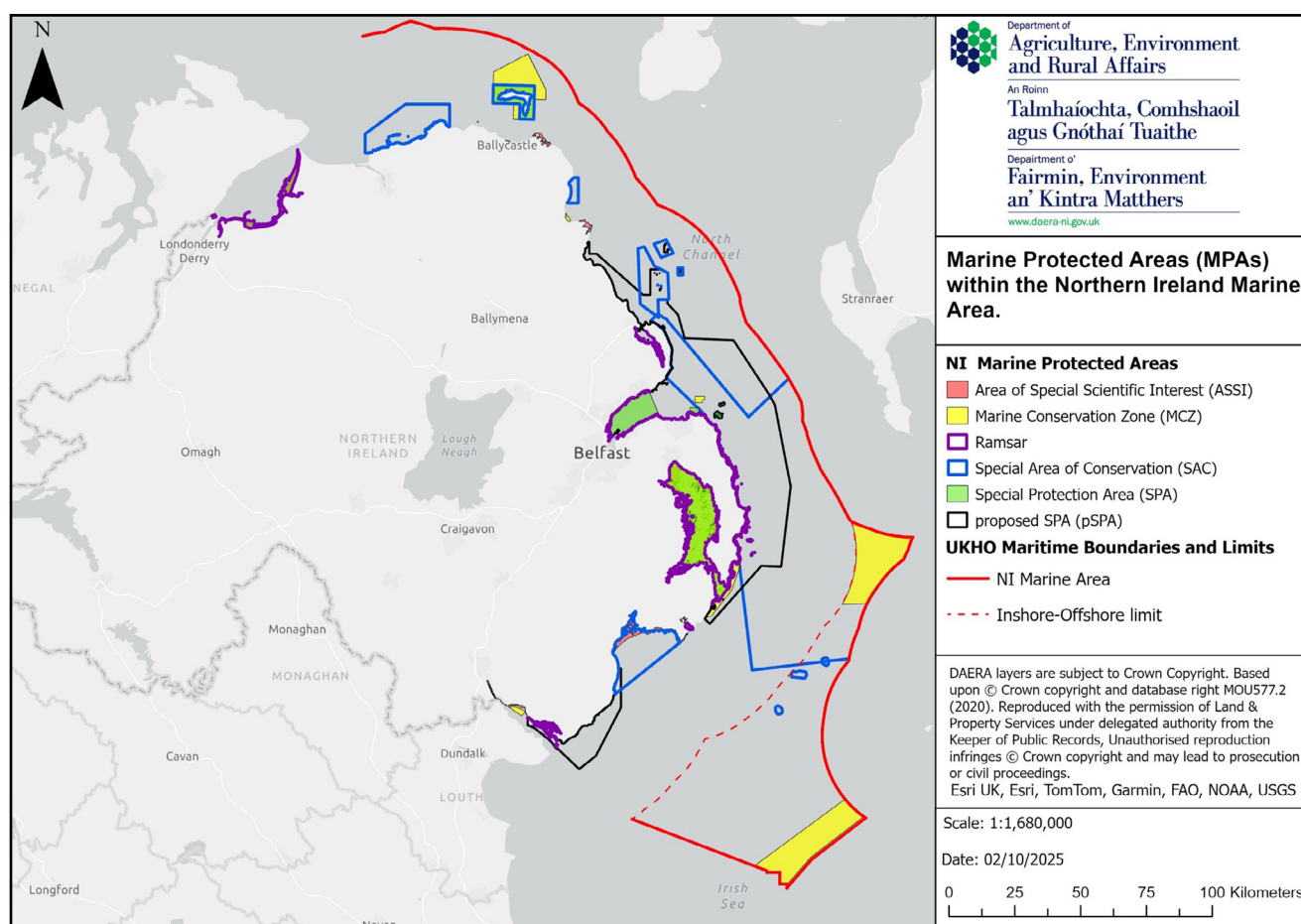


Figure 1: The Northern Ireland Inshore and Offshore Regions showing the Marine Protected Areas network.

¹⁷ as defined at Section 322 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#).
¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2013/10/contents/data.pdf>

Outcome

The outcome from this strategy will be that:

By 2050 Northern Ireland's seabird species are in recovery, showing improved resilience to current and emerging threats, with increases in abundance and breeding success since the last seabirds census.

