

# KILLOUGH BAY AND STRAND LOUGH

## Views About Management

### The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)

#### **A statement of Environment and Heritage Service's views about the management of Killough Bay and Strand Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")**

This statement represents the views of Environment and Heritage Service about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. Environment and Heritage Service has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of Environment and Heritage Service is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 4-6 of the attached Document B for a list of these operations and activities). Environment and Heritage Service welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

#### **MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES**

##### **Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures**

Purple Moor-grass and rush pastures are an important habitat for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland, through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, grassland generally needs some management to retain its interest. Although occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, in the absence of management, coarse grasses can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant.



Grazing by cattle is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and helping to maintain open areas and a diverse sward structure although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. In the absence of grazing, cutting of the vegetation to create open areas and reduce the dominance of coarse grasses is desirable.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the species-rich grassland by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

Prevent the loss of more sensitive grassland species through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases other methods of control, such as cutting, may be required.

Where appropriate, encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the grassland from drying out.

### **Saline Lagoons**

Saline lagoons are an important habitat for wildlife. They are bodies of water that have a restricted connection to the sea and may vary from brackish to fully saline or hyper-saline. Associated species of saline lagoons are highly specialised to cope with these conditions. Strand Lough is a brackish lake while many of the surrounding fields still contain species indicative of their saline nature. Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see the quality and extent of the saline lagoon being maintained or enhanced through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. The latter includes important invertebrate communities.

Specific objectives for saline lagoons include:

Management should aim to prevent the net loss of lagoon habitats caused by land development and land reclamation.

Ensure that recreational use of lagoons is managed to minimise disturbance to wildlife.

Management should aim to maintain good water quality as nutrient enrichment can have a detrimental effect due to restricted water exchange.

### **Mudflats**

Mudflats are an important habitat for wildlife. The littoral sediments support a wide variety of marine invertebrates that represent an important food source for many fish and bird species. They also support beds of seagrass and a rich algal and sponge

assemblage which are sensitive to habitat disturbance and water and sediment quality. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the mudflat through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality.

As disposal of dredge or other material can lead to smothering of species Environment and Heritage Service would discourage such activities.

As mudflat and sandflats are sensitive to disturbance, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sympathetic use of the habitat to ensure that disturbance and physical damage to intertidal habitats and communities is minimised.

In addition to causing disturbance, unregulated bait digging, shellfish gathering and other such activities may lead to damage to, and a possible loss of, species and communities. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage sustainable practices that minimise such effects.

Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see the spread of the hybrid cordgrasses *Spartina anglica* and *S. townsendii* controlled as this can lead to modification of the habitat.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management which favours the natural processes of sediment movement.

### **Intertidal Rock**

Rocky shores are an important habitat for wildlife. The littoral zone is composed of a variety of different habitats and communities, including rock pools, bedrock ledges and platforms, gullies, crevices and boulder fields. A diverse range of seaweeds and marine animals are associated with these habitats and most are specially adapted to periods of immersion. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of intertidal rock through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Active management of rocky shores is usually minimal as these are naturally occurring habitats dominated by tidal processes and wave exposure. It is important that good water and sediment quality are maintained. Environment and Heritage Service would seek to maintain the coastline in as natural a state as possible.

Direct damage to rocky habitats can be caused by activities such as dredging and construction. In addition, anthropogenic structures may have an impact by altering the wave regime and may also restrict the sediment budget within the coastal system.

Specific objectives include:

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution as this may affect reef communities, particularly due to increased turbidity (which may reduce algal communities) or siltation (which may smother animal communities).

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management which favours the natural processes of sediment movement.

Environment and Heritage Service would discourage the unregulated removal of species through bait digging, shellfish gathering and seaweed harvesting which can lead to damage to, or a loss of, coastal communities and habitat.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage sustainable fishing practices and, where appropriate, the development of non-disturbance zones.

### **Light-bellied Brent Goose**

Killough Bay and Strand Lough ASSI is an important wintering site, especially in late winter and early spring, for internationally significant numbers of Light-bellied Brent Geese from Arctic Canada. The site also holds large numbers of other migratory wildfowl and waders. The Brent Geese are attracted by a rich food supply, mainly consisting of the seaweeds that grow on the inter-tidal mudflats. The quality of feeding areas is, however, susceptible to the influence of human activities undertaken both within and outside the ASSI that may result in pollution or changes in water quality or unacceptable levels of disturbance to feeding birds. It is therefore important that damaging practices are minimised around the ASSI.

Secure roost sites, free from disturbance, are essential to allow the birds to conserve energy when food resources are unavailable at high tide. Some of these roosts may lie outside the ASSI. Undisturbed roosts are particularly important during severe winter weather. The inter-tidal habitats present within the ASSI should be managed in order to safeguard the wintering Light-bellied Brent Goose population.

Killough Bay and Strand Lough represents a valuable resource for many different types of recreational and other activities. However, as noted above, many of the important species that are present on the site can be affected by these activities. The birds which use the area for feeding and roosting are especially vulnerable to disturbance at high tide roosts, and during severe winter weather.

Specific objectives include:

Foraging habitats on the shoreline and in the inter-tidal zone should not be subject to operations that would reduce either their area or the food resources they hold for Light-bellied Brent Geese.

Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see disturbance minimised around known roost sites, especially those used by geese at high tide and also at frequently used feeding areas.

Management should seek to minimise the unregulated removal of species through bait digging and shellfish gathering which can lead to damage or loss of food availability for the wintering birds. Such activities are also a source of disturbance to the birds.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the sensitive use of the site through the effective management of activities which may cause disturbance, for example through the provision of refuges and the adoption of good practice by different user groups.

### **Bird Assemblage**

Killough Bay and Strand Lough ASSI supports an assemblage of bird species typical of Irish reedbeds. Reedbeds within Killough Bay and Strand Lough ASSI should be managed in such a way as to maintain and enhance its bird assemblage. This is best achieved through appropriate management of the habitat.

Specific objectives include:

Where appropriate, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the blocking of drains to prevent the vegetation from drying out.

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Where feasible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the grazing of fen and swamp, although overgrazing should be avoided as the wet soils are particularly susceptible to poaching. Where grazing is not possible other management practices, such as cutting, may be used.

In general, the control of scrub within fen and swamp communities can be achieved through the appropriate grazing regime. In some cases additional scrub control may be required.

### **Management principles applicable to all habitats throughout the site**

Environment and Heritage Service would encourage all activities associated with site maintenance, management, access and recreation to be undertaken in a sensitive manner that ensures disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the main habitats through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very

important for wildlife such as breeding birds and invertebrates.

*E. Diane Stevenson*

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Authorised Officer

Dated the *1st* of *FEBRUARY* 2008