

Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for North Norfolk Sandbanks and Saturn Reef Special Area of Conservation

December 2020



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 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: Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all of the time and Annex I Reefs, the site will contribute to delivering:

- Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all of the time and Annex I Reefs in the southern North Sea.
 - Favourable Conservation Status of habitats of European importance, including Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all of the time and Annex I Reefs, 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 II: Greater North Sea;
- 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 holds the most extensive offshore linear ridge sandbank type in UK waters and the best example of open sea, tidal sandbanks in a moderate current strength in UK waters. The site also protects Annex I Biogenic reef made of *Sabellaria spinulosa*. The boundary of the site encompasses the whole linear sandbank system rather than to separate out individual banks. The entirety of the MPA is considered a representative functioning example of the Annex I feature Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time. The whole SAC is designated and viewed as one integrated sandbank system, and reflects our current advice that its extent covers the entirety of the site.

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:

- 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;
- Carbon and nitrogen cycling: maintaining healthy and productive ecosystems; and
- Climate regulation: by providing a long-term sink for carbon.

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>

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 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.

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 [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 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 features in the site.

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

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

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 above, the Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all of the time and the Annex I Reefs, need to be restored to favourable condition. Please see the [Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives](#) 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 features of the site.

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

- demersal fishing;
- aggregate extraction;
- cabling; and
- oil and gas operations.

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 site-specific [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 Information Centre](#) useful.