This timeframe aligns with the vision of the **draft Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2032**¹⁹ and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)** vision timeline to 2050 and acknowledges the long lifespans and relatively low reproduction rates characteristic of many seabird species.

Aim

The aim of this strategy is to:

To improve the conservation status of seabirds in Northern Ireland through effective management of current and emerging threats, with the overall goal of meeting Good Environmental Status.

In relation to the outcome above, and delivering on the aim, over the next 10 years, our actions will:

1. Strengthen the monitoring efforts and evidence base of our seabird populations;
2. Implement management measures and innovative action to confront both current and emerging pressures and threats, to assist with UK efforts in working towards achieving and maintaining Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy; and
3. Focus on education and engagement and promote cross-border collaboration to raise awareness of the importance of our seabird populations amongst the general public.

Strategic Actions

Eight key Strategic Actions were identified for this strategy. They have been placed into 'Governance', 'Evidence and data collection', 'Management', 'Funding' and 'Communications' themes, but in many cases the actions will deliver across all five themes.

Governance

1. Establish an inclusive governance structure to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan, including the setting of SMART timeframes and undertaking iterative review of the strategy.

Evidence and data collection

2. Collate existing evidence from all seabird monitoring efforts in Northern Ireland and identify the knowledge gaps, threats and pressures to enhance the evidence base and data availability of seabird distribution and populations.
3. Enhance seabird conservation research by using novel technologies and maintaining an ongoing coordinated monitoring programme to improve our understanding of seabird populations.

Management

4. Identify and deliver targeted management measures to aid the recovery of seabirds and the wider ecosystem upon which they rely.
5. Implement a monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of management measures, incorporating adaptive management where required.

Funding

6. Develop funding to support delivery of the Action Plan, to include exploring opportunities for green finance and other revenue streams.

Communications

7. Raise awareness of the significance of seabirds in Northern Ireland, emphasising the region's importance within the British Isles, and promote understanding of their environmental, cultural and economic value across all sectors to ensure their long-term protection.
8. Identify opportunities for training programmes and promote comprehensive knowledge transfer for site managers and conservation professionals, ensuring they are equipped with the latest expertise and best practices necessary for effective seabird and habitat management.

Each of the strategic actions is supported by prescriptive actions, as detailed in the Action Plan ([Annex A](#)) which on implementation will contribute to achieving the outcome of seabird recovery by 2050.

The Strategy does not have SMART timeframes as this reflects the dependence on stakeholders for co-delivery as well as the variable availability of funding. Instead, the Department will work with the Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group to apply SMART timeframes to the actions contained in the Action Plan.

These actions will be applied to the 30 species listed as a priority in this strategy, unless where specified to particular target species within an individual action.

Species list

The strategy covers 30 species of seabird (refer to Table 1) that frequently occur in Northern Ireland waters, including breeding species and wintering waterbirds. Further information on each species in relation to their conservation and designation status is provided in [Annex C](#).

The Department acknowledges that there are additional species which could be considered, such as passage seabirds, rare visitors and less-frequent wintering waterbirds²⁰. Any recommendations for the protection of seabirds listed in this strategy could also have a positive influence on all seabirds and waterbirds regardless of their exclusion.

²⁰ These include Balearic Shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*), Yellow Legged Gull (*Larus michahellis*) and Black-Throated Diver, *Gavia arctica*, however, there is a particular lack of data on their distribution and those pressures which might impact these species, therefore, they were not included within this iteration of the Strategy.

Table 1: List of species considered in this Strategy.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Functional Group
Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	Surface Feeder
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	
Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	
European Storm Petrel	<i>Hydrobates pelagicus</i>	
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	
Black-Legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	
Manx Shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	Surface Feeder/ Water Column Feeder
Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	
Black Headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Wading/ Surface Feeder
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	Water Column Feeder
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	
European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Water Column Feeder/ Benthic Feeder
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	
Red throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>	
Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	
Red Breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Benthic/ Water Column Feeder
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	

Policy and legislation that provides protection for seabirds in Northern Ireland

There are a range of mechanisms currently in place for protecting Northern Ireland's seabirds, as outlined below:

1. The Marine Plan for Northern Ireland

The draft Marine Plan, and once adopted, the Marine Plan for Northern Ireland, provides a framework to be used by all decision makers to enable them to facilitate sustainable marine development. The Marine Plan is built on overarching UK and Northern Ireland legislation and seeks to safeguard our biologically diverse marine area and enable the sustainable and productive use of this valuable resource.

