Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for Braemar Pockmarks Special Area of Conservation

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 qualifying feature condition;
    - conservation benefits that the site can provide; and
    - conservation measures needed to support achievement of the conservation objectives set for the site (this document);
- Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) providing more detailed and site-specific information on the conservation objectives; and
- Advice on Operations providing information on those human activities that, if taking place within or near the site, can affect it and present a risk to the achievement of 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 qualifying feature: Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases, 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;

- Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases in the Northern North Sea.
    - Favourable Conservation Status of habitats of European importance, including Submarine structures made by leaking gases is one of the aims of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (Habitats Directive) as transposed into the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017);
- An ecological network of areas of special conservation interest under the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention);
- 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 Region;
- Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy; and
- Resilience of the UK's network of marine protected areas and wider marine biodiversity to impacts of climate change (2013 EU Guidance[1]).

This site has been designated because it holds an excellent example of the Annex I habitat Submarine structures made by leaking gases in a European context. In this location, large blocks, pavements slabs and smaller fragments of Methane-Derived Authigenic[2] Carbonate (MDAC) have been identified. These carbonate structures provide a habitat for a diverse range of marine fauna.

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

- Climate regulation - The observation of chemosynthetic bacterial mats across multiple surveys indicates active gas seepage. Chemosynthetic organisms metabolise natural gas and its derivatives including methane – serving to contribute to the regulation of climate. The Methane-Derived Authigenic Carbonate (MDAC) structures themselves are storage units of methane, being derived from the anaerobic oxidation of methane; and

[1] 2013 EU Guidelines on Climate Change and Natura 2000. Dealing with the impact of climate change on the management of the Natura 2000 Network of areas of high biodiversity value. Available here: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/climatechange/pdf/Guidance%20document.pdf
[2] An authigenic sedimentary rock deposit is one that was generated where it is found or observed. Sedimentary authigenic minerals include calcium carbonate.

- Nutrition - by providing a habitat for a variety of fauna, including commercially important fish such as cod, monk-fish, haddock, wolf-fish and conger eel.

Further detail on ecosystem services which the site can provide are available in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) under the structure and function attribute.

Managing activities that affect the qualifying feature of the site to maintain it at or restore it to, favourable condition, will support the site's provision of the benefits and delivery of obligations listed above.

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC's view on the overall condition of the site's qualifying feature. This view is based on information provided in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO).

The SACO sets out our understanding of the feature's attributes which are listed in the conservation objectives . In summary, a feature is in unfavourable condition either where evidence indicates one or more of its attributes need to be restored or where restoration is not considered to be possible through human intervention. Conversely, a feature is in favourable condition where evidence indicates none of the attributes are being adversely affected. To understand JNCC's view on condition you will need to refer to the SACO for this site.

Table 1. JNCC's view on the condition of the qualifying feature in the site.

Protected feature	View of condition
Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases	Unfavourable – noting it is not considered feasible to restore some of the feature's attributes using management intervention.

The conservation measures listed below set out JNCC's view as to which, if any, human activities require management to maintain the feature within the site.

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 above, the Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases need to be restored to favourable condition where feasible to do so. Please see the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives for more detail. Using evidence available about the site and information contained within the Advice on Operations for this site, we consider that the activity listed below is capable of significantly affecting the qualifying feature of the site.

This activity should be managed to restore the Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases by reducing or removing associated pressures:

- Demersal trawling.

Management of the site should be informed by the sensitivity of protected features to pressures associated with human activities. The Advice on Operations 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. The Advice on Operations 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 a feature where the feature is known to be sensitive to associated pressures. The sensitivity assessments provided in the Advice on Operations workbook and the guidance within, 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. Advice on Operations 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 site-specific Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives 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.