

DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT THE MAIDENS, COUNTY ANTRIM. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.

The Department of the Environment (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area delineated and described 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 'The Maidens Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

The Maidens consist of two small islands (the West and East Maidens) and a series of rock platforms which dry out at low water. They are formed of an igneous rock known as dolerite which appears to take the form of a series of massive intrusions in to older rocks. The latter has been eroded away leaving the dolerite exposed both above and below the sea.

The Maidens are of importance for their breeding European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* colony, seal population (both Common seal *Phoca vitulina* and Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* and a range of intertidal rock communities. The Maidens are a series of off-shore islands off the eastern coast of Co. Antrim.

At the time of the Seabird 2000 survey, The Maidens had 97 occupied nests of European Shag *Phalacrocorax aristotelis* which represents 2.6% of the all-Ireland population and 32.2% of the Northern Ireland population for this species. The site also supports small populations of Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, Herring Gull *L. argentatus* and Great Black-backed Gull *L. marinus*. Black Guillemot *Cephus grylle* also breed within the designated area.

Both Common Seal *Phoca vitulina* and Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* are present. Recent counts indicate a population of some 20 Common Seal and 60 Grey Seal. Pups of both species have been recorded. The Maidens provides a range of habitat types for seals. West Maiden provides permanently dry rock which is ideal for pupping while the islets and reefs, exposed at low water, offers opportunities for feeding or moulting.

Due to the remoteness and lack of accessibility these islands provide a safe sanctuary for the seal community and represent the only truly remote and undisturbed location within Northern Ireland's suite of ASSI's for these species.

The Maidens is also notable for its intertidal rock communities. The intertidal area is generally rather narrow, and is dominated by bedrock with wave-cut platforms. Most of the site is very exposed with reduced species diversity which is characteristic of a site of this exposed nature. However, there are localised pockets of shelter with moderate furoid cover (Spiral Wrack *Fucus spiralis* and the Toothed Wreck *Fucus serratus*)

The Maidens is notable for the following biotopes, which are typical of an exposed rocky shore: Yellow and Grey Lichens, *Verrucaria maura*, *Chthamalus spp*, *Alaria esculenta* and *Laminaria digitata*.

The area is characterised by an upper splash zone dominated by the lichen *Verrucaria maura*. Many of the exposed mid-shore rocks are dominated by the Common limpet *Patella vulgata* and there is a zone in the lower eulittoral zone dominated by the red algae *Mastocarpus stellatus*. Common invertebrates include the Periwinkles *Littorina saxatilis* and *L. mariae*, the Dog Whelk *Nucella lapillus* and the Beadlet Anemone *Actinia equina*. The brown algae Oarweed *Laminaria digitata* and Dabberlocks *Alaria esculenta* typify lower shores.

Due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the site it is not affected by the usual anthropogenic factors such as, winkle pickers, bait diggers, dog walkers and horse riders.

SCHEDULE

The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the seabird colonies:

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land, including reclamation and extraction of minerals, including sand and gravel.
2. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material.
3. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for:
 - i. plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
 - ii. normal cutting regimes for which consent is not required under paragraph 2 above.
4. 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.
5. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.

6. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
7. The killing or taking of any wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 17, 20, 21 and 22 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
8. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area:
 - i. Educational activities;
 - ii. Research activities;
 - iii. Recreational activities.
9. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.
10. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

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.
- (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.

THE MAIDENS

Views About Management

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

A statement of Northern Ireland Environment Agency views about the management of The Maidens Area of Special Scientific Interest (“the ASSI”)

This statement represents the views of Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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. Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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 Northern Ireland Environment Agency is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 2 and 3 for a list of these operations and activities). Northern Ireland Environment Agency 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

Remote areas of coastline are scarce in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would seek to ensure appropriate management of the area for breeding seabirds, seals and the intertidal rock habitat interests at The Maidens.

Seabird colony and habitat interests

The suitability of the site for breeding seabirds is largely dependent on its physical structure. This determines the availability of nest sites and may reduce the vulnerability of nests to predators. It is therefore important that the physical integrity of the site is maintained as far as is possible, taking into account natural processes.

Disturbance may affect the breeding success of seabirds with eggs and young birds particularly vulnerable to accidental damage if adults are startled. . The source of such disturbance can originate both from the land and the sea. Exceptional activities near the colony, including particularly noisy activities, should be avoided during the breeding season (April – July).

Care should be taken regarding any activities which affect the naturalness of the various vegetation communities.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of the seabird colony and associated habitat through sensitive management of the site.

On West Maiden, the various abandoned buildings also provide nest sites for breeding birds. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage recognition of this role in relation to any future activities relating to these.

Specific objectives include:

No rock or mineral extraction should be carried out within the site.

Do not undertake exceptional activities near the colony which could disturb the birds during the breeding season

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimized

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

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 emersion. Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of littoral 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. Natural processes, such as erosion and collapse of cliffs, should be allowed to proceed freely. It is important that management aims to maintain good water quality and sediment quality.

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

Specific objectives for the intertidal rock include:

Management should aim to minimize the damage caused by recreation activities on rocky shores and in the subtidal area as these may affect the biota due to disturbance, i.e. trampling or shellfish and/or invertebrate collection or by recreational sub aqua diving.

Water quality should be managed as sewage discharge or oil pollution may affect reef communities, particularly due to increased turbidity, reducing algal communities, or siltation, smothering animal communities.

Minimise the extraction of marine aggregates from near-shore gravel beds.

Management should aim to minimise the removal of species through unregulated bait digging, shellfish gathering and seaweed collection which can lead to damage or loss of communities and substratum.

Modification of natural or man-made features, such as the clearance of boulders, large stones and algae should be discouraged.

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Encourage sustainable fishing practices and the development of possible non disturbance zones.

Aim to minimize the impact of the construction and operation of long sea outfalls.

Discourage the accidental or deliberate introduction of 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 intertidal rock, such as sediment shores and mudflats through sensitive management.

Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance of good water quality through the control of pollution and artificial enrichment.

Encourage the production and implementation of coastal zone management plans, including nature conservation objectives.

Common and Grey Seal

Both Common Seal *Phoca vitulina* and Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus* are found all around the coastline of Northern Ireland. Haul out areas are required for pupping during June and July (Common Seal) and September to November (Grey Seal). Such areas also serve as resting sites throughout the year, particularly during the respective moulting periods.

Sheltered reefs and rocks are the preferred haul out areas, 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.

Where seal haul outs occur Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the maintenance and conservation of the surrounding marine habitat to support the seal population.

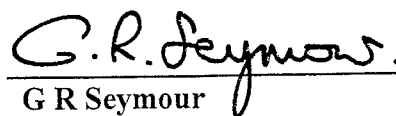
Northern Ireland Environment Agency would encourage the effective management of activities which cause disturbance through the provision of seal refuges and the adoption of good practice guides by different user groups through education.

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, winkle pickers and boats to the vicinity of haul outs should be restricted where possible.

The use of crafts and vehicles associated with aquaculture has the potential to cause disturbance to seals, especially during breeding, pupping and moulting seasons and should thus be minimised.

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

Sealed with the Official Seal of the
Department of the Environment
hereunto affixed is authenticated
by



G R Seymour
Senior Officer of the
Department of the Environment

Dated the 21st of September 2009