

'UK Approach' to updating the UK's Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms

December 2015

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1. What does this 'UK Approach' document cover?

This 'UK Approach' document provides a summary of the UK approach¹ to updating its Natura 2000 Standard Data Forms (SDFs) in relation to the December 2015 update (as also briefly described in the explanatory notes and details of changes included in the United Kingdom's Tranche 50 submission of [SACs](#) and [SPAs](#)). The UK's Natura 2000 electronic data submission was posted on the European Environment Agency's EIONET website on 22nd December 2015 with updated and new information on each of its Natura 2000 sites. This exercise has been completed for all of the UK's SACs, SCIs and pSCIs (654 in total, including 2 in the UK Overseas Territory of Gibraltar), and SPAs (272 in total, including 2 in the UK Overseas Territory of Gibraltar)².

2. Introduction – Background requirement/mandate

Article 4(1) of the Habitats Directive and Article 4(3) of the Birds Directives require Member States (MSs) to transmit information on each of their Natura 2000 sites to the European Commission. These requirements are fulfilled by completing the Standard Data Form (SDF), which provide the European Commission (and other interested parties) with site-specific details.

In 2011, the Habitats Committee adopted Commission Implementing Decision [2011/484/EU](#) 'concerning a site information format for Natura 2000 sites'. The Decision includes an improved and expanded SDF format for MSs to transmit information to the Commission on their Natura 2000 sites. A timeframe was agreed for a two phase updating-process to be followed by MSs. The first phase involved transferring information from the existing SDFs into the new format by October 2012 (completed) and the second phase involved the update of the SDFs by the end of 2015. This UK Approach document outlines how, and what, the UK has undertaken to fulfil the requirements of the second phase of this recent SDF updating process. It also provides a clear and transparent audit trail detailing how each of the sections of the SDF have been completed for the UK's terrestrial, inshore and offshore Natura 2000 sites by the responsible bodies³, and HM Government of Gibraltar. Information on the evidence sources used to provide the information is also given where necessary.

3. UK process – who has undertaken the work?

The SDFs were updated by collaborative working between experts on terrestrial and marine Natura 2000 designations from the five Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) of the United Kingdom (i.e. the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOENI), Natural England (NE), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)). The group of experts took decisions during the course of the work to establish the approaches necessary to complete the different sections of the SDF, based on the data/information available and in the context of assessing the implications, risks and benefits of the changes in the broader context.

¹ This mainly describes the approach taken for the updating of Natura 2000 SDFs in metropolitan UK – for terrestrial and, inshore and offshore marine sites. The Government of Gibraltar had already completed almost all of the mandatory information required by the new SDF format for its two sites.

² Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Community Importance (SCIs) and proposed SCIs (pSCIs, which are also referred to in the UK as candidate SACs (cSACs)) designated under the Habitats Directive (Article 3(2)), and Special Protection Areas (SPA) classified under the Birds Directive (Articles 4(1) and 4(2)) in terrestrial, and inshore and offshore marine areas.

³ Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOENI), Natural England (NE), Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

HM Government of Gibraltar had already completed the information required in the new SDF format for their two sites in 2012. The only new mandatory information that was provided in this December 2015 update was on an assessment of its Data Quality for habitat extents and species population numbers (details of this requirement are provided below). This was completed by the Department of the Environment and Climate Change in HM Government of Gibraltar.

4. UK view/perspective on the role of SDFs

For metropolitan UK Natura 2000 sites, the current view is that SDFs should, where possible and practicable, contain information which reflects the status of the Natura 2000 sites '*as at the time of their designation*'. In particular, this refers to the ecological information included within sections 3.1, 3.2⁴ and 3.3.

This approach maintains, in most cases, the ecological information in the SDFs which was originally used to justify the selection of the site in accordance with the relevant selection criteria. Crucially, the ecological information has not been changed through this current updating exercise. Therefore, there were no legal implications associated with the features listed under sections 3.1 (habitats) and 3.2 (species) of the SDFs. Therefore, no formal consultation with stakeholders has been required (i.e. there were no re-designation issues to address) during this update. These have been the underlying principles adopted in the 2015 SDF update process.

For habitat types under section 3.1 this includes information on cover (in ha) of habitat types and the four components of the ecological site assessment (Representativity, Relative Surface Area, Degree of Conservation and the overall Global Assessment). For species under section 3.2 this includes information on the minimum and maximum size of the population on the site and the three components of the ecological site assessment (Degree of Conservation, Isolation and the overall Global Assessment).

