

Habitats Regulations Assessment



Department of

**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

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Habitats Regulations Assessment

Stage 1: Test of Likely Significance

Name of Project or Plan.	Removal of Boats from Strangford Lough
Reference (if available)	
Name and location of <i>National Site Network</i> site(s)	Strangford Lough, N.I.
<i>National Site Network</i> site features: Refer to JNCC website for further information. Http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/ Note: ensure that you assess all features that are classified as A, B, C. You may make mention of any site features of lesser presence i.e. D or E but this is mostly where they are connected to the existence of A, B, C features. Features that are of a presence or distribution below this are not considered European Site. See Data Form on the JNCC web page for the site.	Strangford Lough SAC 1140- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide 1150- Coastal lagoons 1160- Large shallow inlets and bays 1170- Reefs 1210- Annual vegetation of drift lines 1220- Perennial vegetation of stony banks 1310- Salicornia and other annuals colonizing mud and sand 1330- Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) 1365 - <i>Phoca vitulina</i> (Qualifying Feature Grade C) Strangford Lough SPA A674- <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i> A143- <i>Calidris canutus</i> A193- <i>Sterna hirundo</i> A194- <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> A191- <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> A162- <i>Tringa tetanus</i> WATR- Waterbird assemblage Strangford Lough MCZ- awaiting consultation process on MCZ features, management options and socio-economic impact assessments Strangford Lough Part 1 ASSI Management Principles for: Seagrass (<i>Zostera</i> Beds) Coastal Saltmarsh Intertidal Rock Common Seal <i>Phoca vitulina</i> Wintering Waterbirds Breeding Terns Coastal Processes Strangford Lough RAMSAR Site



National Site Network site features: Refer to JNCC website for further information. Http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/ Note: ensure that you assess all features that are classified as A, B, C. You may make mention of any site features of lesser presence i.e. D or E but this is mostly where they are connected to the existence of A, B, C features. Features that are of a presence or distribution below this are not considered European Site. See Data Form on the JNCC web page for the site.	North Channel SAC (located ~29.5km away, designated for Harbour porpoise), Murlough SAC (located ~40km away, designated for Harbour Seals) The Maidens SAC (located ~93.5km away, designated for Grey seals) are also included for consideration of potential impacts to these mobile marine mammal features.
Description of the Project or Plan Suggested topics to be covered: • Size and scale • Land-take • Distance from National Site Network site or key features of the site • Resource requirements (water ab- Straction etc.) • Emission (disposal to land, water or air) • Excavation requirements • Transportation requirements • Duration of construction, operation, de-commissioning etc. • Other	Size and Scale • The removal and disposal of boats and fishing debris from four locations in Strangford Lough. This includes • Taggart Island fishing and aquaculture debris concrete coated polystyrene cubes, 2x old fishing boats, an old powerboat, and a metal pontoon. • Zenato a 27ft Solid glass fiber yacht. • Mellifont ex fishing Trawler • Morlo 16ft Fibreglass Yacht Land Take This will remove debris from Strangford Lough allowing the seabed and shore to return to a more natural state. Distance for NSN sites or key features This project will occur, directly within Strangford Lough SPA/SAC/RAMSAR/ASSIsites. (See maps) Resource requirements This project will be removing debris and marine litter from the Lough. There will be no requirements for depositing on the seabed or extraction of water or sediment. Emission Other than emissions associated with the use of land vehicles or boats for removal there should be limited other emissions beyond disturbing the sediment in limited areas around removing the marine debris for removal.