Most activities in the marine environment require a marine licence under Part 4 of the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) ('MCAA') or are regulated through another statutory authorisation system

Public authorities must take authorisation decisions in accordance with the policies in the Marine Plan and comply with the legal requirements for marine protected areas (MPAs) or protected species including protection of their essential habitats, and prevention of damage to nests or places used for shelter or protection. The draft Marine Plan sets out how the Precautionary Principle and Mitigation Hierarchy should be applied to decision-making.

2. Biodiversity Duty

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the WANE Act) places a statutory duty on public bodies to conserve and enhance biodiversity. **The Biodiversity Duty** (Section 1 (1)) extends beyond protected sites and requires all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity when carrying out their functions. There is a requirement for public bodies to protect and maintain biodiversity, and to look for opportunities to enhance or restore biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Lists under the WANE Act define those Priority Habitats and Species which are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity and that public bodies should take steps to further the conservation of; this includes some of the seabird and marine birds included in this Strategy as detailed in [Annex C](#).

3. The Wildlife Order

All wild birds are protected under the **Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended)**²¹ from unlawful killing or injury. This includes making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill or injure any wild birds or take, damage, destroy or disturb a nest whilst it is being built or in use.

4. Protected Areas

Seabirds are given additional protection through the designation of sites as Special Protection Areas (SPA) under the **Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)**²², Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) under the **Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013**²³, and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the **Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002**²⁴. Additionally, both coastal and inland wetlands of international importance are designated under the **Ramsar Convention**²⁵. The sites designated for the protection of habitats and species are collectively referred to as the Northern Ireland Protected Sites network across terrestrial and marine areas, with marine designations referred to as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

These sites undergo regular monitoring against the site's conservation objectives with the results written up as a condition assessment by the Department on a 6-year cycle. Management of the sites to ensure the features are meeting the conservation objectives and to highlight any potential risks are carried out in close partnership with key stakeholders. Regulations are in place regarding usage and development to protect the designated features.

[The Marine Protected Areas Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Region 2025-2030](#) details the Department's approach to designation, management, restoration and enforcement of activities within MPAs. The Seabird Conservation Strategy will be in alignment with this approach.

21 [Wildlife \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1985](#)

22 [The Conservation \(Natural Habitats, etc.\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 1995](#)

23 [Marine Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#)

24 [The Environment \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2002](#)

25 [Ramsar Convention](#)

Implementation of the Action Plan

Governance

The Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group ('the Advisory Group'), will be responsible for overseeing the delivery and review of the Action Plan required to meet the aim of the strategy, including the setting of SMART timeframes for the Action Plan. The Advisory Group will operate within the governance framework of the Marine Nature Recovery Oversight Group, ensuring alignment with the **Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland**²⁶(EIP) and other marine nature recovery strategies as well as accountability for the delivery of the Action Plan. The Advisory Group will regularly review Actions to ensure these are addressed and can allocate and amend SMART timeframes as targets are met. There are cross-linkages between the Actions, and these will be delivered concurrently. The Department will work together with stakeholders to implement the Action Plan, continuing the co-design approach used in developing this Strategy.

A number of site-level management groups are already in place and, where applicable, the Advisory Group will engage with these to reflect considerations both across the Northern Ireland marine area and wider transboundary areas. These include the Strangford Lough MPA Management Steering Group and the Rathlin Forum.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Department currently contributes to statutory reporting requirements as outlined below. Additional output includes the **Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report**²⁷ biodiversity metric which is published annually and details some of the species within the scope of this strategy. This includes reporting on the condition of the MPAs which are designated for various seabird species and assemblages.

Delivery of the Actions will be tracked by monitoring and reviewing progress and success. The Advisory Group will need to agree delivery partners, set timeframes, and consider new proposals or work areas to contribute to the Action Plan. This process also allows review of new evidence and species ahead of the first formal review of the Strategy, which is aligned to the other strategies and action plans developed by the Department, and the targets of the EIP, which is 2030 (refer to Action 1.2).

Success of the Action Plan will also be determined through wider assessments carried out at a UK level:

²⁶ [Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)
²⁷ [Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

[UK Marine Strategy Part 1](#): indicator assessments for non-breeding waterbirds and breeding seabirds in the Celtic Seas show an improvement linked to the delivery of targeted actions.

