

Consultation on management measures for the use of fast craft and Personal Water Craft (PWC) in Marine Protected Areas

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Policy assessments

The proposed management measures have been subject to a Habitats Regulations Assessment, an Equality and Human Rights Impact Screening exercise, Regulatory Impact Assessment and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment. These accompanying assessments are available to download from the Department's website.

How to Respond

Please respond to this consultation using one of the following methods:

- Online at: <https://consultations2.nidirect.gov.uk/daera/consultation-on-the-management-of-fast-craft-and-p>
- By e-mail at: MarineConservation@daera-ni.gov.uk
- By post to:

Marine Conservation and Reporting Team
Marine and Fisheries Division
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Malone Lower
Belfast
BT7 2JA

When responding please provide the following information:

- Your name;
- Contact details (preferably email);
- Organisation you represent (if applicable); and
- Your main area of interest

This information will assist in the analysis of responses.

Accessibility

Alternative formats can be made available on request in large print, disc, Braille, audio cassette, or text phone for the hearing impaired. The document may also be made available on request in minority ethnic languages to those who are not proficient in English. The Department will translate executive summaries of key publications into Irish or Ulster Scots upon request. Information and additional copies of the document can be requested by text phone on: 028 9056 9829.

Freedom of Information, Confidentiality of Responses, Sharing of information

DAERA will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. We are unable to reply individually to the points you may raise as part of your reply.

Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and this will provide you with guidance on the legal position about any information submitted by you in response to this consultation. Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation. For more information and to view the DAERA Privacy Statement please go to:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-privacy-statement-document>

The FOI Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential, information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any

information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public please include an explanation in your response including any harm you believe such a disclosure might cause.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the FOI Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office, or visit the [ICO Website](#).

Introduction

Well managed Marine Protected Area (MPA) networks are recognised internationally as one of the ways of protecting our marine environment and international commitments have been made accordingly. The Department has established a network of 48 MPAs providing protection for 38% of Northern Ireland's inshore region.

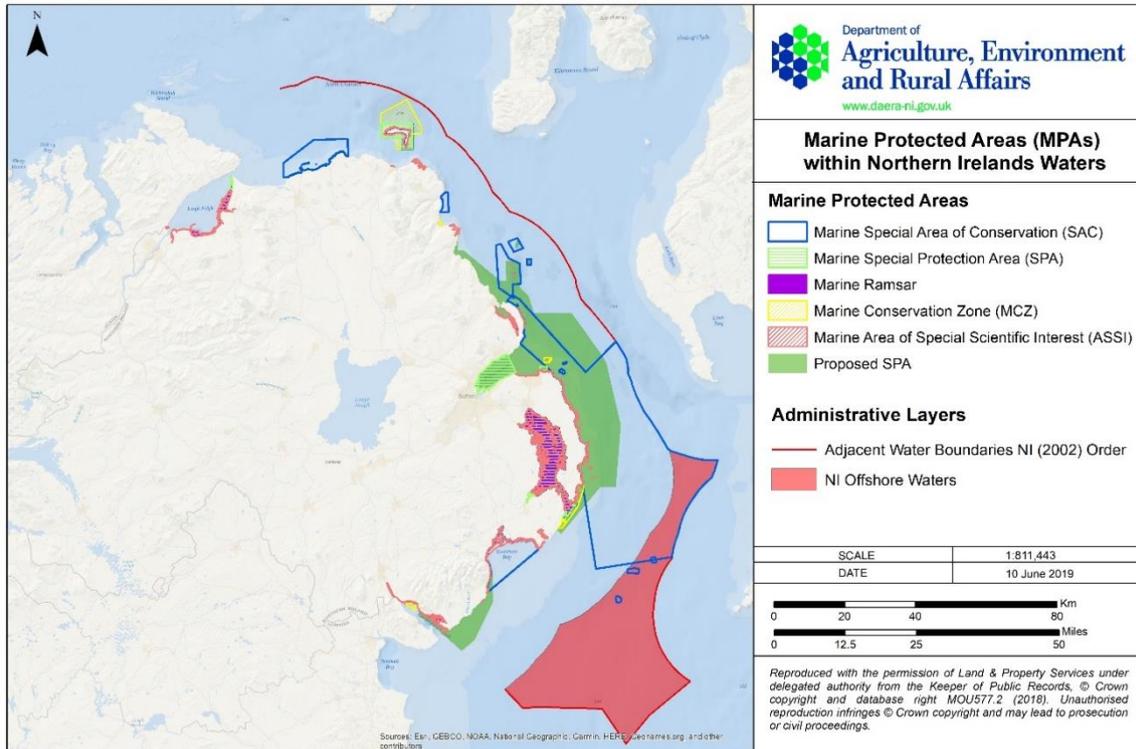
The MPA network is made up of five types of designations:

- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - for habitats of European importance, such as reefs and sandbanks;
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs) - for seabirds of European importance, such as guillemots and terns;
- Ramsar sites - for wetlands;
- Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) - for nationally important habitats and species such as mudflats and seals; and
- Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) - to protect rare, threatened or nationally important marine habitats, species and geological features.

A map of Marine Protected Areas in Northern Ireland is displayed in Figure 1.

The Department may use legislation such as The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 to introduce byelaws and management measures for the purpose of furthering the conservation objectives stated for a marine protected area. The introduction of such management measures in this case is intended to provide additional protection, from disturbance, to designated marine species and will contribute to the achievement of the objectives above.

Figure 1: Map of Marine Protected Areas in Northern Ireland



1.2 - What legal protection applies under these designations?

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated under Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 and the Department is required to exercise its functions so as to secure compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. To fulfil this duty the Department must establish the necessary management measures to ensure the conservation objectives of the qualifying features are achieved.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are designated under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the Department is required to exercise its functions in a manner which best furthers the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

Under section 26 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, the Department may make byelaws for the purpose of furthering the conservation objectives stated for an MCZ as well as for the protection of European marine sites (SACs and SPAs). Section 26 allows the Department to restrict or prohibit the doing of anything in the MCZ/SPA/SAC which would disturb any object in the MCZ/SPA/SAC.

Section 32 of the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 states that it is an offence for a person to contravene any byelaws made under section 26. In the instances of such offences, section 35 provides the Department with powers to impose a fixed monetary penalty to a person in contravention of the relevant byelaw. The Department will consult separately on the issuing of Fixed Monetary Penalties in marine protected areas.

A list of MCZ, SAC and SPA sites in the Northern Ireland inshore region can be found at Annex A.

Why are management measures required?

Marine wildlife is vulnerable to disturbance any time people are in its immediate area, there is a further risk of disturbance when our presence is accompanied by the noise or speed of a motorised vessel or when there are groups of people present. Marine wildlife can have various responses to threat or disturbance. Under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 the Department is required to exercise its functions in a manner which best furthers the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

The management measures proposed in this consultation are designed to reduce the risk of disturbance to seals, cetaceans and birds.

Seals

Seals spend about 20% of their lives on land, hauling out onto established resting sites. Time spent hauled out is essential for the seals to rest and digest their food. Their response to disturbance can range from elevated stress levels resulting from an increased vigilance to physical injuries especially to pups if the disturbance results in a “stampede” as the seals simultaneously try to get to the safety into the water. It is essential when juveniles or pups are present that craft remain a safe distance away, if they are disturbed from these sites there is no guarantee that they will return to them.

Cetaceans

Cetaceans can be disturbed by many of the sounds made by marine craft, many of which (e.g. the cavitation of the propeller) can interfere with the sounds that they use for communicating with one another, detecting food or predators as well as sounding out their surroundings. Such disturbance can have an impact on feeding and cause additional stress during pregnancy. Cetaceans can also be disturbed by craft such as Personal Water Craft (PWC) changing direction rapidly or heading directly towards them.

Birds

Birds can be disturbed by noise, proximity / speed of craft, as well as from a craft's wake. This disturbance can be magnified when there is more than one craft present. If birds are disturbed from nests, their eggs or young may be left vulnerable to predators. Disturbance may also result in birds using valuable energy when food is in short supply.

How can the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife be reduced?

