Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for Central Fladen Nature Conservation Marine Protected Area

December 2020

JNCC

jncc.gov.uk

What the conservation advice package includes

The information provided in this document sets out JNCC's current view of the site's condition, the conservation benefits which the site can provide and the measures required to support achievement of the site's conservation objectives. This forms part of JNCC's formal conservation advice package for the site and must be read in conjunction with all parts of the package as listed below:

- Background Document explaining where to find the advice package, JNCC's role in the provision of conservation advice, how the advice has been prepared, when to refer to it and how to apply it;
- Conservation Objectives setting out the broad ecological aims for the site;
- Statements on:
    - the site's protected feature condition;
    - conservation benefits that the site can provide; and
    - conservation measures needed to further the conservation objectives stated for the site. This includes information on those human activities that, if taking place within or near the site, can impact it and hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the site (this document); and
- Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) providing more detailed and site-specific information on the conservation objectives.

The most up-to-date conservation advice for this site can be downloaded from the conservation advice tab in the Site Information Centre (SIC) on JNCC's website.

Conservation benefits

By maintaining or achieving favourable condition for the protected features, the site will contribute to delivering:

- Strategic objectives and policies within Scotland's National Marine Plan, particularly 5 (climate change) and 9 (natural heritage);
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's Big Step 6 (Marine and coastal ecosystems restored) Priority Project 12 (Increase environmental status of our seas);
- A network of MPAs around the UK, as outlined under the UK Marine & Coastal Access Act (2009) (Section 123) of relevance to Scotland;

- An ecologically coherent network of MPAs which are well managed under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-east Atlantic, (OSPAR Convention), specifically OSPAR region: II Greater North Sea; and
- Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy.

This site has been designated to protect Burrowed mud (specifically sea-pens and burrowing megafauna and examples of tall sea-pens). A geomorphological feature known as a Sub-glacial tunnel valley is also protected, which represents part of the Fladen Deeps Key Geodiversity Area. Burrowed mud is a Priority Marine Feature and is included on the OSPAR list of Threatened and/or Declining habitats & species.

This site provides conservation benefits to the wider marine environment and society by affording protection to Burrowed mud and its associated species and consequently the provision of the following ecosystem services:

- Nutrition: Different sediment types offer habitat for breeding and feeding for various commercial species, which in turn are prey for larger marine species, including birds and mammals;
- Bird and whale watching: Foraging seals, cetaceans and seabirds may also be found in greater numbers near some Subtidal sedimentary habitats due to the common occurrence of prey for the birds and mammals; and
- Climate regulation: Providing a long-term sink for carbon within sedimentary habitats.

Managing activities that affect the protected features of the site to conserve them at, or recover them to, favourable condition, will support provision of ecosystem services and help fulfil the policy obligations listed above.

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC's view on the overall condition of the site's protected features based on our understanding of the feature. In summary, a feature is considered to be in unfavourable condition either where evidence indicates it needs to be recovered or where recovery is not considered to be possible through human intervention. Conversely, a feature is considered to be in favourable condition where evidence indicates it is not being adversely affected.

Table 1. JNCC's view on the condition of the protected features in the site.

Protected feature	View of condition
Burrowed mud	Unfavourable
Sub-glacial tunnel valley representative of the Fladen Deeps Key Geodiversity Area	Favourable

The conservation measures listed below set out JNCC's view as to which, if any, human activities may require additional management to conserve or recover the features within the site.

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 above, the Burrowed mud needs to be recovered to favourable condition.

Using evidence available about the site and information contained within the Feature Activity Sensitivity Tool (FeAST), we consider that the activities listed below are capable of significantly affecting the qualifying features of the site. These activities should be managed to conserve the Burrowed mud by minimising associated pressures:

- mobile demersal fishing.

As set out in Table 1, the Sub-glacial tunnel valley feature representative of the Fladen Deeps Key Geodiversity Area is considered to be in favourable condition. Based on best available evidence, JNCC do not consider that activities taking place are capable of affecting this protected feature. However, this does not preclude the need for management in the future.

Management of the site should be informed by the sensitivity of protected features to pressures associated with human activities. The Feature Activity Sensitivity Tool (FeAST), provides an initial assessment of whether a proposed plan or project (or ongoing activity) may have an impact on a protected feature in the site. FeAST identifies pressures associated with the most commonly occurring marine activities, and provides a detailed assessment of feature sensitivity to these pressures. A human activity is considered capable of affecting, other than insignificantly, a feature where the feature is known to be sensitive to associated pressures. The sensitivity assessments provided in FeAST, should be used at an early stage of a plan or project when considering potential impacts of an activity.

The simple presence of such human activities would not necessarily significantly affect the site were they to occur. FeAST should be used in conjunction with the specific details of a proposed plan or project (e.g. indirect and/or additive impacts, activity duration, time of year, scale etc.) and the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) to develop assessments of impacts to features within the site. You may also find the information available in the Activities and Management tab of the site's Site Information Centre useful.