

OUTER ARDS

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 the Outer Ards 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 5 and 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

The Geological Series

Earth science features provide information about a region's geological history and can also aid interpretation of geological processes in the past and present.

The earth science interest at Outer Ards occurs as beach and foreshore exposures. The rock series throughout the ASSI is of importance but of particular interest are the formations in the area of Orlock Bridge, Coalpit Bay, Ballyferris and Whiskin shore, Ballyhalbert harbour, White House port and Millin Bay. Environment and Heritage Service would like to encourage the maintenance of the ASSI and its earth science interest.

Provided no damaging activities, as set out in the Schedule (pages 5 and 6), are undertaken without consent, the needs of owners, occupiers and the Department can be met.



Earth science features such as those at Outer Ards may require occasional management intervention in order to maintain access to, and exposure of, the geology. This could include, for example, selective removal of vegetation or any major build up of loose rock.

Specific objectives include:

Maintain the geological series in an undamaged state.

Maintain access to the geological series.

Sand dunes

Sand dunes are an important habitat for wildlife. They develop where sand is blown landwards from the beach and is deposited above the high water mark. A process of succession takes place as vegetation colonises the bare sand. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the dunes through the conservation of their associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and associated grassland fungi.

Coastal processes are complex and the management of sand dunes should take into account the need to maintain or restore where necessary, the natural processes and dynamics of dune development and succession.

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

Grazing is one way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species and it can help to maintain open areas and a diverse sward structure. Where grazing is not feasible, other methods - such as cutting or mowing to create open areas and reduce the dominance of Bracken, coarse grasses and woody species - may be desirable.

Many of the vegetation types on sand dunes are fragile and heavy disturbance can lead to loss of cover and soil erosion. However, where recreational and other pressures are not severe, the impact of activities such as light trampling can be beneficial. For example, tracks through dunes may open up areas where vegetation cover has become rank and provide small areas of bare sand, thus increasing the diversity of habitats available.

Specific objectives include:

Low intensity grazing over parts of the ASSI has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice, where this

is feasible. Where grazing is not feasible other management practices, such as cutting, may be used.

In general, the control of scrub and Bracken within sand dune communities can be achieved most effectively through the appropriate grazing regime. However, where there has been a prolonged absence of grazing, additional scrub and Bracken control, such as mechanical cutting and/or the careful application of herbicides, as agreed with Environment and Heritage Service, may be required.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the sand dunes by ensuring that there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide.

Management of amenity beaches can affect the early stages of dune formation by removing the strandline that helps to trap blown sand and to develop new dune ridges. Where appropriate, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management practices which allow the development of a natural strandline.

Where recreational pressures are significant enough to result in the loss of vegetation cover and prevent recovery, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the restoration of the vegetation through the sensitive management of access.

Coastal saltmarsh

Saltmarsh is an important habitat for wildlife. Saltmarsh generally forms in the upper parts of intertidal mudflats, usually in more sheltered coastal locations. The vegetation typically shows a succession from lower marsh communities to upper marsh communities, depending upon the extent of tidal inundation. Saltmarshes provide valuable habitat for invertebrates and birds and act as nursery sites for several fish species. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the saltmarsh, through the conservation of all of the component vegetation communities and their associated native plants and animals.

Coastal processes are complex and the management of saltmarshes should take into account the need to maintain or restore where necessary, the natural processes of sediment movement and the dynamics of saltmarsh succession.

Many of the more sensitive saltmarsh species can be lost through intensive management treatments such as fertiliser and herbicide application.

Where saltmarshes are managed, this is usually by grazing; it helps to provide a variety of different habitats which is particularly important for wintering bird species. If grazing ceases on these sites, there may be a loss of botanical diversity as rank grasses become dominant. However, not all saltmarshes require active management to retain their conservation interest, particularly where there has not been a history of grazing.

Specific objectives include:

On sites that have traditionally been grazed, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice. However, overgrazing should be avoided as it may result in a reduction in species diversity and cause poaching. Where there has not been a history of grazing the saltmarsh should normally be left to maintain itself, as grazing-sensitive species are likely to be present.

Due to its position, coastal erosion can be particularly damaging to saltmarsh. Where possible, Environment and Heritage Service would encourage management which favours the natural processes of sediment movement and the dynamics of saltmarsh succession.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the saltmarsh by ensuring that there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide.

