

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds: Citation for Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Belfast Lough Open Water Special Protection Area

Unitary Authority/County: Belfast City Council
North Down Borough Council
Newtownabbey Borough Council
Carrickfergus Borough Council

Consultation proposal: Belfast Lough Open Water has been selected for classification as a Special Protection Area because of its important wintering populations of waterfowl.

Site description: Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough comprises a series of mudflats and lagoons. The outer lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays.

The Belfast Lough open water area comprises the marine area below the mean low water mark. Seawards it extends to a notional boundary between the eastern limits on the north and south shores of the Outer Belfast Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest at Kilroot and Horse Rock respectively. The boundary towards the head of the lough is a notional line between Greencastle on northern shore and Holywood Bank on the southern shore.

Water depths within the site are generally between 1m and 10m. Shallow waters, less than 5m in depth, dominate the area with deeper waters confined to the central area of the lough, east of a line between Greenisland and Cultra.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 5592.99 ha.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under **Article 4.2** of the Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting internationally important populations of the following species:

Species	Count and Season	Period	% of population
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1677 individuals – wintering	5 year peak mean for 1996/97 – 2000/01	0.35% NW Europe population

Bird figures from: WeBS database

Non-qualifying species of interest

In addition, the site supports nationally important numbers of (all data are 5 year averages of individuals for period 1996/97 – 2000/01) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (407, 8.7 % of the Irish wintering population), Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (405, 5.8%), Scaup *Aythya marila* (233, 7.8%), Eider *Somateria mollissima* (1116, 55.8%), Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (287, 14.4%) and Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrato* (170, 8.5%).

Status of SPA

Belfast Lough Open Water Special Protection Area was classified as a Special Protection Area on date (Day, Month, Year).