

Second Cycle North Eastern River Basin Management Plan

Water Dependent Features of Natura 2000 sites (SACs, SCIs and SPAs) in the North Eastern River Basin District.

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An Agency within the Department of the
Environment
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1 Introduction

Natura 2000 sites are Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive, and also incorporate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) designate under the 1979 Birds Directive. SACs contain rare European habitats and SPAs contain rare European bird species and are assessed as being in either favourable or unfavourable condition. Sites of Community Importance (SCI) are precursors for SACs.

Where Natura 2000 sites are failing their conservation objectives, NIEA has identified the actions that need to be taken to achieve them. Actions necessary to avoid deterioration of the areas supporting designated habitats and species have also been identified.

Very often a Natura 2000 site lies within a water body and where this occurs the WFD status objectives apply in addition to the requirement to maintain the site at favourable conservation status or restore it to that status.

In 2012 the UK government agreed that a set of principles should be designed to provide a combined approach for expressing the conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites and WFD classification, where water bodies comprise or are part of the area. The potential benefit of the use of same set of standards for WFD status objectives and Natura 2000 objectives is the better alignment of standards and objectives in terms of simplifying management, assisting communication and a reduction in regulatory complexity.

In May 2013, each Devolved Administration and its respective Agencies were tasked with developing an approach for these over-arching objectives at a regional level. Although further work is still required to finalise the approach, a number of recommendations have been decided and will be subject to confirmation once the updated Common Standards Monitoring (CSM) guidance, used to monitor the condition of Natura 2000 sites, is published.

Water bodies are the basic management units for reporting and assessing compliance with the Directive's environmental objectives. For the first river basin plan in 2009 size thresholds taken from the Directive were used to delineate surface water bodies (rivers, lakes,

transitional and coastal). During the first cycle we have been able to improve on our water body sets through better understanding of catchment characteristics and increased knowledge through river walks, routine monitoring and targeted LMA investigation work. This has resulted in a reduction of the number of water bodies in Northern Ireland, from 575 river water bodies to 450, but the total area covered by the Plan is not affected.

The tables presented in the following sections are an update of the Natura 2000 site condition as reported in the 2009 river basin plan which also stated how many water bodies were failing to achieve good status within the designated site.

In the First Cycle Plan (2009) in the North Eastern River Basin District there was a total of 21 water dependent Natura 2000 sites. Of these sites 38% were favourable, 57% were unfavourable and 5% were yet to be assessed. Since then 3 additional Special Protection Areas have been designated and 3 Sites of Community Importance. This now means that as of 2015 there are a total of 27 water dependent Natura 2000 sites, 56% of which are favourable and 44% are unfavourable.

2 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in the North Eastern River Basin District

2.1 Rathlin Island SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Unfavourable | 1 | 1 | Submerged or partially submerged sea caves; annual vegetation of drift lines; reefs; sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts | Reefs | Stony reefs on the east coast impacted by mobile fishing gear | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Voluntary ban in place. DARD considering making this a closed area to mobile gear |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.2 North Antrim Coast SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|--|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 1 | 2 | Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes"); annual vegetation of drift lines; Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima</i>); vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts; land snail (<i>Vertigo angustior</i>) | Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes") Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts | Under-grazing Under-grazing and invasive species (including bracken and scrub) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Features are improving but still unfavourable |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.3 Breen Wood SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 1 | 1 | Bog Woodland | Bog Woodland | Over-grazing (including deer browsing) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Woodland recovery can take a great number of years before recovery can be measured |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.4 Garry Bog SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Favourable | 2 | 1 | Active raised bogs | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.5 Turmennan SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|-----------------------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 1 | 1 | Transition mires and quaking bogs | Transition mires and quaking bogs | Water quality (including silt, water pollution (direct or diffuse), run-off, nutrient enrichment, eutrophication. Invasive species (including bracken and scrub). Potential impact of groundwater. | Please refer to Programme of Measures on the website | Agri-environment Schemes are in place |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.6 Hollymount SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Unfavourable | 2 | 1 | Alluvial forests with <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> and <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> (<i>Alno-Padion</i> , <i>Alnion incanae</i> , <i>Salicion albae</i>) | All features | Invasive species (including bracken or scrub) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Under NIEA ownership/management and features are starting to improve but not as yet at a significant level |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.7 Lecale Fens SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 3 | 3 | Alkaline fens | Alkaline fens | Under-grazing. Water quality (including silt, water pollution (direct or diffuse), run-off, nutrient enrichment, eutrophication etc) and water quantity. Potential impact of groundwater. | Please refer to Programme of Measures on the website | Active NIEA local management agreements are in place for grazing |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.8 Strangford Lough SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|--|---|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 11 | 11 | Coastal lagoons; Large shallow inlets and bays; annual vegetation of drift lines; Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Piccinellietalia maritimae</i>); Mudflats and sand flats not covered by seawater at low tide; Perennial vegetation of stony banks <i>Phoca vitulina</i> Reefs; <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand | <p>Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Piccinellietalia maritimae</i>)</p> <p><i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand Reefs</p> <p>Perennial vegetation of stony banks</p> | <p>Invasive species <i>Spartina anglica</i></p> <p>Invasive species <i>Spartina anglica</i></p> <p>Game or fisheries horse mussel management (e.g. Introduction of stock at too high a level, over-zealous cutting of river banks, bait digging)</p> <p>Agricultural operations (e.g. Ploughing, fertiliser, pesticides)</p> | <p>No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition .</p> <p>Please refer to Programme of Measures for aquatic alien species on the website</p> <p>Please refer to Programme of Measures on the website</p> | <p><i>Spartina</i> control programme management</p> <p><i>Spartina</i> control programme management</p> <p>There are specific actions to address this problem in the specifically developed horse mussel action plans.</p> |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.9 Murlough SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 9 | 7 | Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (<i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i>); Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes"); Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>); <i>Euphryas aurinia</i> ; <i>Hypodryas</i> ; Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide; <i>Phoca vitulina</i> ; Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time | Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (<i>Calluno-Ulicetea</i>) Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes") Atlantic salt meadows (<i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i>) | Invasive species (including bracken or scrub) and under grazing Invasive species (including bracken or scrub) and under-grazing Invasive species (including bracken or scrub) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Agri-environment schemes in place |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.10 Ballykilbeg SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 1 | 1 | Marsh fritillary butterfly | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.11 Aughnadarragh SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 2 | 1 | Marsh fritillary butterfly | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.12 Eastern Mourne SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|---|--|--|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 4 | 4 | Blanket bogs; Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> | Blanket bogs Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> | Over-grazing (including deer browsing) Over-grazing (including deer browsing) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | There are indications that the site is improving. Agri-environment Schemes are in place |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