There are ways in which people can enjoy the marine environment and view marine wildlife without causing disturbance to the animals encountered. There are organisations such as Wildlife Safe (WiSe) and the RYA that will provide individuals with training in the necessary skills and behaviours to allow them to carry out their activities (commercially as well as recreationally). It is skills such as these that the Department considers to be essential for all

commercial users and beneficial for recreational users in the proximity of marine wildlife. A summary of guidance is contained in Annex B.

Management Measures.

Prior to developing any proposed management measures, The Department engaged with local authorities, training organisations, eNGOs and industry representatives on the topic of personal watercraft use in marine protected areas. As a result of this engagement, The Department was able to consider additional factors such as safety of navigation, existing management measures and local legislation relative to the use of PWC in marine protected areas as well as explore the options available to form education packages for stakeholders. All such factors have been taken into account when developing the proposed measures.

The Department is proposing management measures to protect marine wildlife from disturbance that may be caused by:

- Commercial tour operators
- Leisure users of fast craft including PWC.

Commercial Tour Operators

For the purposes of this consultation, the Department considers a commercial tour operator to be, anyone who uses their vessel to carry fee paying customers for leisure purposes including, but not limited to, activities such as, diving, angling, wildlife tour and thrill rides.

There is a risk of disturbance to marine wildlife when groups of people in boat/boats are in their immediate proximity, this disturbance can occur even if the vessel is moving at slow speed. In order to minimise this disturbance the Department is proposing that any management measures designed to reduce the risk should apply in all MCZs, SACs and MPAs. A list of these sites can be found at Annex A.

Proposed Management Measures

- Permitted access to marine protected areas for all commercial tour operators conditional on the vessel's skipper gaining certification in the WiSe Scheme.

Rationale for management measures

The Department's goal is to ensure that commercial operators in marine protected areas are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide their customers with an experience that allows them to enjoy the marine environment in a sustainable fashion while protecting marine wildlife from disturbance.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you agree with the Department's definition that a Commercial tour operator is, "**anyone who uses their vessel to carry fee paying customers for leisure purposes including, but not limited to, activities such as, diving, angling, wildlife tour and thrill rides**"?
2. Are there any other activities that you feel should be included under this definition?
3. Do you support the proposal, "**Permitted access to marine protected areas for all commercial tour operators conditional on the vessel's skipper gaining certification in the WiSe Scheme**"?
4. If you are a commercial tour operator, what impact would this proposal have on your business?
5. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to this proposal?

Fast Craft and PWC

Since late 2020 there has been an increase in recreational activity across the Northern Ireland coastal area that is being attributed to the introduction of international travel restrictions associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. This has culminated in increased reports of marine wildlife disturbance, predominantly from the inappropriate use of personal watercraft (jet-skis). The main species affected are cetaceans (dolphins, porpoises and whales), seals (both Grey and Harbour) and to a lesser extent basking shark and seabirds.

If this increase of recreational activity continues then the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife will increase accordingly.

Complaints have been received about personal watercraft disturbing marine wildlife in Strangford Lough SAC, Murlough SAC (Tyrella and Minerstown ASSI), Skerries and Causeway SAC and North Channel SAC (Cloughey). These four SACs have marine mammals as designated features (Harbour seals and Harbour porpoise). There have also been incidents of personal watercraft disturbing seabirds in Rathlin SPA. These complaints have occasionally been associated with other high speed craft.

The Department is proposing management measures for the use of fast craft and PWC in the following marine protected areas

- Skerries and Causeway SAC
- Rathlin SAC/SPA
- Strangford Lough SAC
- North Channel SAC (Cloughey)
- Murlough SAC (Tyrella and Minerstown ASSI)

Formulation of management options for Fast Craft and Personal Water Craft (PWC)

For each of the 5 MPAs the Department has considered the following management options

- Issue of Advisory Notices detailing best practice on the use of PWCs in MPAs where vulnerable marine species are a designated feature.
- Permitted access to marine protected areas for PWC use, conditional on the user's agreement to abide by a code of practice for the operation of PWC in specific MPAs.
- Permitted access to marine protected areas for commercial boat tour operators, conditional on the skipper attaining WiSE accreditation.
- Speed restricted zones within specific areas of MPAs
- Prohibition zones within an SPA where there is the risk of disturbance to loafing / nesting birds.
- Prohibition zones within an MPA where the use of PWCs are excluded in the vicinity of marine species sensitive to disturbance of entry to specific zones. The boundaries of any prohibition zone will be set taking into account the guidance set out in WiSe.