[Birds of Conservation Concern](#): Future assessments will need to demonstrate that, for Red and Amber listed seabird species, the delivery of targeted actions has led to an improvement in their conservation status.

[OSPAR Quality Status Reports](#): Indicator assessments of marine bird abundance and marine bird breeding productivity for the Celtic Seas can be linked to the delivery of targeted actions.

[Seabird Monitoring Programme](#): Improvements in seabird population trends and breeding success should be demonstrably linked to the effective delivery of actions.

Funding

The availability of funding to deliver the action plan is key, as demonstrated by a dedicated action on this. Currently, funding opportunities for seabird action are available through the Department's Environment Fund, to deliver on-the-ground conservation actions. Work packages through the three PEACEPLUS projects (the CMAP project, the MOSAIC Project and the ACCLIMATISE Project which commenced in 2025)²⁸ have proposed actions to target seabird populations, some at a species level and others more widely, which will also contribute to the Strategy's Actions. The Marine Nature Recovery Oversight Group will have a role in identifying other funding opportunities that might be relevant.

The Energy Act 2023²⁹ provides powers for enabling greater flexibility in the range of compensatory measures available where a marine protected area is unavoidably damaged by the development of a plan or project as a result of offshore wind activities and compensation is required. In addition, the Energy Act also provides powers for the creation of one or more Marine Recovery Funds to support the delivery of these measures. This fund(s) may provide opportunities to support the implementation of compensatory measures projects for seabird species.

²⁸ <https://www.seupb.eu/latest/news/almost-eu25m-peaceplus-funding-awarded-marine-and-coastal-management>
²⁹ [Energy Act 2023](#)

Conclusion

Northern Ireland's breeding and wintering seabird and waterbird populations are internationally recognised.

However anthropogenic activities, habitat loss, avian flu and climate change threaten their survival. With more reliance on the marine environment for food, travel, recreation and provision of renewable energy to mitigate against climate change, it is imperative that we continue to sustainably use the marine environment while considering wider environmental concerns. The ambitious conservation and management action of this Strategy will deliver our outcome whereby, by 2050, the conservation status of seabirds is significantly improved and restored and their populations in Northern Ireland are recovering, resilient, and thriving.

Annex A: Seabird Conservation Strategy Action Plan

Governance Theme

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
1. Establish an inclusive governance structure to oversee the implementation of the action plan and iterative review of the strategy.	1.1	Within six months of publication relevant stakeholders to re-establish Northern Ireland Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group and convene the group at least twice yearly to ensure delivery of the action plan is on track.
	1.2	Provide updates on the progress of Action Plan completion to the Marine Nature Recovery Oversight Group and applying SMART timeframes to the Action Plan.
	1.3	Conduct iterative reviews of the action plan and species list, to contribute to the formal review of the Strategy in 2030 alongside other strategies delivering EIP targets for marine nature recovery.

Evidence and Data Collection Theme

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
2. Collate existing evidence from all seabird monitoring efforts in Northern Ireland and identify the knowledge gaps, threats and pressures to enhance the evidence base and data availability of seabird distribution and populations.	2.1	Collate and continue to update the seabird evidence base in Northern Ireland as it becomes available including breeding colonies, diet, foraging areas and at sea distributions.
	2.2	Collaborate with data collecting partners to improve the accessibility and usability of datasets, and, where appropriate, support publication through online platforms and viewers.
	2.3	With key stakeholders, develop a Northern Ireland specific sensitivity tool for seabirds in relation to activities in local waters (based on FeAST).
	2.4	Collaborate with key stakeholders to gather evidence of seabird interactions, including bycatch and entanglement, with fishing vessels in the Northern Ireland marine area.
	2.5	DAERA to publish condition assessments for ornithological SPAs/ASSIs on the website on completion within each 6-year cycle.

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
3. Enhance seabird conservation research by using novel technologies and maintaining an ongoing coordinated monitoring programme to improve our understanding of seabird populations.	3.1	Continue to work collaboratively with key stakeholders to deliver a coordinated long-term seabird monitoring programme.
	3.2	Participate in the UK Seabird Science Group, PEACEPLUS project steering groups, and other relevant UK and Republic of Ireland forums to inform the identification of research that will benefit seabird conservation.
	3.3	Support research using methods such as drone surveys, remote monitoring, aerial surveys combined with tagging studies, and other innovative data collection methods to improve data gathering and contribute to assessment of population status.

