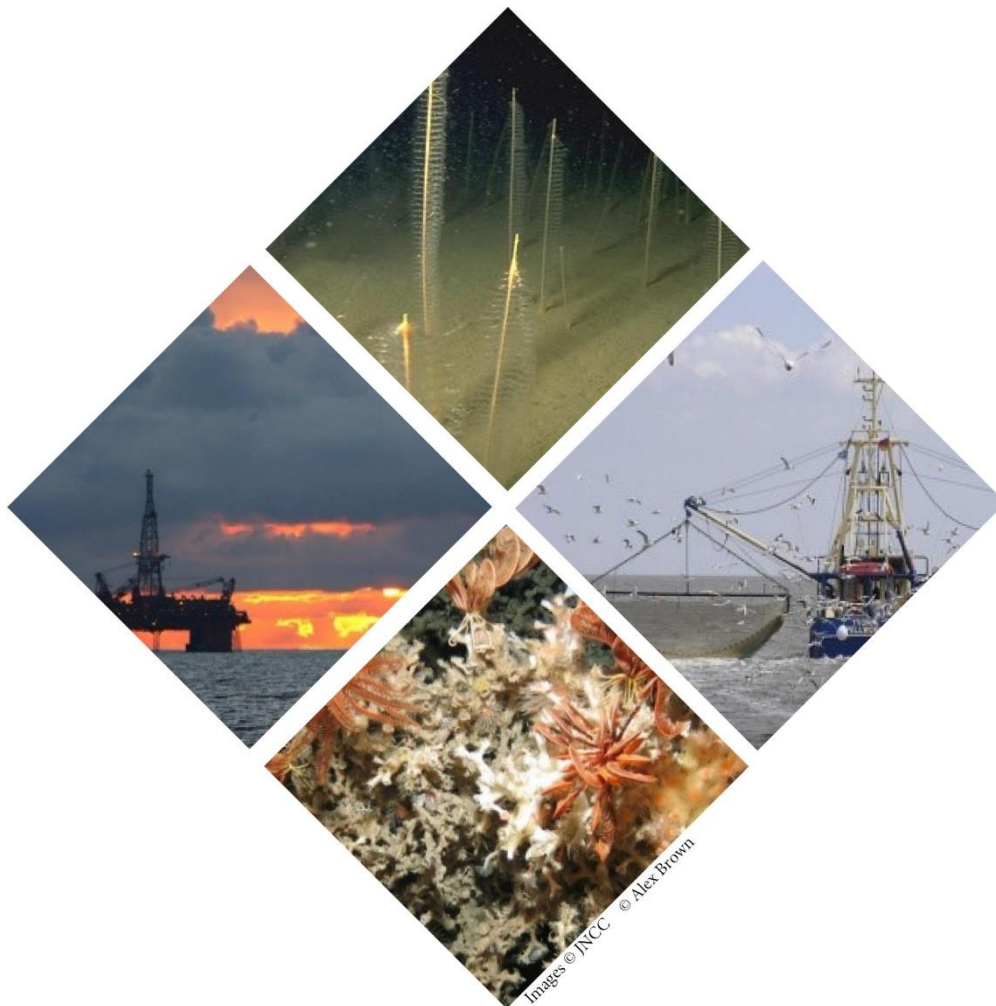


Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for Croker Carbonate Slabs candidate Special Area of Conservation and Site of Community Importance

December 2020



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

Conservation benefits

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

- Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases in the Irish 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: III Celtic Seas;
- 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 Guidance¹).

This site has been designated because it makes a valuable contribution to maintaining the Annex I habitat Submarine structures made by leaking gases in UK waters. This site is characteristic of the subtype “bubbling reefs”. The seabed surface is composed of extensive areas of exposed methane-derived authigenic carbonate (MDAC). The seabed habitats created by these MDAC structures are distinctive, supporting a diverse range of marine species that are absent from the surrounding seabed characterised by coarse sediment.

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:

- Climate regulation: by providing a natural storage capacity for greenhouse gases e.g. methane; and
- Nutrition: by providing habitat, a food source and refugia for a variety of fauna, including a range of commercially important fish species.

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

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>

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC's view on the overall condition of the site's qualifying features based on our understanding of the feature. Please contact [JNCC](#) for further information if required. In summary, a feature is in unfavourable condition either where evidence indicates it needs 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 it is not being adversely affected.

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

Protected feature	View of condition
Annex I: Submarine structures made by leaking gases	Favourable

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

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1, the qualifying feature in the site is considered to be in favourable condition. Based on best available evidence, JNCC do not consider that activities taking place are capable of adversely affecting the qualifying feature of the site. However, this does not preclude the need for additional management in the future.

Any future 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 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.