

River Basin Management Plans

Water Dependent Features of Natura 2000 Sites (SACs, SCIs and SPAs) in the Neagh Bann River Basin District

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1 Introduction

Natura 2000 sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive, and also incorporate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designate under the 1979 Birds Directive. SACs contain rare European habitats and SPAs contain rare European bird species and are assessed as being in either favourable or unfavourable condition. Sites of Community Importance (SCI) are precursors for SACs.

Where Natura 2000 sites are failing their conservation objectives, NIEA has identified the actions that need to be taken to achieve them. Actions necessary to avoid deterioration of the areas supporting designated habitats and species have also been identified.

Very often a Natura 2000 site lies within a water body and where this occurs the WFD status objectives apply in addition to the requirement to maintain the site at favourable conservation status or restore it to that status.

In 2012 the UK government agreed that a set of principles should be designed to provide a combined approach for expressing the conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites and WFD classification, where water bodies comprise or are part of the area. The potential benefit of the use of same set of standards for WFD status objectives and Natura 2000 objectives is the better alignment of standards and objectives in terms of simplifying management, assisting communication and a reduction in regulatory complexity.

In May 2013, each Devolved Administration and its respective Agencies were tasked with developing an approach for these over-arching objectives at a regional level. Although further work is still required to finalise the approach, a number of recommendations have been decided and will be subject to confirmation once the updated Common Standards Monitoring (CSM) guidance, used to monitor the condition of Natura 2000 sites, is published.

Water bodies are the basic management units for reporting and assessing compliance with the Directive's environmental objectives. For the first river basin plan in 2009 size thresholds

taken from the Directive were used to delineate surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, transitional and coastal). During the first cycle we have been able to improve on our water body sets through better understanding of catchment characteristics and increased knowledge through river walks, routine monitoring and targeted LMA investigation work. This has resulted in a reduction of the number of water bodies in Northern Ireland, from 575 river water bodies to 450, but the total area covered by the Plan is not affected.

The tables presented in the proceeding sections are an update of the Natura 2000 site condition as reported in the 2009 plan which also stated how many water bodies were failing to achieve good status within the designated site. The next sections update the number of water bodies failing to achieve good status under both the 575 and 450 water body threshold.

In the First Cycle Plan (2009) in the Neagh Bann River Basin District there were a total of 20 water dependent Natura 2000 sites. Of these sites 20% were favourable, 70% were unfavourable and 10% were yet to be assessed. Since then 1 additional site, a Site of Community Importance (SCI), has been declared. This now means that as of 2014, there are a total of 21 water dependent Natura 2000 sites, 28% of which are favourable and 72% are unfavourable.

2 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in the Neagh Bann River Basin District

2.1 Eastern Mournes SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	0	0	0	Blanket bogs Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i>	All features	Over-grazing (including deer browsing)	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	There are indications that the site is improving. Agri-environment schemes are in place.

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.2 Garron Plateau SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	2	5	2	Blanket bogs; Marsh saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>); Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters; Transition mires and quaking bogs	All features	Over-grazing (including deer browsing)	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	Agri-environment schemes and the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMPNI) with NIWater are in place

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.3 Bann Estuary SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	3	2	2	Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('grey dunes') Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>)	All features	Over-grazing	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	No change in status but site is showing signs of improvement (Atlantic salt meadows favourably recovering)

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.4 Main Valley Bogs SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	4	4	2	Active raised bogs	Active raised bogs	Water management (including drainage, dredging or alterations to the water table. Could be too much water or too little) Burning	Investigations ongoing	Site partially owned by NIEA allowing work to take place

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.5 Wolf Island Bog SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Favourable	Favourable	1	2	1	Active raised bogs	Active raised bogs	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.6 Ballynahone Bog SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	3	2	2	Active raised bogs	Active raised bogs	Water management (including drainage, dredging or alterations to the water table. Could be too much water or too little)	Investigation ongoing	Management ongoing on site via the Ulster Wildlife Trust

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.7 Rea's Wood & Farr's Bay SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	3	3	3	Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>)	All features	Invasive species (including bracken and scrub)	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	Ongoing invasive management (bracken and scrub)

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Prediction based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.8 Derryleckagh SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	1	0	1	Transition mires and quaking bogs	All features	Lack of remedial management (e.g. stopping-up drains, scrub cutting, erecting deer fences)	Management ongoing	Under NIEA management. Agri-environment Schemes are also in place.