Management Theme

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
4. Identify and deliver targeted management measures to aid the recovery of seabirds and the wider ecosystem upon which they rely.	4.1	Within six months of publication, complete a prioritisation exercise to identify which seabirds require urgent measures for protection and recovery.
	4.2	Develop associated species or habitat management action plans based on the outputs of 4.1.
	4.3	Consult with site managers to identify the appropriate conservation measures required for each seabird breeding habitat (whether coastal or inshore), with particular focus on low-lying islands prone to erosion and flooding.
	4.4	Identify seabird breeding islands where eradication of invasive mammalian predators or management of native predators would improve conservation outcomes, building on existing projects (e.g. LIFE Raft) and work with stakeholders to implement targeted predator-management measures.
	4.5	Develop and deliver targeted management measures with stakeholders at sites experiencing disturbance, including direct engagement with visitors and site users to promote responsible recreation at protected sites.
	4.6	Identify and develop appropriate management measures for seabird prey and foraging areas, in consultation with stakeholders.
	4.7	Review existing guidance and publish updated advice to strengthen and coordinate Departmental and stakeholder responses to the emergence, spread and impacts of seabird disease and parasites, including HPAI.

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
	4.8	Support initiatives that reduce marine litter and build public awareness of its impact on seabirds in Northern Ireland, including risks such as entanglement, ingestion and chick provisioning.
	4.9	Develop opportunities to implement a contaminant-testing programme for seabird carcasses to improve understanding of impacts on local populations.
5. Implement a monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of management measures, incorporating adaptive management where required.	5.1	DAERA will develop a method for evaluating and demonstrating the effectiveness of management measures (e.g. using a scorecard and producing annual progress reports) that can contribute to the MEPCA Indicator for Protected Areas.
	5.2	Undertake an annual review of all management measures outlined in actions 4.1-4.9 through the NI Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group.

Funding Theme

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
6. Develop funding to support delivery of the action plan, to include exploring opportunities for green finance and other revenue streams.	6.1	The NI Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group to identify funding streams and mechanisms to enable the delivery of the above actions e.g. Environment Fund, Shared Island Fund and a dedicated seabird strand to the Marine Environment and Fisheries Fund (MEFF).

Communications Theme

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
7. Raise awareness of the significance of seabirds in Northern Ireland, emphasising the region's importance within the British Isles, and promote understanding of their environmental, cultural and economic value across all sectors to ensure their long-term protection.	7.1	DAERA and the NI Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group will work together to publish annual factsheet on action plan progress (coordinated with updates to the MNROG and to EIP reporting timeframes).
	7.2	Increase national and international public awareness of Northern Ireland's seabirds, their ecological importance, the issues they face, through participation in public-facing events linking with seabird conservation.

Strategic Action	Action No.	Detailed actions
8. Identify opportunities for training programmes and promote comprehensive knowledge transfer for site managers and conservation professionals, ensuring they are equipped with the latest expertise and best practices necessary for effective seabird and habitat management.	8.1	Through the NI Seabird Conservation Strategy Advisory Group, explore availability of training programmes, for areas such as surveys, species identification, tracking, drone operation and ringing, for volunteers and professionals to ensure sufficient resources are available.
	8.2	Develop a range of best practice codes and guidance for implementation by site managers and citizen science.

Annex B: Broader Strategic Context

The co-design and development of this Strategy supports several high priority, high-level and interlinked policies and strategies relating to nature recovery and biodiversity on a global, UK, and Northern Ireland level.

Global and North-East Atlantic Region

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (“GBF”)

The GBF was adopted by 190 countries, including the United Kingdom in December 2022. It sets out an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050. Among the Framework’s key elements are 4 goals for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030. At an international level, the Seabird Conservation Strategy will contribute towards a number of biodiversity targets within the GBF. Further details are available [here](#).

The OSPAR Convention

OSPAR is the mechanism by which fifteen Governments and the European Union cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. The OSPAR **North East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030** was adopted in October 2021 and contains strategic and operational objectives to address biodiversity loss and other pressures which are relevant to seabirds. There are a number of operational objectives that are aligned to the Action Plan, such as those focussed on “reducing pressures to enable the recovery of marine species and benthic and pelagic habitats in order to reach and maintain good environmental status, and working to minimise, and where possible, eliminate, incidental by-catch of marine birds”. Further details are available [here](#).