Coastal grasslands and heaths

Coastal grasslands and heaths are important habitats for wildlife. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the grassland and heathland through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals. These include higher plants of limited distribution within Northern Ireland and associated grassland fungi.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, coastal habitats generally benefit from some management to retain their 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 is the most effective way of controlling the growth of more vigorous species, helping to maintain a diverse sward structure which continues to support species-rich grassland and heath. In the absence of grazing, cutting and removal 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 features of interest. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the continuation of this practice where feasible. Where grazing is not feasible, other management practices, such as cutting, may be used.

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.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the species-rich grassland by encouraging the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry or herbicide to the site.

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

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 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.

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.

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.

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

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

Seagrass (*Zostera*) beds

Seagrass beds are an important habitat for wildlife, supporting rich communities of plants and animals. They act as nursery area for fish species and form an important food resource for wintering wildfowl. Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the seagrass bed through the conservation of its associated native plants and animals.

Specific objectives include:

Management should aim to maintain good water and sediment quality, as seagrass beds are sensitive to excessive nutrient enrichment which can lead to outbreaks of the ephemeral algae *Enteromorpha* that can subsequently smother the seagrass.

Management should encourage the sympathetic use of the habitat to ensure that disturbance and physical damage to the seagrass is minimised.

Management should also aim to ensure that the sediment budget within the estuarine or coastal system is not restricted by anthropogenic influences. Construction, such as causeways and seawalls, can alter the sedimentary regime which may in turn impact seagrass beds as they are sensitive to such changes.

Common Seal

The Common Seal, *Phoca vitulina*, is found all around the coastline of Northern Ireland. Haul out areas are required for pupping during June and July and also for resting throughout the year, particularly during the moulting season from July to September. Sheltered inshore bays and estuaries are the preferred haul out areas; the habitat can vary from rocky shores to mudflats and sandbars, usually close to deep water and good feeding grounds. As a result of this, management should ensure that these areas are maintained and that access to them by seals is not restricted. The Grey Seal, *Halichoerus grypus*, also occurs occasionally. Where seal haul outs occur Environment and Heritage Service would encourage the maintenance and conservation of the surrounding marine habitat (rocky shore or mudflat and sandbar) to support the seal population.

Specific objectives include:

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

Disturbance around known haul out sites, especially during the pupping season (June to July for the Common Seal and September to November for the Grey Seal) should be minimised. Access by walkers, shellfish gatherers and boats to the vicinity of haul outs during the breeding, pupping and moulting seasons should be restricted where possible.

Environment and Heritage Service would seek to maintain the current range of designated haul out sites of common seals (and grey seals where applicable) by establishing a regular system to monitor populations throughout each year.

Wintering Waterbirds

Outer Ards ASSI is a wintering site for large numbers of migratory waterbirds. It supports internationally important numbers of Light-bellied Brent Goose, Golden Plover, Ringed Plover and Turnstone together with populations of Great Crested Grebe, Great Cormorant, Eider, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Dunlin, Purple Sandpiper, Curlew and Redshank that are significant in an all-Ireland context.

Geese, ducks and waders are attracted by a rich food supply and secure roost sites. Wildfowl make use of both open water and surrounding open habitats, including coastal saltmarsh, for feeding. Aquatic vegetation and invertebrates are important food sources for many ducks while geese and some ducks obtain a proportion of their food on land. Waders feed predominantly on shellfish and burrowing invertebrates in intertidal mudflats and other wet areas. Accumulations of seaweed along the tideline may also contain significant prey resources for waders. The quality of feeding areas is susceptible to change due to operations undertaken both within and outside the ASSI that may result in pollution or deterioration 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, as at high tide. Some of these roosts may lie outside the ASSI. Undisturbed roosts are particularly important during severe winter weather. Wildfowl usually roost on open water, while waders tend to use islands or isolated headlands. The variety of habitats present within the ASSI should be managed in order to safeguard the wintering waterbird population.

Specific objectives include:

As feeding habitats, including beaches, mudflats and shellfish beds, are critical to the birds well-being, Environment and Heritage Service would not wish to see any operations undertaken that would reduce either their area or the food resources they hold for wintering waterbirds.

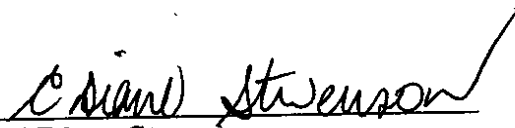
Environment and Heritage Service would wish to see disturbance minimised around known roost sites, especially those used by birds at high tide and also at frequently used feeding areas.

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 such as Common Cord-grass.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the main habitats, such as open water, swamp, scrub and woodland, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats are often very important for wildlife, especially invertebrates.


E Diane Stevenson
Authorised Officer

Dated the 01st of February 2008