

# OUTER ARDS - SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)

UK9020271

## CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

### Document Details

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### Revision History:

Version	Date	Summary of Changes	Initials	Changes Marked
V1	01/12/2002	Internal working document	IE	
V1.1	August 2013	Review	IE	
V2.0	February 2015	Draft	IE	Complete review

### Site relationship

To fully understand the site conservation requirements for this site it may be necessary to also refer to other site Conservation Objectives

This SPA adjoins Belfast Lough SPA, Belfast Lough Open Water SPA and Strangford Lough SPA. It is also close to Copeland Islands SPA and adjoins the proposed East Coast Marine SPA.

The SPA boundary also includes the Outer Ards Ramsar site.

See also Boundary Rationale

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives<sup>1</sup> to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, terrestrial/inter-tidal Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

## **2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition
- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.
- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

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<sup>1</sup> 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive 79/409/EEC as amended)

### 3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

#### 3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as “**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**”.

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

### 4 GENERAL INFORMATION

COUNTY: Down

Outer Ards ASSI G.R. J628 694

AREA: 1240.82 ha.

Outer Ards SPA G.R. J628 694

AREA: 4753.82 ha.

REVIEW OF ANY ADJOINING OR REMOTE MARINE AREAS WILL BE INFORMED BY JNCC REPORT ON MARINE USAGE BY TERN SPECIES FROM EXISTING SPA'S DESIGNATED FOR BREEDING TERNS.

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES WILL BE REVISED AS THESE ISSUE PROGRESS

## 5 SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

The coastal site extends from near Grey Point, Belfast Lough to north of Ballyquintin Point at the southern end of the Ards Peninsula. The site is contiguous with Belfast Lough SPA and Strangford Lough SAC/SPA. It comprises a variety of shoreline types including rock platforms, off-shore islands, boulder, gravel and sand beaches. Coastal relief is low so that no significant cliffs are present. While the wintering waterfowl utilise the open shore, breeding seabirds (tern species) are present on Cockle Island, Groomsport (SPA and Ramsar). A marine area has been included within the SPA adjoining the Cockle Island tern nest site. Limited adjoining habitat is included in the site, principally maritime heath and grassland.

### 5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The SPA and Ramsar sites comprise the Outer Ards ASSI together with Ballymacormick Point ASSI. In addition, the SPA includes a sea area adjoining Cockle Island, Groomsport (breeding terns). Such areas adjoining colonies are of importance to an extent for feeding although terns can be wide ranging in their search for food. Landward, the site is generally limited to the head of beaches and rock platforms but in places extends inland where habitat quality justifies this. Major harbour complexes have been excluded. Roost sites occurring outside the extent of natural or semi-natural habitat have not been included but their importance must not be underestimated.

## 6 SPA SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type	Feature	Population (5 year average 1995-2000) except where stated	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Population at time of designation (SPA)	SPA Review population	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Species	Arctic Tern breeding population <sup>a</sup>	260 (current population)	263	263	207	58
Species	Golden Plover wintering population <sup>a</sup>	2927	2109	2109	2079	735
Species	Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population <sup>a</sup>	206	209	209	245	54
Species	Ringed Plover wintering population <sup>a</sup>	452	516	516	545	380
Species	Turnstone wintering population <sup>a</sup>	1084	1210	1210	1241	846
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Habitat extent					
Habitat <sup>1</sup>	Roost site locations					

Table 1. List of SPA selection features.

<sup>1</sup> Habitat is not a selection feature but is a factor and is more easily treated as if it were a feature. Habitat extent is also used for breeding birds reported as an area.

### Notes on SPA features – may not be applicable to all SPAs

The above table lists all relevant qualifying species for this site. As the identification of SPA features has and continues to evolve, species may have different status but all should be considered in the context of any HRA process. Ultimately all SPAs will be renotified to formalise species features.

<sup>a</sup> – species cited in current SPA citation and listed on current N2K dataform

<sup>b</sup> – species selected post SPA designation through UK SPA Review 2001

<sup>c</sup> – species highlighted as additional qualifying features through the UK SPA Review 2015 or the UK marine SPA programmes.

