

## DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

## DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT STRANGFORD LOUGH (PART 1), COUNTY DOWN. 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 Committee for Nature Conservation and being satisfied that the area delineated by the solid black line on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora and fauna and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the "Strangford Lough (Part 1) area of special scientific interest".

Strangford Lough as a whole is one of the largest sea-loughs in Northern Ireland, and possesses a landscape of drowned drumlins and raised beach terraces which have been shaped by the Quaternary glaciation. The drumlins display various stages of wave erosion, with a number of them reduced to rocky islets and reefs, known locally as "pladdies". The intertidal zone covers approximately 50 km<sup>2</sup> and the diversity of the marine habitats is internationally renowned. The many different intertidal habitats are identifiable on the basis of substrate type and wave exposure with each one supporting a characteristic range of species; no comparable area in Northern Ireland has so wide a range of either habitats or species. There are a number of species of interest because they are near the northern (e.g. Diodora apertura (Keyhole Limpet), Elysia viridis (a sea slug), Cereus pedunculatus (Daisy Anemone)) or southern (e.g. Acmaea tessulata (Tortoise-shell Limpet), Leptasterias mulleri (a starfish)) extremes of their ranges. The richness of the marine flora and fauna can largely be attributed to physiographical features resulting in the immense tidal flow through The Narrows, the range and timing of the tidal variations in the Lough and the wide variety of substrates which occur. The lough as a whole represents a unique and extremely complex, integrated system.

The Strangford Lough (Part 1) Area of Special Scientific Interest includes extensive mudflats and also sandflats, saltmarsh and rocky intertidal habitat. The mudflats support luxuriant beds of eelgrass; Zostera noltii, Zostera angustifolia, Zostera marina and Ruppia maritima are all present, with the latter widespread but quite local in its distribution. Such extensive 'beds' are rare in the British Isles. The intertidal mudflats (particularly the Zostera beds) are of great importance as feeding areas for wintering wildfowl and waders. The lough overall supports internationally important numbers of wintering wildfowl (maximum >20,000 birds in 1986/87) and waders (maximum >37,500 birds in 1986/87). Up to 40% of the world population of the Pale-bellied Brent Goose (Branta bernicla hrota) occurs on the lough in early winter and most favour the mudflats in the Part 1 area. The numbers of Shelduck (Tadorna tadorna), Redshank (Tringa totanus), Knot (Calidris canutus) and Wigeon (Anas penelope) are all of international importance, and several other species occur in large numbers.

The sandflats and mudflats are especially productive in terms of invertebrate infauna. The clean sand areas support large populations of the bivalve molluscs Tellina tenuis (Thin Tellin) and Cerastoderma edule (Edible Cockle), whilst in the more muddy/gravel areas the community is dominated by Scrobicularia plana (Peppery Furrow Shell).

The relatively extensive areas of estuarine saltmarsh at and around the mouth of the Comber River can be considered of importance because this is a rare habitat in Northern Ireland. A typical assemblage of saltmarsh plants and communities

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occur here, with a pioneer zone of Glasswort (Salicornia spp.) giving way to vegetation dominated by the Common Saltmarsh Grass (Puccinellia maritima) either in effectively mono-dominant stands or in mixed communities with Sea Lavender (Limonium humile), Sea Aster (Aster tripolium), Sea Arrow-grass (Triglochin maritima) and Sea Pink (Armeria maritima). At higher levels, the community is replaced by one which contains Red Fescue (Festuca rubra) and Saltmarsh Rush (Juncus gerardii) as co-dominants and occasionally fringed by stands of Common Reed (Phragmites australis).

The rocky intertidal zone is limited within the Part 1 area; a habitat which is unique within Northern Ireland occurs in stretches of shore at or around extreme low water spring tides (E.L.W.S.) off South Island. This is an unusually stable intertidal habitat consisting of cobbles interspersed with occasional larger boulders lightly but firmly embedded in coarse sand and gravel. In this habitat there are exceptional growths of many sponge (Porifera) and sea-squirt (Tunicata) species, interspersed with various tube-dwelling worms (Annelida). The diversity of the associated herbivores and detritivores is considerable.

In summer the islands and surrounding lands provide valuable nesting grounds for a variety of birds. Four species of Tern occur in important concentrations, most notably Common Tern (Sterna hirundo) and Sandwich Tern (Sterna sandvicensis), with over 20% and over 40% respectively of the total Irish breeding populations. Within the area, important colonies are found on Ogilby, Black Rock, Sheelah, Boretrees and Gabbock islands.

Strangford Lough is the most important breeding site in Ireland for the Common Seal (Phoca vitulina); North Boretree Rock which is located within the Part 1 area supports one of the largest colonies. Many of the low-lying rocky islands and reefs are regularly used as hauling out sites. Small numbers of Grey Seal (Halichoerus grypus) and Otters (Lutra lutra) also occur.

#### SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area and require prior notification to and permission from the Department:-

- Cultivation, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing or re-seeding.
- Changes in the grazing regime, including changes in type of livestock or significant increase or decrease in livestock population, or changes in the seasonal pattern of grazing or cessation of grazing.
- Changes in livestock feeding practice.
- Changes in the mowing or cutting regime, including changes from hay making to silage cutting, or cessation of mowing.
- Application of manure, slurry, fertilisers or lime.
- Application of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill, selectively or non-selectively, any form of animal, plant or other living organism.
- Dumping, spreading or discharge of any matter.

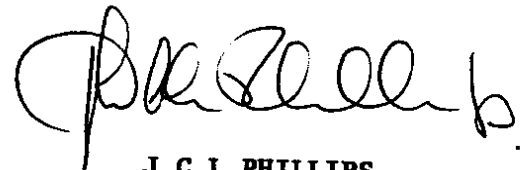
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- Burning.
- The release into the area of any wild, feral or domestic animal, plant, or seed. "Animal" includes any mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish or invertebrate but does not include livestock.
- The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains.
- Changes in tree or woodland management (including, afforestation, planting, clear and selective felling, thinning, coppicing, modification of the stand or underwood, changes in species composition).
- Drainage, including the use of mole, tile, tunnel or other artificial drains.
- Modification of the structure of water courses (for example, rivers, burns, springs, ditches, drains), including their banks and beds such as by realignment, regrading or dredging.
- Management of aquatic or bank vegetation.
- The alteration of water levels or water tables or utilisation of water (including storage or abstraction).
- Infilling of ditches, drains, ponds, pools, marshes or pits.
- Changes in coastal fishing practice, and changes in fisheries management, and changes in the use of traps or fish cages.
- Collection of sea food or marine organisms.
- Reclamation of land from sea, estuary, marsh, lake or river.
- Bait digging in intertidal areas.
- Erection of sea defences or coast protection works including cliff or landslip drainage or stabilisation measures.
- Extraction of minerals including shingle, sand, gravel, topsoil, sub-soil, or shells.
- Construction, removal or destruction of roads, tracks, walls, fences, hard-standings, banks, ditches or other earthworks or the laying, maintenance or removal of pipelines or cables, above or below ground.
- Storage of materials.
- Erection of permanent or temporary structures or the undertaking of building, engineering or other operations, including drilling, or the formation of access roads.
- Alteration or modification of natural or man-made features, (including clearance of boulders, large stones, loose rock or scree, infilling of pits or quarries).

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- Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife.
- Recreational, educational or research activities likely to damage the wildlife.
- Changes in game or waterfowl management or hunting practices.
- Exercising of animals in areas where they are likely to disturb or damage the wildlife.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of the Environment for  
Northern Ireland on 24 February, 1988



J C L PHILLIPS  
Assistant Secretary

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