

Statements on Conservation Benefits, Condition & Conservation Measures for East of Gannet and Montrose Fields Nature Conservation MPA

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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 and General Management Approach;
 - conservation benefits that the site can provide; and
 - conservation measures needed to further the conservation objectives stated 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, could impact it and hinder the achievement of the conservation objectives stated for the site.

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

Conservation benefits

By conserving 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 parts 5 (climate change) and 9 (natural heritage);
- [Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's](#) Big Step 6 (Marine and coastal ecosystems restored) and 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 that 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 UK Marine Strategy.

This site has been designated to protect offshore deep-sea muds and ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*) aggregations (including subtidal sands and gravels as their supporting habitat).

Both are [Priority Marine Features](#) (PMFs) in Scotland's seas and ocean quahog are included on the [OSPAR list of Threatened and/or Declining Habitats & Species](#) across the North-east Atlantic.

This site provides conservation benefits to the wider marine environment and society by affording protection to offshore deep-sea muds and their associated biological communities, and ocean quahog aggregations (including subtidal sands and gravels as their supporting habitat) and consequently the provision of the following ecosystem services:

Offshore deep-sea muds

- Nutrition: mud habitats can provide suitable habitat for *Nephrops norvegicus* (Norway lobster) – offshore deep-sea muds in this site support *Nephrops* fisheries (functional unit 34); and
- Climate regulation: by providing a long-term sink for carbon within sedimentary habitats.

Ocean quahog aggregations

- Nutrition: by providing prey for a broad range of fish and invertebrate species.
- Regulatory processes: providing a benthic-pelagic link by removing plankton and detritus from the water column;
- Scientific study: the longevity of the species makes it of value for the study of long-term climatic and environmental change. They are also of value as an indicator species for heavy metal pollutant concentrations in seabed sediments and in ageing research; and
- Carbon cycling and nutrient regulation: maintaining healthy and productive ecosystems through the laying down of carbonate during shell growth and filter-feeding.

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.

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC's view on the overall condition of the site's protected features. 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 recovered or where recovery 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 protected features in the site.

Protected feature	View of condition and feature objective
Offshore deep-sea muds	Unfavourable
Ocean quahog aggregations (including subtidal sands and gravels as their supporting habitat)	Unfavourable

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 protected features within the site.

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 offshore deep-sea muds and ocean quahog aggregations (including subtidal sands and gravels as their supporting habitat) need to be recovered to favourable condition. Please see the [Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives](#) (SACO) for further detail and justification.

Using available site evidence and information contained within the [Advice on Operations](#) for this site, JNCC considers that the activities listed below are capable of affecting, other than insignificantly, the protected features of the site.

These activities should be managed to prevent further deterioration to offshore deep-sea mud and ocean quahog aggregations (including subtidal sands and gravels as their supporting habitat) by removing or reducing (where appropriate) their associated pressures:

- Demersal trawling; additional management is needed for demersal trawling within the site to prevent further deterioration of both protected features from exposure to associated pressures like abrasion and removal of non-target species;
- Oil and gas operations, including the decommissioning of existing structures;
- Renewable energy generation; and
- Cabling.

Management of the site should be informed by the sensitivity of the 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) has the potential to affect, other than insignificantly, the protected features of 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 the activity 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.

[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](#) (SACO) to develop assessments of impacts to protected features within the site.