

Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for Dogger Bank Special Area of Conservation

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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 features 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 section in the [Site Information Centre](#) (SIC) on JNCC's website.

Conservation benefits

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

- Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time in the Greater North Sea.
 - this 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 Greater North Sea (OSPAR Convention);
- 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](#)).

Dogger Bank is the largest single continuous expanse of shallow sandbank in UK waters and a unique example of a relict sandbank formed by glacial processes in UK waters.

Despite its location in open sea, Dogger Bank lies in relatively shallow water, with parts lying in less than 20m depth. This exposes the bank to substantial wave energy, preventing the colonisation of sand by vegetation on the shallower parts of the bank. The bank extends into both Dutch and German waters. It is home to a variety of species which live both on and within the sandy sediment such as flat fish and sand eels; the latter can be found on the sides of the sandbank and are a key prey item for many seabirds, whales and dolphins and fish such as cod. The Dogger Bank MPA overlaps with a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) that has been identified for the protection of [Harbour porpoise](#) (*Phocoena phocoena*). You can find more information about the Southern North Sea SAC in the [Site Information Centre](#).

This site provides conservation benefits to the wider marine environment and society by affording protection to a range of seabed habitat types and their associated species and consequently the provision of the following ecosystem services. In summary:

- Nutrition: by providing a habitat for a variety of fauna, enhancing the availability of prey for commercially important fish species;
- Bird and whale watching: by providing a habitat for a variety of fauna, enhancing the availability of prey for seabirds and marine mammals; the Dogger Bank area is an important location for Harbour porpoise and grey and common seals are known to visit the bank.
- Climate regulation: by providing a long-term sink for carbon.

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 them at, or restore them to, favourable condition will support the site's provision of benefits and delivery against the obligations listed above.

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC's view on the overall condition of the site's qualifying features. This view is based on information provided in the [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 of the site.

Protected feature	View of condition
Annex 1 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time	Unfavourable

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

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 above, Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time, need to be restored to favourable condition. Please see the [SACO](#) for more detail. Using evidence available about the site and information contained within the [Advice on Operations](#) for this site, we consider that the activities listed below are capable of significantly affecting the qualifying feature of the site.

These activities should be managed to restore Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time, by reducing or removing associated pressures:

- Oil and gas industry, including decommissioning of existing activities;
- Aggregates;

- Cabling; and
- Renewable energy: planned associated activities should include the mitigation hierarchy appropriate [mitigation measures](#)

Activities that have been removed to restore Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time, by reducing or removing associated pressures resulting in no additional management requirements:

- [Demersal fishing](#)¹.

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 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 SACO to develop assessments of impacts to the feature within the site. This information is also available in the Activities and Management section of the [Site Information Centre](#).

¹The Marine Management Organisation has made the bylaw "Bank Special Area of Conservation (Specified Area) Bottom Towed Fishing Gea Bylaw 2022" that prohibits the use of bottom towed fishing gear, including demersal seines and semi-pelagic towed gear throughout the whole of the Dogger Bank SAC to protect the designated feature of the Dogger Bank SAC: sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time. The specified area includes a buffer zone to ensure that fishing activities taking place adjacent to the marine habitat do not negatively impact it.