United Kingdom

The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 (“the Marine Strategy”)

The Marine Strategy requires action to be taken to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) in our seas, in a coordinated approach across all four UK Governments, to achieve the UK vision of a clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse marine environment. More information can be found [here](#).

Within the updated UK Marine Strategy Part Three, DAERA has stated its commitment to the development of this Seabird Conservation Strategy, under the Birds descriptor.

UK Joint Fisheries Statement

The value of both biodiverse ecosystems and sustainable fishing are recognised within the **UK Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS)**. The JFS sets out the ambition of the UK to continue delivering sustainable management of fisheries, recognising that a healthy and resilient marine environment is the foundation for a prosperous seafood sector and thriving coastal communities. The JFS also recognises the importance of reducing bycatch and minimising incidental catches of key species such as seabirds through its sustainability, ecosystem, and bycatch objectives. More can be read [here](#).

Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 makes provisions in relation to marine functions and activities, including the marine planning and licensing systems. More can be read [here](#).

The UK Marine Policy Statement is the framework for preparing Marine Plans and taking decisions affecting the marine environment in the UK marine area. More can be read [here](#)

Northern Ireland

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

“The Act” is a key statutory instrument that creates a framework that will establish a pathway to achieving emission reduction targets which will ensure that Northern Ireland makes a contribution to the achievement of the UK 2050 Net Zero target. The Act includes a target for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 as well as a set of interim targets for 2030 and 2040 for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland.

The Act sets out that the biodiversity impact must be considered in setting the carbon budget; plans and policies to achieve the budget (such as sectoral Climate Action Plans) should, where practicable, use nature-based solutions that enhance biodiversity; and illustrate responsibility to protect or restore ecosystems to aid carbon mitigation efforts. The Climate Action Plan sets a roadmap to net zero, enhancing biodiversity in the process. More can be read [here](#).

A reduction in emission targets can be achieved through the development and installation of offshore windfarms but requires careful consideration of their siting to reduce potential adverse impacts to seabirds. The Strategy highlights the importance of obtaining robust evidence while identifying relevant pressures and threats to support future decisions.

Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland’s first Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) forms the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that collectively can deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment. The preparation and publication of an EIP is a statutory duty placed upon the Department by Schedule 2 of the Environment Act 2021, which came into force in July 2022. Further

details and links can be found on the DAERA website [here](#).

Targets for seabirds in the EIP include the completed action of consulting on this Strategy by 2024, and that by 2030, key marine priority habitats and species are in recovery, as well as complimentary targets focussed on the delivery of an effective MPA network.

This Strategy, alongside the Marine Protected Areas Strategy, Blue Carbon Action Plan and the upcoming Elasmobranch Conservation Strategy, should be considered one of a suite of strategies and action plans published by the Department which are delivering on targets for nature recovery in the EIP.

The draft Marine Plan for Northern Ireland

The draft Marine Plan will inform and guide the regulation, management, use and protection of our marine area. It is a single document made up of two plans, one for the inshore region and one for the offshore region. Further details and links to the most recent draft, and 2018 consultation responses, can be found [here](#).

DAERA's draft Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2032

DAERA is consulting on a draft Nature Recovery Strategy which has strong linkages to the Seabird Conservation Strategy. Protecting and restoring priority species, and, where possible, managing and maintaining marine habitats as healthy functioning ecosystems for the long-term are core aims of the Strategy. The draft Nature Recovery Strategy is also working to implement the targets of the GBF. More can be read [here](#).

Annex C: Seabird Conservation Strategy Species List

Seabird Conservation Strategy Species List

This list details the species that require active conservation action based on the current conservation status (Birds of Conservation Concern 2020-2026), latest counts (Seabirds Count, the fourth census of Britain and Ireland's breeding seabirds 2015-2021), protected area features, Northern Ireland Priority Species³⁰ and data sources (Seabird Monitoring Programme, SMP, and Wetland Bird Survey, WeBS)

