DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT CASTLE POINT, COUNTY ANTRIM. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.

The Department of the Environment (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area described and delineated on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the geological features and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Castle Point Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The limestone rocks exposed in the cliffs and rock platforms between Ballycastle and Port Calliagh belong to the Ulster White Limestone Formation and are overlain by basalt of the Antrim Lava Group. The Ballycastle and Port Calliagh Chalk Members have their type localities within the site. The available evidence indicates the Chalk Members were deposited in a warm, shallow sea during the Cretaceous, some 80 million years ago. They represent the youngest Cretaceous (Campanian to Maastrichtian) strata preserved in Northern Ireland (and indeed in Ireland) with the Ballycastle Chalk Member being the younger of the two.

At the eastern end of the site there is an exposure of the Ballycastle Pellet Chalk. The available evidence indicates that the Pellet Chalk was derived from the Ulster White Limestone Formation as a colluvial, or gravity induced, deposit that accumulated at the foot of a basalt-capped chalk slope. This is much softer than the 'normal' well cemented Ulster White Limestone Formation members. Consequently it is one of the only localities that readily yield microscopic marine fossils, or foraminiferans, of this age. The taxa *Globorotalites conicus* and *Neoflabellina rugosa*, which are unrecorded post Campanian, and *Osangularia lens* which is exclusively Maastrichtian, indicate the rocks span the Campanian – Maastrichtian boundary.

There is another exposure of the Pellet Chalk further north west along the coast. This is pinkish and is found in association with an area of brecciated limestone with large, round boulders of basalt and broken flints embedded in it. There is a circular depression at the southern end of the exposure and this has been interpreted as an erosional feature that subsequently became filled with the debris forming the breccia and Pellet Chalk. Furthermore, a volcanic vent breccia can be seen in the cliff section adjacent to it, cutting through the basalt above the limestone.

The area is also notable for its inter-tidal communities. An extensive limestone, wave cut platform on a moderately exposed shore supports many wide shallow rock pools. The intertidal area is characterised by red algae and patellobarnacle biotopes although barnacles themselves are scarce due to the soft nature of the substrate. Pockets of localised shelter allow the growth of Fucus spiralis.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the geological features of the area:

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land including reclamation and extraction of minerals, including rock, sand, gravel and peat.

2. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material.

3. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation.

4. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.

5. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or stones and grading of rock faces.

6. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage the interest of the area:

   i) Educational activities;

   ii) research activities;

   iii) recreational activities.

7. Sampling of rocks, minerals, fossils or any other material forming a part of the site, undertaken in a manner likely to damage the scientific interest.

FOOTNOTES

(a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the operations or activities listed in the Schedule does not constitute planning permission. Where required, planning permission must be applied for in the usual manner to the Department under Part IV of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

(b) Also note that many of the operations and activities listed in the Schedule are capable of being carried out either on a large scale or in a very small way. While it is impossible to define exactly what is large and what is small, the Department would intend to approach each case in a common sense and practical way. It is very unlikely that small scale operations would give rise for concern and if this was the case the Department would normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.