Advisory Notices

The proposed advisory notices will be developed with input from local authorities, training organisations and PWC industry representatives. They will contain information unique to the relevant MPA and provide guidance on:

- The type of marine wildlife in the MPA.
- Appropriate behaviours when marine wildlife is encountered.
- Appropriate methods of craft control when in close proximity to marine wildlife.
- Details of any exclusion zones or areas where speed should be restricted.

Along with designated features, other marine species may be present in marine protected areas. Species such as wild birds, basking shark, whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals are protected under International and national legislation throughout the UK. Disturbance of such marine species is an offence under The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) and The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1985. The proposed advisory notices will provide guidance against the disturbance of all relevant marine species.

Permitted access to MPAs for PWCs.

The Department proposes that any permit required for the use of PWC in a marine protected area will be free of charge to the PWC user. Issuance of the permit however will be conditional upon the user's agreement to abide by a code of practice for the use of PWC in marine protected areas. This code of practice will be developed between The Department, local authorities, training organisations and PWC industry representatives.

Proposed management measures in MPAs

Skerries and Causeway SAC

Designated Species at risk of disturbance

- Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

Proposed Management Measures

- Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC
- DAERA plans to commission a site specific survey to determine the level of risk of disturbance experienced by sensitive marine species.
- DAERA will continue to work with harbour masters and local authorities around the issue of slipway access.

Rationale for management measures

The Department's primary goal is to reduce the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife through the education of PWC users. The Department has not received any evidence of actual disturbance to marine wildlife within the SAC, it is hoped that specific surveys will provide evidence of the current exposure levels experienced by marine wildlife to help inform future decision making.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, "**Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC**"?
2. Do you support the proposal, "**DAERA plans to commission a site specific survey to determine the level of risk of disturbance experienced by sensitive marine species**"?

3. Do you support the proposal, “**DAERA will continue to work with harbour masters and local authorities around the issues of slipway access**”?
4. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

Rathlin Island SPA / SAC / MCZ

Designated Species at risk of disturbance

- Black Guillemot (Cepphus grylle)
- Guillemot (Uria Aalge)
- Razorbill (Alca torda)
- Kittiwake (Rissa tridactyla)
- Breeding Seabird Assemblage (including puffins, fulmars, common gulls, herring gulls and breeding black guillemots)

Proposed Management Measures

- Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SPA / SAC
- DAERA will continue monitoring the risk of disturbance to sensitive species within the SPA / SAC.

Rationale for management measures

The Department’s primary goal is to reduce the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife through the education of users of PWC and other fast craft.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, “**Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SPA / SAC**”?
2. Do you support the proposal, “**DAERA will continue monitoring the risk of disturbance to sensitive species within the SPASAC**”?
3. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

Strangford Lough SAC

Designated Species at risk of disturbance

- Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Proposed Management Measures

1. The Department is proposing four Prohibition zones in Strangford Narrows (Cloghy Rocks, Granagh Bay, Bar Hall Bay and Angus Rock). The prohibition will apply to PWC and other leisure craft not used in navigation*. The prohibition zones will not apply to vessels fishing commercially.
2. Permitted access to the SAC for PWC users, conditional on the user's agreement to abide by a code of practice for the operation of PWC in Strangford Lough SAC.
3. Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC.
4. DAERA will, with partners, continue monitoring the risk of disturbance to sensitive species within the SAC.

