

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT RUNKERRY, COUNTY ANTRIM. ARTICLE 24 OF THE NATURE CONSERVATION AND AMENITY LANDS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1985.

The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland (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 flora and physiographical 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 'Runkerry Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

Runkerry strand is a 1.2 km long, northwest-orientated beach, bounded by basalt headlands and occupies a fault-controlled bay. The River Bush enters the sea at the south - western end of the bay.

The site is of particular geomorphological interest as it is the highest energy beach in Northern Ireland. Many of the physical features produced in this setting are of textbook quality, particularly since the beach describes almost the entire range of states from dissipative to reflective. It is of international importance as a site in which natural beach changes can be readily demonstrated. It is also one of the few strongly river-influenced systems along the north coast, the River Bush supplying some terrestrial sediment to the system.

A wide range of features are present both within the bay and on the beach including beach cusps, rip current channels, longshore rip feeder channels, giant cusps and migratory transverse and crescentic nearshore bars.

The majority of sediment in this system is stored in the dunes to the rear of the beach. This means that the long-term balance of this area depends on the uninterrupted exchange of material between the bay, beach and dunes. There is a lack of fresh sediment input to the beach zone, with processes therefore operating in conditions of scarcity leading to occasional erosion of upper beach and dune materials, which are then reworked by the sea but retained within the system.

The beach undergoes marked seasonal changes between dissipative conditions, during which most sediment is stored offshore as bars. These bars dissipate wave energy and protect the beach from high-energy winter storms. In summer, a more reflective profile generally develops in response to lower wave energy. Under such conditions most sediment is stored on the beach which reaches its maximum extent and results in wave energy being reflected back into the bay. The transformation between the two states is marked by a succession of intermediate states, which match predicted beach models.

The dune system at Runkerry is largely inactive and is perched on older gravels and glacial sediments. The southern end of the dunes exhibit two large blowouts with associated blow-over chutes.

While the dunes are generally stable, a small zone of mobile and semi-mobile dune is present. The former is characterised by the presence of Sand Couch *Elytrigia juncea* together with Marram *Ammophila arenaria*, while the latter is dominated by tussocks of Marram with frequent Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*. Herbs include Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*. Damper natural depressions within the site are principally dominated by bryophytes, notably a carpet of the moss *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*. Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria* and Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* are also frequent in this setting.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and physiological 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 ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including rock, sand, gravel and peat.
2. Introduction of grazing.
3. Application of manure, slurry or artificial fertiliser.
4. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill any form of wild plant, other than plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
5. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraphs 4 or 5 above.
6. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for
 - i) plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
 - ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which a consent is not required under paragraph 3 above.
7. The release into the area of any animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice) or plant. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates; 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore.
8. Burning.
9. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.

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

11. Operations or activities which would affect wetlands (including rivers, streams and open water), e.g.

- i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
- ii) modification to the structure of any watercourse;
- iii) lowering of the water-table, permanently or temporarily;
- iv) change in the management of bank-side vegetation;
- v) changes in field drainage or boundary field drainage.

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

- i) educational activities;
- ii) research activities;
- iii) recreational activities;
- iv) exercising of animals.

13. 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.

14. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage the physiographical features of the area.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment for
Northern Ireland on 20 JANUARY 1999



ROBERT C. MARTIN
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.
- (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.