2.13 Garron Plateau SAC

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|--|--|--|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 3 | 2 | Blanket bogs; <i>Saxifraga hirculus</i> ; Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters; Transition mires and quaking bogs | Blanket bogs Marsh saxifrage (<i>Saxifraga hirculus</i>) Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i> | Over-grazing (including deer browsing) Over-grazing (including deer browsing) Over-grazing (including deer browsing) | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Agri-environment Schemes and a Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMPNI) with NI Water are in place to help address all features. |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

3 Sites of Community Importance (SCI) in the North Eastern River Basin District

3.1 Red Bay SCI

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 0 | Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater at all times which are composed of maerl, sub-fossil maerl, coarse sands, gravels and cobbles. | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

3.2 Skerries and Causeway SCI

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 1 | Submerged or partially submerged sea caves; Reefs; Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Harbour porpoise | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

3.3 The Maidens SCI

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 0 | Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time; Reefs; Grey seal | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4 Special Protection Areas (SPA) in the North Eastern River Basin District

4.1 Belfast Lough SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 6 | 5 | Redshank | Redshank | | No specific measures for water dependent features as no water quality related activities are causing condition | Reasons for decline uncertain and investigations are required |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.2 Killough Harbour SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 1 | 0 | Light-bellied Brent Goose | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.3 Larne Lough SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 3 | 3 | Common tern; Roseate tern; Sandwich tern; Light-bellied Brent Goose | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.4 Swan Island SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 1 | Common tern; Roseate tern; Sandwich tern; Light-bellied Brent Goose | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.5 Outer Ards SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 5 | 4 | Arctic tern; Golden Plover; Light-bellied Brent Goose; Ringed Plover; Turnstone | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Appropriate management prescriptions and refined site objectives required |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.6 Rathlin Island SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Unfavourable | 1 | 1 | Guillemot; Peregrine; Razorbill; Seabird assemblage | Peregrine | Investigation ongoing | | RSPB has begun an eradication programme for rats and feral ferrets. Urgent investigation required on herring gull and puffin populations |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.7 Strangford Lough SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|--|--|--|--|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Favourable | Favourable | 11 | 13 | Bar-tailed Godwit; Golden Plover; Knot; Light-bellied Brent Goose; Redshank; Shell duck; Water bird assemblage | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.8 Antrim Hills SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|--|--|--|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Assessed | Favourable | 8 | 8 | Hen Harrier; Merlin | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.9 Belfast Lough Open Water SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 2 | Great Crested Grebe | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.10 Copeland Islands SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|---|---|---|----------|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Not Declared | Favourable | N/A | 0 | Arctic tern and Manx Shearwater | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | Not applicable: feature in favourable condition | |

* Based on current 575 water bodies ** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies

4.11 Sheep Island SPA

| 2009 Condition status | 2014 Condition status | Number of water bodies at less than good status | | Designated water dependent habitats/species | Feature(s) not meeting objective | Reason for not meeting objective | Action required | Comments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--------|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| | | 2009* | 2015** | | | | | |
| Unfavourable | Unfavourable | 0 | 1 | Cormorant | Cormorant | | | Programme required to investigate potential nest predators, possible human disturbance and the status of local fish stocks. |

* Based on current 575 water bodies

** Based on second cycle 450 water bodies