Common Name	BoCCI4 Status	Seabirds Count status	Season	Designations	NI Priority Species	Data Availability
Atlantic Puffin	Red	>10% decline	Breeding	ASSI	Yes	SMP - NI
Black Guillemot	Amber		Breeding	MCZ	Yes	SMP - NI
Common Guillemot	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Razorbill	Red	Stable	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	SMP - NI
European Shag	Amber	Stable	Breeding	ASSI	Yes	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Great Cormorant	Amber	>10% decline	Breeding/ Wintering	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Great Skua	Amber	No data	Breeding	None	Yes	SMP - NI
Manx Shearwater	Amber	No data	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Northern Fulmar	Amber	>10% decline	Breeding	ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Arctic Tern	Amber	Stable	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Common Tern	Amber	>10% decline	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Roseate Tern	Amber	Stable	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	SMP - NI
Sandwich Tern	Amber	Stable	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	No	SMP - NI
Little Tern	Amber	-	Breeding	None	No	SMP - NI
Black Legged Kittiwake	Red	>10% increase	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	SMP - NI
Black Headed Gull	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding/ Wintering	ASSI	Yes	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Common Gull	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding/ Wintering	ASSI	No	SMP – NI/ WeBS

³⁰ <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/list-northern-ireland-priority-species-2023>

Common Name	BoCCI4 Status	Seabirds Count status	Season	Designations	NI Priority Species	Data Availability
Great Black-Backed Gull	Green	>10% increase	Seabird Report – Breeding	None	No	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Herring Gull	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding/ Wintering	ASSI	Yes	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Lesser Black-Backed Gull	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding/ Wintering	ASSI	No	SMP – NI/ WeBS
Mediterranean Gull	Amber	>10% increase	Breeding	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	SMP - NI
Common Eider	Red	No data	Breeding/ Wintering	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	WeBS
Great Crested Grebe	Amber	No data	Breeding/ Wintering	SPA/ ASSI	Yes	WeBS
Red Throated Diver	Amber	No data	Breeding/ Wintering	SPA/ ASSI	No	WeBS
Red Breasted Merganser	Amber	No data	Breeding/ Wintering	ASSI	No	WeBS
Great Northern Diver	Amber	No data	Wintering	None	No	WeBS
European Storm Petrel	Amber	No present	Breeding	None	No	SMP – non-NI
Gannet	Amber	-	Breeding*	None	No	SMP – non-NI
Slavonian Grebe	Amber	-	Wintering	None	yes	WeBS
Common Scoter	Red	No data	Breeding/ Wintering	None	No	WeBS

* not breeding in Northern Ireland

Annex D: Glossary

Anthropogenic – effects, processes, objects, or materials are those that are derived from human activities.

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) – are declared under The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 for their species, habitat and/or geological features.

Biodiversity – is the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they form part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Bycatch – Fishermen sometimes catch and discard animals they do not want, cannot sell, or are not allowed to keep. This is collectively known as “bycatch.”

eNGOs – environmental Non-Governmental Bodies

Good Environmental Status (GES) - The environmental status of marine waters where these provide ecologically diverse and dynamic oceans and seas which are clean, healthy and productive, as defined under the UK Marine Strategy Regulations.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) – used to refer to MCZs designated under section 13 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 in the Northern Ireland inshore region and in section 116 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 in the Northern Ireland offshore region. MCZs are designated to safeguard vulnerable or unique marine species and habitats of national importance.

Marine Protected Area (MPA) – Used to describe a geographic area of the marine environment which has been designated for specific conservation objectives in relation to the features present. The ultimate aim of these sites is for long-term management to achieve sustainable use, both for marine ecosystems and associated stakeholders.

Northern Ireland Priority Species (NIPS) – Priority species require conservation action because of their decline, rarity and importance in an all-Ireland and UK context under Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) – areas that are achieving the long term and effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas.

OSPAR – refers to the Oslo - Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic. It is an agreement by relevant governments and the European Community to co-

operate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

UK Marine Strategy – the UK Marine Strategy Regulations – This strategy provides an updated assessment of our seas and sets objectives, targets, and indicators for achieving Good Environmental Status.

Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention and are classified as MPAs.

Restoration – the process of improving or returning a marine ecosystem or habitat to a healthier and more natural state after it has been damaged or degraded by human activities or environment factors.

SNCB – Statutory Nature Conservation Body

Special Protected Areas (SPAs) – are designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended)⁴⁰ to select sites for bird species included in Annex 1 of the Directive, and also for regularly occurring migratory species.

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