## 6.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Feature Type (i.e. habitat, species or earth science)	Feature	Size/ extent/ pop'	Population at time of designation (ASSI)	Common Standards Monitoring baseline
Habitat	Coastal saltmarsh			
Habitat	Coastal sand dunes			
Habitat	Intertidal mudflats			
Habitat	Maritime cliff and slope			
Habitat	Intertidal rock			
Species	Fungi assemblage			
Species	Higher plant assemblage			
Species	Cormorant wintering population		221	231
Species	Great Crested Grebe wintering population		82	4
Species	Eider wintering population		475	438
Species	Curlew wintering population		917	473
Species	Dunlin wintering population		2239	1187
Species	Lapwing wintering population		5379	3099
Species	Oystercatcher wintering population		1623	1593
Species	Purple Sandpiper wintering population		78	54
Species	Redshank wintering population		904	794
Earth Science	Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology			
Earth Science	White House Port Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous			
Earth Science	Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous			
Earth Science	Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy			
Earth Science	Orlock Structural Geology			
Earth Science	Millin Bay Structural Geology			

Table 2. List of ASSI features, additional to those that form all or part of SPA selection features. These will be referred to in ANNEX II.

## 7 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The Conservation Objectives for this site are:

*To maintain each feature in favourable condition.*

For each feature there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the tables below. Component objectives for Additional ASSI Selection Features are not yet complete. For each feature there are a series of attributes and measures which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether a feature is in favourable condition, or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annexes.

## 8 OUTER ARDS SPA CONDITION ASSESSMENT 2014

Species	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	CSM	5 yr mean	% CSM	Status
Arctic Tern (B)	205	182	215	191	34	58	165.4	<b>285.17</b>	Favourable
Light-bellied Brent Goose	946	781	593	649	1311	54	856.0	<b>1585.19</b>	Favourable
Golden Plover	1148	721	439	362	181	735	570.2	<b>77.58</b>	Unfavourable
Ringed Plover	125	308	278	265	120	380	219.2	<b>57.68</b>	Unfavourable
Turnstone	930	1037	1000	780	692	846	887.8	<b>104.94</b>	Favourable

## 9 SPA SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

To maintain or enhance the population of the qualifying species

Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population

To maintain or enhance the range of habitats utilised by the qualifying species

To ensure that the integrity of the site is maintained;

To ensure there is no significant disturbance of the species and

To ensure that the following are maintained in the long term:

- Population of the species as a viable component of the site
- Distribution of the species within site
- Distribution and extent of habitats supporting the species
- Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species

Feature	Component Objective
Arctic Tern breeding population	As above
Arctic Tern breeding population	Fledging success sufficient to maintain or enhance population
Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	As above
Golden Plover wintering population	As above
Ringed Plover wintering population	As above
Turnstone	As above

wintering population	
Habitat extent	To maintain or enhance the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used or potentially usable by Feature bird species (1001 ha intertidal area), (breeding areas xx ha) subject to natural processes
Habitat extent	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes
Roost sites	Maintain or enhance sites utilised as roosts

Table 3. List of SPA Selection Feature Component Objectives

### Tern nesting localities current and historical (TO BE FINALISED)

Cockle Island – only site currently used
Bird Island
Burial Island
Green Island
South Rock
North Rock

Table 4. Historical tern nesting locations within the SPA

## 9.1 ADDITIONAL ASSI SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVES

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Component Objective</b>
Coastal mosaic	
Intertidal mud/sand	
Intertidal rock	
Fungi	
Higher Plant Assemblage	
Cormorant wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Eider wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Curlew wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Dunlin wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Lapwing wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Oystercatcher wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Purple Sandpiper wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Redshank wintering population	As for SPA selection feature objectives
Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
White House Port Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Orlock Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes
Millin Bay Structural Geology	Maintain the extent of exposures and access to them subject to natural processes

Table 5. ASSI Component objectives

## 10 MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

### See also Views About Management for relevant ASSI

**Owner/Occupier's** – (to be used to identify any key management considerations arising from ownership e.g. owners/organisations having an obvious bearing on conservation matters or from management agreements).

Approximately 170 individuals/organisations own land within the SPA. Major landowners and leasees within the SPA, relevant to the site management include, Crown Estate Commissioners, National Trust, NIEA, North Down and Ards Council, Commissioner of Irish Lights, RSPB and Private Individuals. There may be conflicts of interest between the requirements of individual/organisations, both within and adjacent to the SPA, and the site management needs.