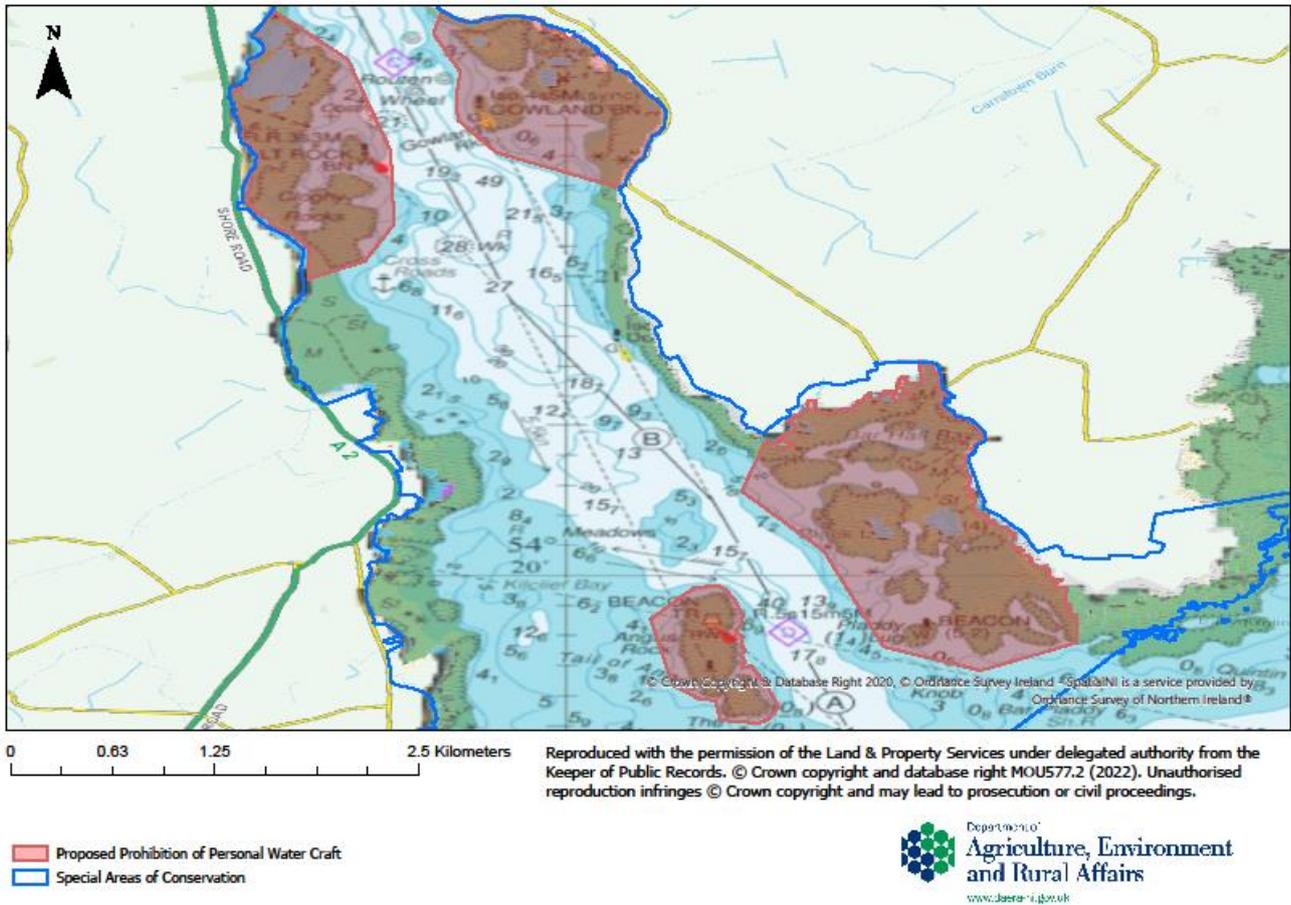
***Definition of "used in navigation" - Used in navigation means only a vessel that makes ordered progression over the water from one place to another.**

Rationale for management measures

The Department's primary goal is to reduce the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife through the education of PWC users. As such it feels that a permitting system that provides PWC users with the appropriate knowledge of best practice in the vicinity of marine wildlife is a reasonable measure to insure their sustainable enjoyment of the marine environment.

The latest condition assessment relating to common seals in Strangford Lough SAC indicates that the feature is at unfavourable status, the Department feels therefore that extra protection is necessary for seal colonies in close proximity to PWC use and is suggesting the four prohibition zones in Strangford Narrows. The four zones are the main haul out points for common seals in Strangford Narrows. A map showing the proposed prohibition zones can be found in Figure 2, below.

Figure 2 map showing proposed prohibition zones in Strangford Lough



Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, **“The Department is proposing four Prohibition zones in Strangford Narrows (Cloghy Rocks, Granagh Bay, Bar Hall Bay and Angus Rock). The prohibition will apply to PWC and other leisure craft not used in navigation”**?
2. Do you support the proposal, **“Permitted access to the SAC for PWC users, conditional on the user’s agreement to abide by a code of practice for the operation of PWC in Strangford Lough SAC”**?
3. Do you support the proposal, **“Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC”**?

4. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

North Channel SAC

Designated Species at risk of disturbance

- Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)

Proposed Management Measures

- The Department will maintain its monitoring programme and continue to gather evidence to help inform future decision making processes throughout the SAC.
- Provision of Advisory Notice for operation of fast craft in the SAC.

Rationale for management measures

The Department's primary goal is to reduce the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife through the education of PWC users. Harbour porpoises can be disturbed by the use of PWC however the Department currently has no evidence of any incidents of such disturbance within the SAC. The Department intends to continue with current monitoring efforts to increase its evidence for disturbance levels within the North Channel SAC to inform and guide future decision making.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, **"The Department will maintain its monitoring programme and continue to gather evidence to help inform future decision making processes throughout the SAC"**?
2. Do you support the proposal, **"Provision of Advisory Notice for operation of fast craft in the SAC"**?
3. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

Murlough SAC (Minerstown and Ballykinlar)

Designated Species at risk of disturbance

- Common Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

Proposed Management Measures - Minerstown

- The Department will continue its programme of outreach and engagement with recreational users of the Minerstown area to increase awareness of the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife.
- Provision of an Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC

Rationale for management measures

There are existing byelaws restricting access to Minerstown seashore to PWC. **Down District Council byelaws for the regulation of the seashore at Minerstown, County Down 2014**, state that, **“A person shall not bring any watercraft including a kite, surfing board, personal watercraft, inflatable boat or semi rigid craft within 200m of the restricted zone between 1 May and 31 October (both dates inclusive)”**. The Department has been working with Newry Mourne and Down District Council to raise awareness of marine wildlife disturbance with users of the Minerstown area and will continue to do so.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, **“The Department will continue its programme of outreach and engagement with recreational users of the Minerstown area to increase awareness of the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife”**?
2. Do you support the proposal, **“Provision of an Advisory Notice for the operation of fast craft in the SAC”**?
3. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

Proposed Management Measures – Ballykinlar

- Provision of Advisory Notice for operation of PWC and fast craft in the SAC. This advisory note will offer guidance on the use of speed for planing craft including PWC approaching and travelling through the channel between Inner and Outer Dundrum Bay.

Rationale for management measures

The Department's primary goal is to reduce the risk of disturbance to marine wildlife through the education of PWC and fast craft users. The proximity of the seal haul out sites to the channel at Ballykinlar however places seal colonies at risk of disturbance from craft including PWCs navigating into and out of Inner Dundrum Bay. In an attempt to minimise the level of disturbance the Department considers it appropriate to issue guidance on the use of speed in close proximity to marine wildlife.

Consultation Questions

1. Do you support the proposal, "**Provision of Advisory Notice for the operation of PWC and fast craft in the SAC, this advisory note will offer guidance on the use of speed for planing craft including PWC approaching and travelling through the channel between Inner and Outer Dundrum Bay**"?
2. Do you have any evidence or points of view that you wish the Department to consider relevant to these proposals?

Annex A – List of MCZs, SACs and SPAs in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

Lough Foyle SPA
Skerries and Causeway SAC
Rathlin MCZ / Rathlin Island SAC / SPA
The North Channel SAC
Waterfoot MCZ
Red Bay SAC
The Maidens SAC
Larne Lough SPA
Outer Belfast Lough MCZ
Belfast Lough Open Water SPA
Belfast Lough SPA
East Coast (NI) Marine pSPA
Outer Ards SPA
Strangford Lough MCZ / SCA / SPA
Murlough SAC
Killough Bay SPA
Carlingford Lough MCZ / SPA / pSPA

Annex B - Guidance for reducing the risk of marine wildlife disturbance

Marine mammals, seabirds and basking sharks are protected by law from injury and disturbance, including reckless or unintentional disturbance. Below is a summary of the Wildlife Safe (WiSe Scheme) best practice principles when boat handling near marine animals; videos on avoiding disturbance and course information are available at www.wisescheme.org.