	Emission (cont..) The debris will be disposed of appropriately with any reusable/ recyclable parts being processed and any marine or land litter collected during the proposed works will be appropriately disposed of to prevent litter entering the marine environment to prevent adverse impacts to Marine Protected Areas, Habitats and Species, as required under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, The Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. National Trust and any contractors hired to complete the works shall adhere to the appropriate pollution prevention guidelines including DAERA Pollution Standing Advice To prevent adverse impacts to Marine Protected Areas, Habitats and Species, as required under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended), The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, The Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002 and the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. and also DAERA Marine Wildlife Disturbance Standing Advice To prevent marine mammal disturbance as required under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995(as amended) and The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended). National Trust and the contractors will ensure that there is no storage of materials in the ASSI below High Water Mean Spring (HWMS) tide mark. This will prevent a pollution incident or smothering impact to any Eelgrass (<i>Zostera</i>) feeding areas for Brent Geese. The access route along the foreshores will be predetermined and the route will not go over <i>Zostera</i> beds or any other designated features. This is in order to prevent compaction/damage to <i>Zostera</i> beds present on site as required under The Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002, the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and OSPAR Agreement 2021-01. In addition, National Trust and the Contractors will ensure invasive non-native species biosecurity measures are in place for all stages of the project and all equipment used. This is to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive non-native species as required under the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended). Excavation Requirements The contractors will not be using percussive equipment such as rock breakers or piling on site therefore there should not be significant marine mammal disturbance. DAERA Marine Wildlife Disturbance Standing Advice will be adhered to.
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Transportation requirements

Agricultural and removal machinery potentially including marine tow boats will be used to remove the boats and marine debris in the least damaging and disturbing way possible.

All work will be carried out with consideration, to negate the impact on over-wintering and breeding birds, avoid disturbance to breeding seals and to minimise the impact on soils and vegetation.

No vehicles, machinery or works will occur below the High Water Mean Spring (HWMS) tide mark (except in direct vicinity of removal of the marine debris) to prevent impact on ASSI features of local coastal processes and Eelgrass (*Zostera*) beds that are important feeding areas for Brent Geese.

This work is planned for the Spring tides at the end of March 2026 (depending upon contractor availability) and should not significantly impact on any of the wintering bird assemblages or the breeding seals.



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Is the proposal directly connected with or necessary to management of the site for conservation of European Site features?	Yes
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Describe the individual elements of the project (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects) likely to give rise to impacts on the National Site Network site.

The aim of this project is to remove fishing, aquaculture and boat debris from Strangford Lough to allow the seabed to recover and reduce the risk of further marine pollution.

Therefore there should be a net benefit to Strangford Lough.

The removal will be from land or via refloating by sea where possible and practical which will not further break up the vessels.

NT have consulted with [REDACTED] in Marine Division and recognize that these boats are potentially a navigational hazard as well as a pollution hazard if left in place.

NT has also spoken to the Crown Estate and taken them on a site visit as some of the Wrecks are on the seabed adjacent to National Trust managed intertidal land.

The Marine Conservation Team have been out to review the sites to assess for any impacts.

The consent process is underway with NIEA for the ASSI.

National Trust has been exploring the legal position for removal of the boats where possible and has sought to liaise with the owners wherever possible or practical.

EUROPEAN SITE Feature: Mention all features Only for EF also consider ASSI Features.	Describe any likely direct or indirect effects to the EUROPEAN SITE features arising as a result of: • Loss; • Reduction of habitat area; • Disturbance; • Habitat or species fragmentation; • Reduction in species density; • Changes in key indicators of conservation value (e.g. Water quality, climate change).	Effect significant / not significant? Explain why? <u>Loss/not significant – This will remove marine debris from the area as long as it does not disturb nesting birds.</u> <u>Reduction of habitat area/none</u> <u>Seabed habitat will increase slightly after removal of the Debris.</u> <u>Fragmentation/none</u> <u>Reduction in species density/not significant</u> <u>Changes in key indicators/none</u> It is anticipated that there will be a slight increase in intertidal/subtidal habitat availability with the removal of the Debris.
Strangford Lough SAC Features; 1. Coastal Lagoons 2. Large shallow inlets and bays 3. Annual Vegetation of drift lines	The project is NOT likely to have any significant negative effects on any of the features on this site in regards to loss, reduction of habitat area, habitat or species fragmentation, reduction in species density, or changes in key indicators of conservation value.	

4. Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>) 5. Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide 6. Perennial vegetation of stony banks 7. <i>Phoca vitulina</i> 8. Reefs 9. <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand Strangford Lough SPA (and component assis) 1. <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i> 2. <i>Calidris canutus</i> 3. <i>Sterna hirundo</i> 4. <i>Sterna paradisaea</i> 5. <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> 6. <i>Tringa tetanus</i> 7. Waterbird assemblage (wintering waterfowl)	The project is NOT likely to have any significant negative effects on any of the features on this site in regards to loss, reduction of habitat area, habitat or species fragmentation, reduction in species density, or changes in key indicators of conservation value.	Not significant. The project aims to improve site integrity and condition in Strangford Lough and reduce the risk of a pollution incident in the future. Not Significant as all works will take place ideally outside of the breeding season of wintering birds and the seals breeding periods at the end of March.
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Describe any potential effects on the <i>National Site Network</i> site as a whole in terms of: interference with the key relationships that define the structure or function of the site	There are no potential negative effects on the NSN as a whole, as removal of marine debris will be localized and any pollution risk will be minimized. This will not have a significant effect on the key relationships that define the structure or function of the sites in Strangford Lough as long as National Trust and the Contractors follow the plans they have set out and liaise appropriately with DAERA and relevant authorities.

Provide details of any other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could (directly or indirectly) affect the site.	There are no other projects (to my knowledge) that could interact in a significant way to affect the removal of Marine Debris in Strangford Lough.

Is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant? :	No
Alone?	No
In-combination with other projects of plans?	No

List of Agencies / Organisations Consulted: Provide contact name and telephone or email address.	
Habitats Regulations Assessment Summary	The project is not likely to have any significant negative effects on any of the sites across the Strangford Lough. Conversely, the aims of the project are to improve site condition. As such, the project is likely to have an overall positive effect on the ecological status of the Strangford Lough and NSN sites.
Conclusion: Is the proposal likely to have a significant effect on a EUROPEAN site?	No

Data collected to carry out the assessment

Who carried out the assessment?	this updated Shadow HRA was completed by Dr. Jade Berman, Coastal Advisor National Trust, 21/10/2025
Sources of data	DAERA ASSI/SAC/SPA Citation, Reasons for Designation and Conservation Objectives documents for Strangford Lough, Outer Ards, Ballymacormick Point, and Ballyquintin Point; DAERA Marine Map Viewer; DAERA Coastal Observatory National Trust site maps relating to proposed conservation work across Strangford Lough and Outer Ards areas; National Trust Implementation of the NT Strangford Lough and Outer Ards conservation action plans documents; JNCC National Site Network Standard Data Forms for Strangford Lough and Outer Ards SPAs; JNCC Summary of Strangford Lough SAC; Consultation with DAERA/NIEA personnel regarding seals, birds, coastal change and potential duplication of work. Coastal Observatory
Level of assessment completed	Test of Likely Significance
Where can the full results of assessment be accessed and viewed?	
Summary of Findings.	The project is unlikely to have a significant negative effect on site/feature integrity/condition across the Strangford Lough and Outer Ards ASSI/SAC/SPA designations. Conversely, the project is likely to have a positive effect across Strangford Lough, enhancing the overall ecological health of these areas and improving site/feature condition.



Grade 7 Sign Off

(only if not progressing to stage 2)

Island Taggart debris

Description Concrete coated polystyrene cubes, 2x old fishing boats, old powerboat, metal pontoon.

History 10+ years old, owner deceased.

Land Ownership NT leased lands.

Location

Structure	What Three Words ref
One	preoccupied.swatting.sporting
Two	flitting.remains.stuns
Three	gains.tissue.serenade



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Google link <https://maps.app.goo.gl/LnwqkwH75qfz548A>

