

EC DIRECTIVE 79/409 ON THE CONSERVATION OF WILD BIRDS:

LOUGH NEAGH AND LOUGH BEG SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA

Situated in the centre of Northern Ireland, Lough Neagh is the largest lake in the British Isles. The proposed Special Protection Area includes three eutrophic water bodies, Lough Neagh and two related loughs Lough Beg and Portmore Lough together with surrounding swamp, fen, wet grassland and swampy woodland. The area of the site is 41,188 hectares.

The boundary of the proposed Special Protection Area follows the boundaries of the Lough Neagh ASSI, Lough Beg ASSI and Portmore Lough ASSI. The site also forms part of a site listed as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The site qualifies under Article 4.1 of EC Directive 79/409 by regularly supporting internationally important numbers of wintering Bewick's swan *Cygnus columbianus* (the five year peak mean for the period 1989/90 to 1993/94 was 251 which comprises 1.5% of the Western and Central Europe population and 10% of the Irish population) and whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus* (the five year peak mean for the period 1989/90 to 1993/94 was 923 which comprises 5.4% of the total Icelandic breeding population and 6.5% of the Irish population). The site also qualifies under Article 4.1 by regularly supporting nationally important numbers of breeding common tern *Sterna hirundo* (200 pairs in 1995 which comprise 7.4% of Irish population).

The site qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Directive as a wetland of international importance by regularly supporting over 20,000 waterfowl in winter. The five year peak mean for the period 1989/90 to 1993/94 was 79,915 birds including nationally and internationally important numbers of the following species: 32,165 pochard *Aythya ferina* (9.2% of north-west European population, 80.4% of Irish population), 23,476 tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* (3.1% of north-west European population, 58.7% of Irish population) and 12,479 goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (4.2% of north-west European population, almost 100% of Irish population), 390 little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (26% of Irish population), 741 great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* (24.7% of Irish population), 781 cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* (3.9% of Irish population), 1,375 mute swan *Cygnus olor* (22.9% of Irish population), 129 greylag goose *Anser anser* (3.4% of Irish population), 165 shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (2.3% of Irish population), 3,447 wigeon *Anas penelope* (2.8% of Irish population), 114 gadwall *Anas strepera* (19% of Irish population), 1,868 teal *Anas crecca* (2.9% of Irish population), 4,982 mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (10% of Irish population), 173 shoveler *Anas clypeata* (2.7% of Irish population), 2,557 scaup *Aythya marila* (85.2% of Irish population) and 6,676 coot *Fulica atra* (26.7% of Irish population).

Lough Neagh is also notable for supporting an important assemblage of breeding birds including the following species which occur in nationally important numbers: great crested grebe, gadwall, pochard, tufted duck, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, redshank *Tringa totanus*, common gull *Larus canus*, lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus* and black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus*. Other important breeding wetland species include shelduck, teal, shoveler, lapwing and curlew.

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Signed Bertie Cullin
on behalf of the Department of the Environment
for Northern Ireland