5. Details of the current SDF-updating task

Ecological information

The only changes that have been made are to rectify some previous errors in earlier translations from SPA citations onto the EU Natura 2000 database. Specifically, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have made limited adjustments through this 2015 update (e.g. to correct obvious errors that are not affected by the third UK SPA network Review) and England have proposed to address any errors in SDF's ahead of implementation of the SPA reviews. It was up to the individual SNCB to decide the extent to which error correction was undertaken as part of this December 2015 update.

Also, for metropolitan UK SPAs, the group of experts undertook to determine whether it was now possible to complete the ecological site assessment information for the Degree of Conservation 'grading' and the overall Global Assessment 'grading' for birds. These components have previously not been completed for metropolitan UK SPAs. 'Degree of Conservation' gradings mainly take into consideration an assessment of the degree of conservation of the habitat important for the species. It was determined that the UK still does not have the information (or good proxies) to assess the habitat for the species as at the time of designation, nor is there further European guidance in this regard. Therefore, the existing UK line is maintained, that this component cannot be completed for metropolitan UK SPAs. The Global Assessment, which relies on Degree of Conservation information also cannot be completed.

⁴ Please note the following exception to this rule: the UK populated the initial tranche of SPA SDFs using baseline population figures from 1998 (following the adoption of a Standard Data Form (SDF) on 18th December 1996 by the European Commission).

The new mandatory field on 'Data Quality' under Sections 3.1 and 3.2 is an assessment of the 'quality of the measurement of the field data' used to assess the habitat cover and species population estimates given in SDFs. This was assessed using field data estimates provided within the SDFs, which is generally (as noted above) the circumstance 'as at the time of designation'.

Other information updates including some ecological information

Although the metropolitan UK's Standard Data Forms should, where appropriate and practicable, contain information which reflects the (ecological) status of the Natura 2000 sites 'as at the time of their designation', there are a number of exceptions to this:

- i) existing sections of the SDF which have been updated with new/more up to date information (with further details provided below):
 - Map of site (site boundaries) (section 7) [with implications for the corresponding overall site area and the habitat extents],
 - Site area (ha) (section 2.2),
 - Some habitat extent(s) (ha) (a field under section 3.1);
- ii) existing sections where the information has been reported differently in response to trying to interpret better what the guidelines require / specify:
 - Species population size on the site (max and min figures) [with implications for the Abundance category used] (a field under section 3.2),
 - Abundance category (a field under section 3.2) (interdependent on population size);
- iii) new mandatory sections where the most recent information available reflects most accurately the current situation on, or affecting, the site:
 - Marine area % (ha) (section 2.3) using the latest Map of site (linking to section 7),
 - Threats, Pressures and Activities (TPAs) (section 4.3),
 - Documentation – i.e. information on Conservation Objectives, advice on operations etc. (section 4.5),
 - Body(ies) responsible for site management (section 6.1),
 - Management plans (section 6.2);

and,

- iv) new information provided in optional sections, used because these are the only sections which allow particular information to be included:
 - Ownership (section 4.4),
 - Documentation (section 4.5),
 - Conservation measures (section 6.3).

The key changes are described below, mainly in relation to either new mandatory sections within the SDF or where there has been a significant change to information/data provided (cross referenced to the first three exception category sections above):

i) Maps of sites / GIS boundaries

It was deemed very important to submit the most recent Natura 2000 site boundaries (derived via GIS) available from each of the five SNCB websites, in order to ensure that site boundary information held by the Commission corresponds with the latest site boundary data

produced by the SNCBs. Boundaries have been taken from a snapshot of dynamic, digital data in July 2015. This has resulted in slight adjustments to overall site areas (ha) (Section 2.2) and Annex I habitat extents for features (ha) (part of Section 3.1).

ii). Population numbers (minimum (min) and maximum (max))

Although no new minimum and maximum species population figures have been provided (requiring consultation), there are some changes as to how information has been reported (e.g. for some species which previously only reported population minima). In these instances, it was agreed to either report min and max using the same estimate (where it was felt that the population estimate was accurate), and in other cases where the previous figures were deemed to be less accurate (and where no new information exists to assess the population size at the time of designation) the population min figure has been removed. In these latter cases the forms now indicate that the species is 'present' (on the site) but that that the assessment of Data Quality is now 'Data Deficient' (i.e. that it was at least not possible, or desirable, to estimate a population min and max at the time of designation).

iii). Marine Area % method

Marine Area % is a new mandatory section. It was agreed that the Natura 2000 'percentage of marine area' section should be set at 0% for sites protecting terrestrial components only, and should be calculated from mean high water limits to obtain the marine areas of sites that protect marine components (features making use of, or dependent on, the marine environment). An additional check for any exceptional circumstances where marine area percentage calculations needed to account of marine features occurring above mean high water limits was also undertaken.