Zenta YachtDescription

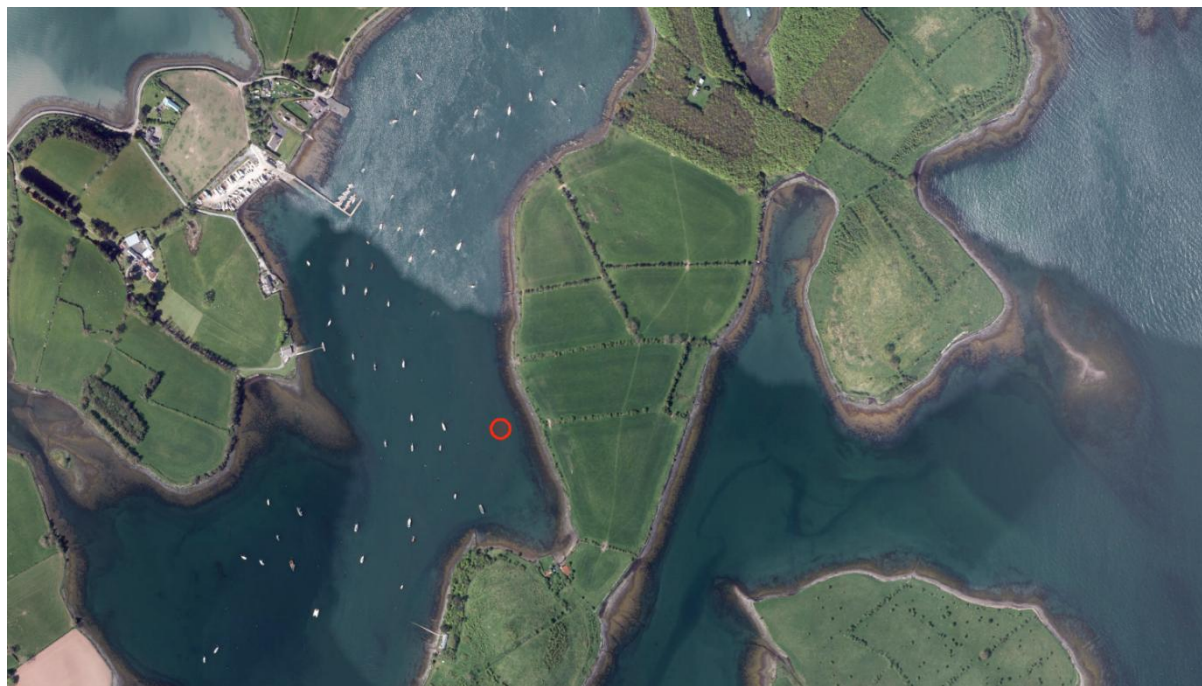
27ft Solid glass fibre yacht. Classified as a motor sail yacht with the layout comprising a cockpit, wheelhouse and a cabin with six berths.

Land Ownership

Lies beneath the medium low water mark adjacent to National Trust leased lands.

Location

Structure	What Three Words ref
Zenta Yacht	functions.army.recipient



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Google Link

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/Jkz6EHYSrqSAW3xx6>

MorloDescription

Fibre glass construction, approximately 16ft in length.

History

Washed up in the aftermath of Storm Eowyn.

Ownership

Lies beneath the mean low water mark adjacent to National Trust leased lands.

Location

Structure	What Three Words ref
Morlo	Storyline.begins.glory 54.529579, - 5.557808 (original location in red circle now moved to yellow circle) https://w3w.co/himself.prancing.closer 54.533864, -5.561989



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Google link <https://maps.app.goo.gl/NK8bQ9Wh74y5ALoq8>

Mellifont TrawlerDescription

Ex fishing trawler, propellor and the ships wheel have been removed in the past six months.
Boat is believed to have now been abandoned.

History

Washed ashore in April 2024. NT have been trying to make contact with the owner since July 2024 but to no avail.

NT believe the boat now to be abandoned, it is capable of floating and should the conditions be right it may drift should the right conditions present themselves.

Ownership

Lies on National Trust foreshore currently.

Location

Structure	What Three Words ref
Mellifont	daffodils.head.boomers



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Google Link <https://maps.app.goo.gl/9rjHRJom8WSwJcaQ9>

**DO NOT PROCEED FURTHER IF YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED THAT
THIS PROPOSAL IS UNLIKELY TO IMPACT A EUROPEAN SITE
AND NO MITIGATION IS REQUIRED**

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment**Fig 1 Assessment of Effects of the Project or Plan on the Integrity of the Site**

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)	
Set out the Conservation objectives of the site	
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.	
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	

Fig 2 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.
(i)			



(ii)			
(iii)			
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
(i)			
(ii)			
(iii)			

Stage 2: Appropriate Assessment Sign Off

Who carried out the assessment?	
Sources of data	
Where can the full results of assessment be accessed and viewed?	
Summary of findings.	
Grade 7 Sign Off	

**If there cannot be appropriate mitigation conditioned at this point then please refer the
assessment to the EF Grants Team.**