The proposed new sewage treatment works for the greater Bangor area at Donaghadee and associated infrastructure may impact upon the SPA. Development pressures are significant along the entire SPA. Other threats include coastal protection works particularly in southern region of the site. The area is of importance for recreational activities. These can exist alongside the SPA feature populations but care is needed that activities do not result in any adverse impacts.

There are no management agreements within the SPA.

## 11 MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES, ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE OR SITE FEATURES

**Notifiable Operations** - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the schedule could affect the site. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Outer Ards SPA, or could affect it in the future. Although, features 1, 2, 3, 4 etc, are the qualifying SPA features, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

### Generic site/feature issues

No	Issue	Threat/comments	Local considerations	Action
1	Adjoining habitat	Particularly important for swans and geese as well as providing high tide roost locations. Significant changes in land management and disturbance are key considerations. Such areas lie without the site making effective management of developments other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Mostly improved agricultural land but provides high tide roosts, most notably for Golden Plover, and additional feeding habitat.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
2	Aquaculture	Disturbance is a minor consideration unless carried	No licensed sites presently but the area	Liaise with DARD Fisheries Division. Assess all license



		out deliberately to minimise losses to shell-feeding waterfowl. Alteration of natural littoral and sub-littoral communities through seeding, tray/trestle cultivation, dredging. Naturalisation of introduced species – both the shellfish themselves and associated species e.g. algae and disease vectors.	has been identified as having potential.	applications individually. Consider the collective impact.
3	Bait digging – commercial or ‘recreational’ and shellfish gathering.	Disturbance and impact on sediment and invertebrate fauna – may be positive through making deeper prey items available on surface. Shellfish gathering represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass. Generally unregulated.	Extent unknown	Monitor scale of activity. Consider the collective impact.
4	Beach cleaning	Disturbance consideration. Loss of seaweed and other driftline material especially represents a net loss to the system in terms of habitat and biomass.	Widespread on local authority and amenity beaches, main concern regards seaweed. Destination of gathered seaweed is unknown – should be returned to the system.	Liaise with local authority to limit frequency or timing of beach cleaning, restricting it to key sites through the summer. Consider best use of organic component, ideally returning it to the system.
5	Beach sand and gravel extraction.	Disturbance issue together with loss of biologically active upper sediments. Most beach systems are sedimentologically closed thus material removed may not be renewed making the activity unsustainable. May lead to changed sediment character of beach ultimately impacting on birds.	Apparently widespread especially in Cloghy area. Impact is unclear but practise is unlikely to be sustainable.	‘Permitted’ extraction of beach sand and gravel should be halted through management agreements. Ad hoc removal should be addressed in conjunction with local authorities.
6	Boating activity – commercial	Disturbance and potential for impact from high-speed liners.	Fishing boat activity is widespread, centred on the main harbours. Shipping within the Irish Sea may have a bearing with regard to the potential for pollution incidents. No immediate issues evident.	Formal consultation likely relating to new schemes. Consider the collective impact.
7	Boating activity – recreational	Disturbance and potential for impact especially from jet skis. Generally relevant to particularly sensitive areas within site.	Main boating centres are at Bangor and Donaghadee. Probably dispersed activity associated with most beaches also. Most activity is likely to be in the	Liaise with appropriate authority with codes of good practice, zoning and use of by-laws as necessary. Consider the collective impact.