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.9 Upper Ballinderry River SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	7	5	3	Otters; Freshwater Pearl Mussel; Water courses of plain to montane levels with <i>Ranunculion fluitantis</i> and <i>Callitricho-Batrachion</i> vegetation	Freshwater Pearl Mussel	Water management (including drainage, dredging or alterations to the water table. Could be too much water or too little) Water quality (including silt, water pollution (direct or diffuse), run-off, nutrient enrichment, eutrophication etc) Game or fisheries management (e.g. Introduction of stock at too high a level, over-zealous cutting of river banks, bait digging).	Agri-environment schemes in place - all have included riparian zone management (RBAN) including fencing. Riparian zones are important for acting as buffer zones, reducing polluting incidents, soil erosion and river siltation. Ongoing research project Ballinderry Fish Hatchery	Ballinderry River Trust partially funded through NIEA to carry out in stream works and projects. Agri-environment Schemes are also in place.

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.10 Montiags Moss SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	1	1	1	Marsh fritillary butterfly	Marsh fritillary butterfly	Invasive species (including bracken and scrub)	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	Direct intervention by NIEA as site owned by NIEA

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.11 Peatlands Park SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	2	2	2	Active raised bogs; Bog woodland; Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration.	Active raised bogs Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	Invasive species (including bracken and scrub) Water management (including drainage, dredging or alterations to the water table).	Bog restoration and management works taking place	Direct intervention by NIEA management as owned by NIEA.

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.12 Curran Bog SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	3	3	2	Active raised bogs; Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration	Active raised bogs	Lack of remedial management.	Stopping-up drains, scrub cutting, erecting deer fences.	Restoration works being discussed with private land owners

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.13 Dead island Bog SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Favourable	Favourable	1	1	1	Active raised bogs	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.14 Slieve Beagh SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	1	1	0	Blanket bogs; Dystrophic lake	Blanket bogs	Burning; Over-grazing (including deer browsing)	No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.15 Carn-Glenshane SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	2	3	1	Blanket bogs	Blanket bogs	Water management (including drainage, dredging or alterations to the water table). Over grazing (including deer browsing)	Land use changes required	Agri-environment Schemes in place

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.16 Teal Lough SAC

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Favourable	Favourable	2	2	2	Blanket bogs	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

3 Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in the Neagh Bann River Basin District

3.1 Skerries and Causeway SCI

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Not Declared	Favourable	N/A	0	0	Submerged or partially submerged sea caves; Reefs; Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Harbour porpoise	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4 Special Protection Areas (SPA) in the North Eastern River Basin District

4.1 Antrim Hills SPA

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Not Assessed	Favourable	5	9	4	Hen Harrier; Merlin	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.2 Lough Neagh and Lough Beg SPA

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Unfavourable	Unfavourable	24	22	16	Great crested grebe (breeding); Bewick's Swan; Goldeneye; Great Crested Grebe (wintering); Pochard; Scaup; Tufted duck; Waterbird assemblage; Whooper swan	Goldeneye; Scaup; Water assemblage; Whooper swan	The issues are unclear; may be changes in migratory patterns, disturbance to high tide roost sites, water quality and/or ecological factors	Investigation required to identify external and internal factors	Surrounding agricultural inputs need reduced; investigation required on the influence of introduced fish species at Lough Neagh (Roach) on populations of diving duck

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.3 Carlingford Lough SPA

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Favourable	Unfavourable	3	0	1	Sandwich Tern; Common Tern; Light-Bellied Brent Goose	Common Tern; Sandwich Tern	Over-grazing (including deer browsing)	Investigation required to identify external and internal factors	Breeding terns could be affected by disturbance, predation, and reduction in breeding sites. Reports of nest predation by Herring gulls. An existing conservation plan by the RSPB for this site is now under review.

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.4 Slieve Beagh-Mullaghfad-Lisnaskea SPA

2009 Condition status	2014 Condition status	Number of water bodies at less than good status			Designated water dependent habitats/species	Feature(s) not meeting objective	Reason for not meeting objective	Action required	Comments
		2009*	2013*	2013**					
Not Assessed	Favourable	1	1	1	Hen Harrier	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Not applicable: feature in favourable condition	Population of Hen Harrier is increasing

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies