

Conservation Objectives and Management Advice for the Pobie Bank Reef Special Area of Conservation UK0030385

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What the conservation advice package includes

The information provided in this document sets out:

- The conservation objectives for the qualifying feature of the site;
- The conservation benefits which the site can provide if managed effectively;
- JNCC and NatureScot's current view of qualifying feature condition; and
- The conservation measures that JNCC and NatureScot consider are required to support achievement of the site's conservation objectives.

This document forms part of JNCC and NatureScot's formal conservation advice package for the site and must be read in conjunction with:

- **Background document** explaining where to find the advice package, JNCC and NatureScot's role in the provision of conservation advice, how the advice has been prepared, when to refer to it and how it can be applied;
- **Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO)** providing more detailed and site-specific information on the conservation objectives of the qualifying feature of the site; and
- **Advice on Operations** providing information on those human activities that, if taking place within or near to the site, could impact it, adversely affecting the site's integrity and presenting a risk of not achieving the conservation objectives stated for the site.

The most up-to-date conservation advice package for this site can be downloaded from the [conservation advice section of the Site Information Centre](#) on JNCC's website.

Conservation objectives

This site has been designated to protect Annex I habitat [Reefs](#).

Reefs are included on the [OSPAR list of Threatened and/or Declining Habitats & Species](#) across the North-east Atlantic.

The conservation objectives for the Pobie Bank Reef SAC are:

For the qualifying feature Annex I habitat Reefs to be in favourable condition thus ensuring site integrity in the long term and contribution to Favourable Conservation Status. This is

achieved by maintaining or restoring as needed, subject to natural change, the qualifying feature's:

- Extent and distribution within the site;
- Structure and function within the site; and
- The supporting processes on which it relies.

Conservation benefits

Maintaining or restoring the qualifying feature of the site at or to favourable condition, will contribute to delivering:

- Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I habitat Reefs in the Northern North Sea region, which is a requirement set out in the [Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations, 2017](#).
- 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);
- An ecological network of areas of special conservation interest under the [Convention of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats](#) (Bern Convention)
- Good Environmental Status under the [UK Marine Strategy](#); and
- 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;
- Target 3 of [The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), known as the 30by30 target is a global commitment to effectively conserve and manage by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas through an ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective areas-based conservation measures.

The types of ecosystem services that can be provided by the qualifying feature of the site are listed below:

- 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;
- Climate regulation: by providing a long-term sink for carbon.

Managing activities to maintain the qualifying feature at, or restore it to, favourable condition, will support provision of ecosystem services and help fulfil the policy and legal obligations listed above.

Qualifying feature Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC and NatureScot’s view on the condition of the site’s qualifying feature. This view is based on JNCC and NatureScot’s assessment of qualifying feature condition using best available information at the time of writing and which is summarised in the SACO available from the [conservation advice section of the Site Information Centre](#) on JNCC’s website. The SACO sets out our understanding of the condition of a feature’s attributes as listed in the conservation objective for the site; extent and distribution, structure and function and supporting processes.

In summary, a qualifying feature is in unfavourable condition either where evidence indicates one or more of its attributes need to be restored. Conversely, a qualifying feature is in favourable condition where evidence indicates none of the attributes are being adversely affected.

Table 1. JNCC and NatureScot’s view on the condition of the qualifying feature in the site.

Qualifying feature	View of condition and qualifying feature objective
Annex I habitat Reefs	Unfavourable, restore to favourable condition

The conservation measures listed below set out JNCC and NatureScot’s advice regarding management which should be implemented to restore the qualifying feature of the site to or at favourable condition.

Conservation measures

Based on JNCC and NatureScot’s understanding of the pressures associated with human activities taking place within, or in close proximity to the site, and the sensitivity of the qualifying feature to those pressures, we conclude that the qualifying feature of the site need to be restored to a favourable condition.

JNCC and NatureScot advise the following conservation measures are adopted to support restoration to favourable condition and reduce the risk of the site not achieving its conservation objectives to the lowest possible level:

- **No new licensable activities capable of significantly impacting** (either directly or indirectly) the qualifying feature Annex I Reefs **should be permitted**. Significance should consider the spatial scale, duration and the relative ecological importance of the area impacted with respect to the site. Longer-lasting impacts to any of a feature's attributes listed in the site's conservation objectives; extent and distribution, structure and function or supporting processes, should be considered significant. Impacts to species considered key or influential to the feature or listed in the OSPAR Threatened and or Declining species list which are present within the feature, could be considered significant.
- To also avoid hindering the recovery of the qualifying feature, **variations to existing licenced activities** must seek, as far as is practicable to do so, to **avoid the introduction of additional hard substrata or subsea deposits** in areas where the qualifying feature Annex I Reefs is recorded within the site. The impact of variations to existing consented activities, are to be **considered on a case-by-case basis in consultation with JNCC and NatureScot**.
- Any new activities, whether located within or outwith the site, must look to avoid or, as far as is practicable to do so, **minimise the introduction of contaminants to ensure compliance with sedimentary and water Environmental Quality Standards** within the site.
- JNCC recognise that Marine Directorate have brought into force management to restore the Annex I Reefs qualifying feature of the site. The management prohibits demersal mobile gear across the majority of the site. Compliance with the management should support the recovery of the qualifying feature within the site from impacts associated with these gear types. As such, **bottom-towed fishing gear effort within the site should be monitored to ensure compliance**.
- Under normal operations, **pelagic gears** are not expected to interact with the qualifying feature of the site and therefore should not present a risk to the achievement of the conservation objectives of the site. **Therefore no additional management of this gear type is advised**.

- Although the use of **static bottom contact gear** is occurring within the site, it is unlikely that any additional management of these gears will be required, as the risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for Annex I Reefs associated with these activities is likely to be minimal. However, it is not possible to fully assess the degree of impact due to limitations around knowledge of the extent and intensity of the fishing activity itself, as well as the impact of this fishing type on the site's qualifying feature. **More scientific research and better fishing effort data is needed.** In the meantime, JNCC advises that **static gear fishing effort within the site is monitored** and the **effects of ongoing use on the conservation status of the qualifying feature is kept under review.** If monitoring shows evidence of detrimental effects at the scale of the conservation status of the qualifying feature, **additional management may need to be considered.**

The Advice on Operations for this site is accessible via the [conservation advice section of the Site Information Centre](#). It provides information on the sensitivity of the qualifying feature of the site to pressures associated with activities that JNCC and NatureScot consider may conceivably take place within, or in close proximity to, the site. This should be used when undertaking an initial assessment of whether a proposed plan or project (or ongoing activity) may have an impact on the qualifying feature and therefore integrity of the site.