			summer period. Implications for seabird nesting sites.	
8	Coastal protection schemes	Where there is no history of this, it impacts on natural beach systems with loss of habitat.	Much of the coastline is highly engineered. Ongoing erosion is a problem locally with ad hoc dumping as a response.	Liaise with Planning Service and other parties with an involvement in coastal management.
9	Cull of fledglings/ young	Licensed selective culling of species impacting on 'more desirable' species. Licensed by NIEA.	Potentially an issue at tern colonies but numbers of breeding large gulls has declined considerably in recent years.	NIEA to review all licenses. Consider the collective impact.
13	Enhanced bird competition	Activities onsite or offsite that influences or results in a shift in balance of species utilising a site.	Future of landfill operations especially in the wider area could impact on breeding seabirds	Liaise with Planning Service. Review wider countryside changes.
14	Fishing – commercial or recreational	Minimal disturbance consideration but may represent 'competition' for piscivorous birds. Represents a net loss to the system in terms of biomass.	Scallop dredging and other trawling is ongoing.	Liaise with DARD and fishing authority as required. Liaise with angling clubs as required.
15	Habitat extent – inter-tidal	Loss of habitats through development, changes in coastal processes. Loss of inter-tidal habitat is a critical issue as this is the feeding zone for the majority (numbers and species) of birds.	Main threat is from ad hoc coastal protection schemes.	Assess planning applications. Monitor using aerial photography.
16	Habitat extent – open water	Loss likely to be limited but expansion of commercial port facilities can impact on key localities.	Not a significant issue	Assess planning applications. Consider the collective impact.
17	Habitat quality – inter-tidal	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality, invasive species or changes in coastal processes.	No major impact although seaweed cleaning/harvesting and sand/gravel extraction are issues of concern.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution incidents. Consider the collective impact.
18	Habitat quality – open water	Alteration of habitat quality through diminution of water quality or invasive species.	Not a significant issue given the sites position in open coastal waters. Impacts are localised.	Assess planning applications. Deal with invasive alien species by preventing their spread or reducing their impact. Liaise with Environmental Protection as required with regard to water quality issues and pollution

				incidents. Consider the collective impact.
19	Habitat extent and quality-breeding	Alteration of habitat area or quality through inappropriate use or absence of site management.	Habitat management is main issue in context of seabirds. Tern site at Cockle Island	Assess needs of breeding species. Liaise with owner or appropriate authority to adjust or introduce site management.
20	High tide roosts	An essential component of sites hosting waders. Development of adjoining ground or actual traditional roost localities may adversely impact on the sites carrying capacity. Many such sites lie without the site making effective management of developments, other than those for which planning permission is required, difficult.	Localities should be mapped including extent of use of adjoining habitat. It is probable that there is movement of birds between Outer Ards and Strangford Lough.	Assess planning applications. Identify key areas and promote site management schemes. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.
21	Introduced species	Range of threats from loss of habitat, feeding competition, disease, hosting species presenting a threat outside of the site.	Extent unknown	Liaise with appropriate authority. Consider feasibility of elimination. Participate in national/international initiatives.
23	Predation.	Mainly of concern on bird breeding sites.	Extent unknown but Cockle Island is accessible at extreme low tides.	Must be dealt with as part of wider countryside management considerations.
24	Recreational activities.	Disturbance is the main consideration although vehicle access may also lead to beach compaction and impacts on beachhead habitats. Breeding birds, especially seabirds, are vulnerable to disturbance as absence of adults can often result in predation or chilling of young with a reduction/loss in fledging success.	Widespread in summer with main concerns being access to Cockle Island (this is positively managed but is very vulnerable in terms of position). Sections of shoreline are heavily used for recreational activities. Cumulative disturbance impacts (e.g. boating, wildfowlers, walkers, dogs etc) may be a significant factor for wintering bird populations impacting on both feeding (inter-tidal) and roosting birds. Mainly an issue during the summer period.	Liaise with local authorities and other managing parties. Signage at vulnerable sites should be reviewed.
25	Research activities.	Census and ringing activities especially have the potential to impact on bird populations, particularly at	Routine winter WEBS counts are undertaken. Breeding seabirds are surveyed annually.	Census and ringing activities to be undertaken by competent individuals, appropriately trained. In

		breeding sites.		case of ringers, appropriate license must be held.
27	Seaweed harvesting	Either cutting living weed or gathering storm debris. The former, depending on scale and frequency, may fundamentally impact on shore communities and their ability to support waterfowl. The latter, represents a net loss to the system in terms of habitat and biomass.	See issue 4 – beach cleaning. In addition, commercial scale sublittoral seaweed cropping has been discussed.	
28	System dynamics	Cuts across many other issues. Dynamic systems, especially coastal, can be affected by many factors especially engineered structures and significant changes in dominant wind direction or storm frequency. Many systems may indeed still be undergoing responses to historical developments e.g. partial reclamation, seawall construction. Changes may include alteration in sediment grade, shifts in patterns of erosion and deposition etc. Consequences for habitat and species utilisation of the site can be profound.	Widespread engineered coastline and other management impacts. Ongoing localised erosion is also an issue. Separate embayments are possibly self-contained. Relationship between sand beaches and offshore sediments are presently unknown.	Human induced change should be minimised. Assess planning applications and liaise with other relevant authorities. Ad hoc dumping and removal of natural materials should be managed. Major natural shifts in system behaviour may be identified through analysis of aerial photographs and site monitoring. Major and consistent changes to patterns of habitat distribution and bird utilisation of the site should be noted.
31	Wildfowling	Has direct effect through bag sizes/bag species and wider disturbance issue. Issue of regulated (through recognised shooting clubs) and ad hoc shooters. Lead shot on grazing lands.	Extent unknown – limited quarry species present within the site.	Liaise with relevant shooting bodies (BASC especially) to define areas for wildfowling, the development of Wildfowlers Codes of Good Practice and encourage bag returns. Support pressure to stop use of lead shot. Review use of Wildfowl Refuges. Consider the collective impact.