Threats, Pressures and Activities (TPAs) method and data used

New mandatory information on negative 'Threats' and 'Pressures' and positive 'Activities' information was requested at site-level. It was agreed that because this is a new mandatory section, it was more practicable to report on TPAs currently acting on sites rather than what was known 'as at the time of designation'. TPAs have been reported at Level 2. The ranking of TPAs as High, Medium or Low threat level is also reported. Each SNCB has carried out this exercise in slightly different ways using relevant national information from the most recent sources available. TPAs were then quality assured by the SNCBs following their internal processes.

Other comments:

1. Optional sections were completed only where there was benefit in terms of the UK providing useful information with respect to site management. These sections were chosen because they were the only sections within the SDF allowing such information to be provided (notably sections 4.5 (Documentation) and 6.3 (Conservation measures)). Section 5.1 (Designation types at national and regional level) was updated in order to fill some previous gaps to ensure a consistent approach was taken to recording which Natura 2000 sites are underpinned by ASSI or SSSI national designations.
2. The updated UK Standard Data Forms have a 'cover sheet' and an 'end sheet'. The cover sheet summarises submission requirements and details, as well as providing relevant European and UK weblinks relevant to the December 2015 UK SDF submission and other UK Natura 2000 site information. The end sheet provides ancillary information to assist readers in the understanding and interpretation of the information held within the forms e.g. codes used.

3. Annex 1 below provides a broad summary of the main updates made on a section-by-section basis in the SDFs for Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Annex 2 provides a broad summary of the main updates made on a section-by-section basis in the SDFs for Gibraltar.
4. As previously mentioned, Gibraltar had already updated their Standard Data Forms using the new format in 2012. The only new mandatory information which has been updated in this 2015 update (that was not previously supplied) is on 'Data Quality' under Sections 3.1 and 3.2 and Management Plan under Section 6.2. Other minor updates have also been made, including on species population numbers (minor adjustments based on new data).
5. The official EC guidance used to inform the UK's December 2015 update of information on its Natura 2000 sites in the new Standard Data Form format is available in the Explanatory Notes section in Implementing Decision [2011/484/EU](#).

JNCC, 27 January 2016

Annex 1: Table providing a summary of the main updates (to the metropolitan UK SDFs) made on a section-by-section basis in the SDFs.

Section number	Section/field name	Summary of updating issue and approach taken	Major/ Intermediate/ Minor issue	Existing/New Mandatory/ Optional
1.3	Site name	Very minor amendments to circa 20 site names (mostly syntax).	Minor	Existing
1.5	Update date	The date 'December 2015' to be added for all sites to reflect when this new information has been submitted to the European Commission.	Minor	Existing
1.6	Respondent	Joint Nature Conservation Committee and JNCC address for all sites	Minor	Existing
1.7	National legal reference of each SAC and SPA designation.	Legal references have been reviewed and updated for all sites. The approach taken was to refer to the implementing regulations relevant for each country and for offshore marine. The regulation numbers specifically noted relate to the act of designation of sites under the Habitats Directive and the classification of sites under the Birds Directive, as well as the references to adding new sites to the national register of European sites and notifying relevant stakeholders.	Major	New
2.2	Area (ha)	Site areas have been updated to correspond with revised GIS boundary data supplied by the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies as published on their websites in July 2015. This change affects the majority of Natura 2000 sites but in most cases the change is very minor. More significant changes occur typically where there are dynamic habitats such as river systems, estuaries and eroding coastlines. All changes are itemised in the UK change log spreadsheet provided as part of this update with an explanation provided for each change.	Major	Existing

2.3	Marine area (%)	Information completed for all sites. The 'percentage of marine area' section has been set at 0% for sites protecting terrestrial components only, and was calculated from mean high water limits to obtain the marine areas of sites that protect marine components (features making use of, or dependent on, the marine environment). An additional check for any exceptional circumstances where marine area percentage calculations needed to account of marine features occurring above mean high water limits was also undertaken.	Major	New
2.5	NUTS Code	New Level 2 NUTS codes added.	Intermediate	New
3.1	Habitats	One deletion of a non-significant (Grade D) interest feature in Northern Ireland (an instance of H6210 that was erroneously identified as H6170). See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Minor	Existing
3.1	Habitat cover (ha)	These are mainly changes as a consequence of updating the site boundaries (Section 2.2). Most of these changes are very minor and have no implications for UK sufficiency. The UK has also updated extent figures for a few Annex 1 habitats (H1320 <i>Spartina</i> swards and H2160 Dunes with sea-buckthorn) to align better with Article 17 reports. See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Intermediate	Existing
3.1	Habitat cover - Data quality	Habitat cover 'data quality' assessments from the time of designation have been made for all cases where an area estimate is provided.	Major	New

3.2	Species	<p>Additions: The UK has added bird qualifying species inadvertently missed off previous EU database submissions. Note that these features are all on official site documentation (the citations) and should therefore be added to section 3.2 of the SDF See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.</p> <p>Deletions: Seven deletions of species interest features (all on SPA) have been made on advice from Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies. In all cases these were incorrect entries within previously submitted data, and were not listed as qualifying interest features on official site documentation used in UK Stakeholder consultation.</p>	Intermediate	Existing
3.2	Species code	Some bird codes updated to align with Natura 2000 reference portal. See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Intermediate	Existing
3.2	Species scientific name	Some scientific names updated to align with accepted species names in the Natura 2000 reference portal. See UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Intermediate	Existing
3.2	Species population size on the site (min and max)	A few population figures have been replicated (from population min into population max), added or removed (but no changes have been made requiring stakeholder consultation).	Intermediate	New
3.2	Species population – Abundance category	Some species 'abundance' categories have been altered for Habitats Directive Annex II species as a result of changes to species population figures.	Minor	Existing
3.2	Species population size on the site – Data quality	Species 'data quality' assessments from the time of designation have been completed for all relevant sites.	Major	New
3.3	Other species – assemblages	Added to explicitly record assemblages of birds.	Intermediate	Existing
4.3	Threats Pressures and Activities (TPAs)	Negative Threats and Pressures and positive Activities have been reported at Level 2 at site level. Ranking and proximity of impact information is also provided.	Major	New
4.5	Documentation	This section has been used to provide information and weblinks to site level Conservation Objectives and other supplementary information related to site level management and generic information on Natura 2000 sites.	Intermediate	New (Note that this is an optional section)

5.1	Designation types at national and regional level	Errors and omissions corrected for a small number of sites.	Minor	Existing (Note that this is an optional section)
6.1	Body(ies) responsible for site management	Initial point of contact for site management issues included for all sites.	Minor	New
6.2	Management plan exists/ Link to management plan	Information on whether or not a plan exists and links provided to Comprehensive Management Plans where appropriate.	Intermediate	New
6.3	Conservation measures	This section has been used simply to refer users to Section 4.5 for information and weblinks on Conservation Objectives and other supplementary information related to site-level management etc. This section was not favoured because there is no option to provide weblinks.	Minor	New (Note that this is an optional section)
7.	Map of the site	Updated boundaries of sites provided as shapefiles.	Major	Existing

Annex 2: Table providing a summary of the main updates (to the Gibraltar Natura 2000 SDFs) made on a section-by-section basis in the SDFs.

Section number	Section/ field name	Summary of updating issue and approach taken	Major/ Intermediate/ Minor issue	Existing/New Mandatory/ Optional
1.5	Update date	The date 'December 2015' to be added for all sites to reflect when this new information has been submitted to the European Commission.	Minor	Existing
1.7	National legal reference of each SAC and SPA designation.	The national Nature Protection Act and relevant site designation Orders are provided.	Major	New
2.5	NUTS Code	New Level 2 NUTS codes added.	Intermediate	New
3.1	Habitat cover - Data quality	Habitat cover 'data quality' assessments have been made for all cases where an area estimate is provided.	Major	New
3.2	Species code	Some bird codes updated to align with Natura 2000 reference portal. See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Intermediate	Existing
3.2	Species scientific name	Some scientific names updated to align with accepted species names in the Natura 2000 reference portal. See the UK change log spreadsheet for further details.	Intermediate	Existing
3.2	Species population size on the site (min and max)	A few population figures have been replicated (from population min into population max), added or removed (but no changes have been made requiring stakeholder consultation).	Intermediate	New
3.2	Species population – Abundance category	Some species 'abundance' categories have been altered for Habitats Directive Annex II species as a result of changes to species population figures.	Minor	Existing
3.2	Species population size on the site – Data quality	Species 'data quality' assessments have been completed for all relevant sites.	Major	New
4.5	Documentation	This section has been used to provide information and weblinks to other management plan information (not covered under Section 6.2).	Intermediate	New (Note that this is an optional section)
6.1	Body(ies) responsible for site management	Changed to Steven Warr (Government of Gibraltar).	Minor	New

6.2	Management plan exists/Link to management plan	Information on whether or not a plan exists and links provided to Comprehensive Management Plans where appropriate.	Intermediate	New
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