Information on protecting Northern Ireland's marine environment is available at www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/marine.

Insensitive boat and Jet Ski handling that leads to disturbance or injury of protected species may lead to legal action against you. For example, the penalty for intentional or reckless disturbance of seals can be up to £5000, or up to six months imprisonment, or both.

Seals

Two species of seal can be seen around the coast of Northern Ireland. The harbour seal is smaller, has a dog-like face and prefers more sheltered habitats whereas the grey seal is larger, has a longer head and is more often seen in exposed areas. Seals haul out to rest, warm up and breed and are very sensitive to disturbance, especially during the pupping season.

- If approaching seal haul outs, do so slowly and quietly from an oblique angle, making no wake.
- Never approach directly or too close; keep your distance (50m minimum).
- Watch out for signs of disturbance – heads going up, seals becoming agitated or moving toward the water. If you see any of these signs, back off slowly and quietly.
- Keep noise aboard to a minimum.
- Know the locations of important haul out areas, such as Rathlin Island and the Skerries Islands.
- Don't feed seals with fish; it can alter their behaviour making them vulnerable to injury from boats.
- Do not stay longer than 15 min.

Seabirds

- Approach seabird colonies slowly and quietly, keeping noise and movement to a minimum.
- Keep your distance – a minimum of 50m is recommended. Using binoculars allows a good view without disturbance.
- Know the locations of specially protected areas and be especially sensitive around nesting times as chicks, eggs and fledglings are highly vulnerable to disturbance.
- If nesting birds start to move around in an urgent manner, bobbing their heads, flapping their wings or launching from ledges, move away slowly and quietly to a safe distance.
- Anchor away from bird feeding or nesting sites to avoid disturbance.
- Avoid travelling through rafts of birds on the surface; they may be feeding, resting, moulting or may be youngsters new to life on the water.
- Slow down to less than 5 knots, give them a wide berth to avoid disturbance. You will see and enjoy the encounter more by not putting them to flight.

Cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises)

Northern Ireland waters have records for 19 species of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Cetaceans vary in their response to boats; some are more sensitive than others, however, they all use sound to communicate with each other and for hunting with prey. Some boat noises such as engines, echo sounders and propeller sounds are in the same range of frequencies that species like bottlenose dolphins use and may drown out their communications causing panic, especially for mothers and calves.

- Slow down to 6 knots, at least 300m away from the animals; a no wake speed is best.
- Check to see if calves are present; if they are, the animals may not be receptive so steer clear. Never get between mothers and calves.
- Never drive your vessel through groups of dolphins.
- If it seems okay to get a little closer, make a slow approach from behind and to one side but don't approach closer than 100m.
- Maintain a steady course and speed to reduce the risk of collision especially if cetaceans approach your vessel to bow ride.
- Watch out at all times for signs that your presence is not welcome, such as rapid swimming or sudden course alteration.
- Be aware of your surroundings – are the animals in a shallow bay where they may feel hemmed in or in open waters where they have room to freely move? Always leave animals room to leave; never close off their exit route from confined areas. Let them leave when they wish and do not pursue them.
- Do not outstay your welcome – 15 min is enough.
- Don't approach if more than two boats are present.

Basking Sharks

The waters around Northern Ireland enjoy visits from the world's second largest fish, the basking shark. These large powerful animals are protected by law from deliberate or reckless disturbance or harm and can pose to a threat to boats that approach too close, sometimes lashing out with their huge tail if disturbed.

- Sharks feeding on plankton along fronts often move in an unpredictable manner so it is wise to keep your distance. They can enter a feeding induced 'trance' where they become oblivious to the approach of vessels and may not get out of your way.
- Basking sharks may be seen in groups, courting and should be avoided so as not to disturb this important behaviour.
- Although you may only see one shark, there may be others just beneath the surface out of sight.
- Basking sharks can breach clear of the water; when this is seen, it is best to keep a safe distance.
- Slow down to 6 knots at least 300m away from the animals.
- Approach slowly from the side and behind; never cut across ahead of sharks.
- Take you engine out of gear so that the propeller is not turning.

For further information:

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