Table 6. List of site/feature management issues

## 12. MONITORING

Monitoring of our Special Protection Areas takes place at a number of levels, using a variety of methods. Methods for both Site Integrity Monitoring and Condition Assessment can be found in the Monitoring Handbook (To be written).

Maintain the integrity of the site. Undertake Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) at least annually to ensure compliance with the SPA/ASSI schedule. The most likely processes of change (e.g. dumping, infilling, gross pollution) will either be picked up by Site Integrity Monitoring, or will be comparatively slow (e.g. change in habitat such as growth of mussel

beds). More detailed monitoring of site features should therefore be carried out by Site Condition Assessment on a less frequent basis (every 6 years initially to pick up long-term or more subtle changes). A baseline survey will be necessary to establish the full extent of the communities present together with the current condition of the features, against which all further condition assessments will be compared.

In addition, detailed quality monitoring or verification monitoring may be carried out from time to time to check whether condition assessment is adequate to detect long-term changes that could affect the site. This type of quality monitoring may involve assessment of aerial photographs to determine site morphological changes. Methodology for this is being developed.

## **12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY**

1. Monitor the integrity of the site (Site Integrity Monitoring or SIM) – Complete boundary survey to ensure integrity of site and that any fencing is still intact. Ensure that no sand extraction or dumping has been carried out within the SAC boundary. This SIM should be carried out once a year.
2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment) - Monitor the key attributes for each selection feature (dune, saltmarsh, species). This will detect if the features are in favourable condition or not. See Annexes I and II for SAC and Additional ASSI Features respectively.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any appropriate assessment that may be needed. It should be noted that appropriate assessments are a separate activity to condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

## **12.2 ADDITIONAL MONITORING ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN FOR SITES IN UNFAVOURABLE CONDITION**

Monitoring actions set out in section 6 and Annex 1 will use, amongst other attributes, bird population data to determine site condition. In the event of a significant population decline being detected, a series of subsequent actions will be initiated. The following list is not exhaustive, actions will be site dependant, but the order of these points IS hierarchical i.e. consider point 1, then 2, etc.

1. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, world. Refer to BTO ALERT limits etc. Liaise with other competent bodies to meaningfully assess wider pattern. No site action if site decline mirrors regional pattern the cause of which is not related to the site. Action may be required at regional or larger scale. If the cause of the regional population decline (e.g. eutrophication) is found at the site then action may be

necessary, but this may need to form part of a network of strategic species action. Further research may be required.

2. Assess the site population in a wider geographical context – Northern Ireland, Ireland, UK, Europe, world. Determine if site losses are balanced by gains elsewhere e.g. breeding terns. Review site condition to determine if losses are due to site deterioration. Determine if possible whether population has relocated within SPA series (national, biogeographical, European). Note that the reasons for such locational changes may not be readily identifiable. Further research may be required.
3. For passage/wintering species assess breeding information. No site action if site decline is due to breeding ground failure, unless breeding ground failure is related to poor adult condition resulting from factors affecting wintering / passage birds.
4. Determine whether a major incident has affected the site e.g. toxic impact on prey items, predation event or geographical shift in available prey. Ability to respond to impacts may be limited.
5. Assess condition of principal site habitats e.g. vegetational composition and structure, change in habitat balance e.g. mudflats reduced by encroaching mussel beds.
6. Assess prey availability. Issues to consider are both within site e.g. water quality, broad site management, and without site e.g. climatically driven factors.
7. Assess whether there have been any changes in any other site features or management practices (see Table 3) that may have affected populations of site selection features.
8. Long-term site value must be considered even when it is found to be in unfavourable condition for a number of reporting cycles. This is particularly important for breeding seabird and wader sites where ongoing appropriate management may ultimately encourage re-establishment of a favourable population.

### 13 SELECTION FEATURE POPULATION TRENDS

Site trends are reported using running 5 year means of annual maximum count (WeBS data). Long term trends in index values have been used to assess changes in overall wintering populations for Northern Ireland and UK (WeBS data). Caution is always necessary in the interpretation and application of waterbird counts given the limitations of these data. The reduced number of both sites and birds in Northern Ireland, result in a greater degree of fluctuation. Trends for Ireland are based on five years of data 1994-1999 (I-WeBS data). Consequently short-term fluctuations apparent in the data series may reflect changes in between year productivity, or other short term phenomena, rather than being indicative of a real change in a population.

<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>SITE TREND</b>	<b>NI TREND</b>	<b>ROI TREND</b>	<b>UK TREND</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Golden Plover	Fluctuating	-	Slight Fluctuation	-	Golden Plover is not included in the indexing processes
Arctic Tern	-	-	-	-	Not known, to be compiled.
Light-bellied Brent Goose	Stable	Fluctuating	Slight Fluctuation	Not Applicable	
Ringed Plover	Declining	Fluctuating	Stable	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI
Turnstone	Declining	Fluctuating	Increasing	Fluctuating	Medium Alert for UK and NI

## ANNEX I

### Feature (SPA) – Breeding Seabirds

\* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
* Arctic Tern breeding population	Apparently occupied nests	No significant decrease in Arctic Tern breeding population against national trends	Requirement that annual data is collected, apply 5 year mean criteria. Ideally the population will be maintained above 1% of the national population. . Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
# Arctic Tern fledging success	Annual survey (as per Gilbert <i>et al.</i> 1998). Determine number of fledglings raised and add to total number of fledglings raised over previous four years and divide by five to obtain average. This should remove variation from season to season, e.g. in response to bad weather.	>1 fledgling per pair successfully raised per year over five year period	Appropriate level of fledgling survival to be determined

### Non-Avian Factors – habitat



<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures or breeding sites, where this would lead to different usage by notified species.

### **Feature (SPA) – Wintering Waterfowl**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Golden Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Light-bellied Brent Goose wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Ringed Plover wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.
* Turnstone wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in population against national trends	Five year running averages will be used to monitor population trends through WeBs data. Decline to a level below the Common Standards Monitoring baseline over a five year period may indicate unfavourable condition of the site.

### **Non-Avian Factors – habitat**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Comments</b>
* Habitat extent	Area of natural and semi-natural habitat	Maintain the area of natural and semi-natural habitats used by notified species, within the SPA, subject to natural processes.	Monitor once every reporting cycle by aerial photography.
# Extent of different habitats	Extent of different habitats	Maintain the extent of main habitat components subject to natural processes	Evaluate habitat quality should bird populations decline due to on site factors. Map any changes in area. This may include mapping areas with different vegetation structures where this would lead to different usage by notified species.
# Roost sites	Location of roost sites	Maintain all locations of roost sites.	Map roost site locations. Visit once every reporting cycle to ensure sites are available.

## ANNEX II

### Feature 1 (ASSI) –

= primary attribute. One failure among primary attribute = unfavourable condition

# = optional factors. These can be in unfavourable condition without the site being in unfavourable condition

Attribute	Measure	Targets	Comments
Coastal mosaic			
Intertidal mud/sand			
Intertidal rock			
Fungi			
Higher Plant Assemblage			
Cormorant wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Great Crested Grebe wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Eider wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Curlew wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Dunlin wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Lapwing wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	

Oystercatcher wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Purple Sandpiper wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Redshank wintering population	Bird numbers	No significant decrease in populations against national trends	
Whiskin Rocks Structural Geology			
White House Port Structural Geology			
Ballyferris and Ballywhiskin Rocks Caledonian Igneous			
Ballyhabert Caledonian Igneous			
Kearney Point/Knockinelder Structural Geology			
Coalpit Bay Lower Palaeozoic stratigraphy			
Orlock Structural Geology			
Millin Bay Structural Geology			