

## Marine Protected Areas in Carlingford SPA MarPAMM Region

### Introduction

Marine and coastal environments are important ecosystems for the provisions of ecosystem services to sustain societal and ecological livelihoods, through the goods and services it provides. The marine environment of Northern Ireland/North of Ireland are home to some of the most internationally important and biologically diverse habitats and species. It is important that these environments are managed in an appropriate way for the maintenance of the social, environmental and economic well-being of our society. As of 2014, 14% of our waters are afforded some protection based on a network of protected areas<sup>1</sup>.

There are several types of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the Northern Ireland, which in combination are intended to form an 'ecologically coherent and well-managed network' as a contribution to the effective conservation and sustainable use of the Northern Ireland's marine environment. The term "MPA" is

*"Any area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment"*<sup>2</sup>

MPAs designate a wide range of marine areas which "have some level of restriction of activity to protect living, non-living, cultural and/or historic resources"<sup>3</sup>. They are designated primarily to

*"help conserve or recover nationally significant or representative examples of marine biodiversity, including threatened or declining species and habitats of European and national importance"*<sup>4</sup>.

MPAs are one of the tools that can help to protect the marine environment, whilst also enabling its sustainable use, ensuring it remains healthy and contributes to our society for generations to come.

In Northern Ireland various forms of MPA have been designated under different legislations at both national and international levels due to international agreements and national legal obligations.

### Northern Ireland Marine Protected Area Network

The Northern Ireland Executive through the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), is committed to the continued development and enhancement of a well-managed and ecological network of MPAs from a devolved perspective and through the UK's contribution to the OSPAR network.

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<sup>1</sup> DAERA, 2014. A Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland inshore region.

<sup>2</sup> International Union for Conservation of Nature – Dudley, N (Editor), 2008. Guideline for applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland, p8.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Administrations Statement, 2012. UK Contribution to Ecologically Coherent MPA Network in the North East Atlantic.

<sup>4</sup> DEFRA, 2016. Marine Conservation Zones: Update.

## **International Designations**

Special Protection Areas (SPA) are sites that have been designated for seabirds of European importance and are classified under the Wild Birds Directive. Species listed under Annex I of this Directive, including Razorbill, Guillemot and Kittiwake are protected, along with their essential habitats. The Directive requires measures to be taken to maintain populations of all naturally occurring birds.

Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are sites designated under the Habitats Directive for habitats of European importance. SACs are designated for habitats and species listed under Annex I and II of the EC Habitats Directive, such as reefs and sandbanks. The Habitats Directive requires Member States to take measures that contribute to the conservation of biodiversity by maintaining or restoring certain habitats and species at a favourable conservation status. The Habitats Directive was transposed by The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 and is required to identify and protect a series of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

Collectively SPAs and SACs are known as the Natura 2000 network which is a European network of nature conservation protected areas. This network is the cornerstone of Europe's nature conservation policy, protecting important habitats and also laying out a strict system of species protection in order to protect biodiversity.

Where a SPA or a SAC incorporates a subtidal and/or an intertidal area, they are also referred to as 'European Marine Sites' (EMS). EMSs are areas at sea that are designated to protect wildlife and habitats that are important at a European level. They are created under EU Legislation. There are two types of EMS: Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which protect birds and their essential habitats and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which protect other wildlife and important habitats<sup>5</sup>.

The UK is signed up to is the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance", the Ramsar Convention 1971. The convention solely focuses on the sustainable use of wetlands, to ensure their effective management. The convention has a commitment to international coordination on transboundary and shared wetland and species.

## **National Sites**

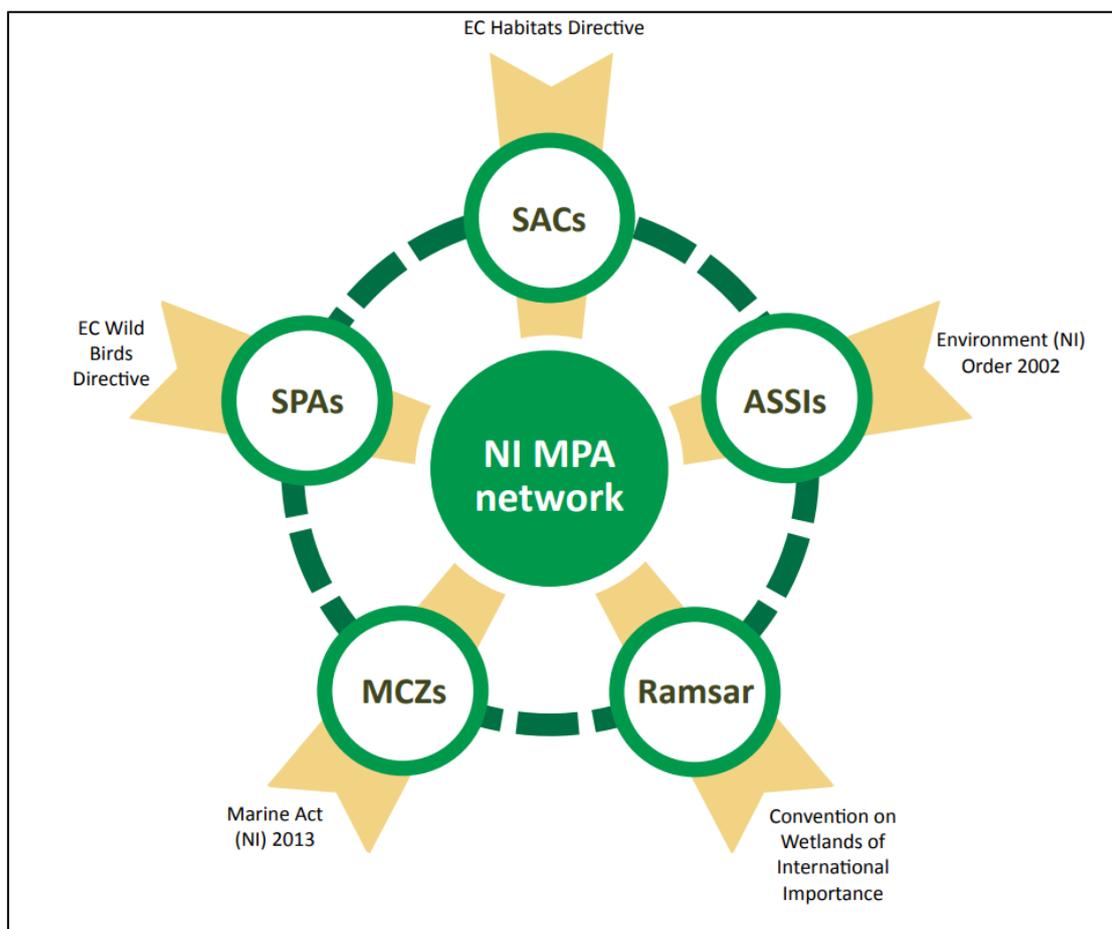
Across the UK, each devolved administration has the power to create Marine Protected Areas to conserve nationally important wildlife and habitats. These national sites have different names in the devolved nations of the UK. The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, establishes a strategic system of marine planning within the inshore region (out to 12 nautical miles) and helps to streamline the process of marine licensing. The Act enables the delivery of an "ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas", through giving DAERA the power, with the agreement of the Secretary of State, to designate MPAs, called Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ).

Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) are designated under The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. It contains powers for the protection of nationally important flora and fauna within Northern Ireland. Schedules of listed nationally important habitats and species include reference to coastal and marine features, including mudflats and common seals.

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<sup>5</sup> DAERA, 2014. A Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland inshore region

**Figure 1: Ecologically coherent network of Northern Ireland’s Marine Protected Areas**



Source: DAERA, 2014

#### **Other Notable International Obligations**

- The OSPAR Convention to develop an ecologically coherent network of well-managed MPAs by 2016;
- The World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 to establish a representative network of MPAs;
- The Water Framework Directive, transposed into the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003; and
  - Sets out that Member States must aim to achieve good chemical and ecological status in identified water bodies by 2015. This includes transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters out to one nautical mile
- The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008) requires that Member States prepare national strategies to manage the seas to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status.
  - The UK Marine Strategy provides the framework for delivering marine policy at the UK level and sets out how we will achieve the vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas.

#### **Cross-Border Perspective**

In Ireland the 1992 EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EC), as transposed by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), is currently the only legislative

instrument providing protection to habitats in the marine environment. For habitats, this protection regime is applicable within the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2018, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) may be established to protect habitats or species. Whilst some terrestrial and coastal NHAs may encompass adjacent marine areas, no NHAs have been established for marine habitats to date.

As the MarPAMM Plan area of the Carlingford Lough SPA is cross-border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, this report looks at background designations of areas and lists their important species and habitats. Information for this background report have been taken from wide array of DAERA reports from the Northern Ireland perspective and from reports from the National Parks and Wildlife for the Ireland perspective.

### Carlingford Lough SPA Northern Ireland

The Carlingford Lough Special Protection Area lies between Killowen Point and Soldiers Point on the northern shores of Carlingford Lough and the landward boundary is entirely coincident with that of the Carlingford Lough Area of Special Scientific Interest. The terrestrial area within the SPA boundary is also entirely coincident with that of the Carlingford Lough Ramsar Site. The terrestrial section of the SPA includes all lands and intertidal areas as shown on the designation map. It also includes the offshore islands of Green Island and Blockhouse, together with their associated islets. The marine section of the site includes areas of open water within the Lough itself and in the area of the Lough mouth seawards to the limits of territorial waters as well as coastal waters northwards to the Bloody Bridge area on the Mourne Coast. The landward boundary for this area is the low water mark, medium tide.

The site qualifies under Article 4.1 of the Directive (2009/147/EC) by supporting internationally important populations of the following species:

Annex I species	Count and Season	Period	% of population
Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	575 pairs Breeding	5 year mean (1993 – 1997)	13.1 % of the all-Ireland population
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	339 pairs Breeding	5 year mean (1993 – 1997)	10.9 % of the all-Ireland population

Data from annual site monitoring by RSPB and national seabird surveys coordinated by JNCC

Species relevant to Article 4.2	Count and Season	Period	% of population
Light-bellied Brent Goose <i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>	319 individuals Non-breeding	5yr peak mean 1990/01 – 1994/95	1.6 % of the international biogeographical population

Waterbird data from annual WeBS programme coordinated by BTO

The principal interests are the breeding colonies of Sandwich and Common Tern and the wintering population of Light-bellied Brent Goose.

Carlingford Lough Special Protection Area complements the equivalent designation on the Republic of Ireland side of the Carlingford Lough, the latter designation made for the internationally important wintering population of Light-bellied Brent Goose.

Management considerations including, Main Threats, Pressures, Activities with impacts on the site or site features within the SPA Conservation Objectives [Report](#) are available on Page 8.

### **Carlingford Lough SPA Ireland**

Carlingford Lough SPA comprises parts of the south side of Carlingford Lough, Co. Louth, between Carlingford Harbour and Ballagan Point. The predominant habitats present are intertidal sand and mud flats. The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for Light-bellied Brent Goose. The E.U. Birds Directive pays particular attention to wetlands, and as these form part of this SPA, the site and its associated waterbirds are of special conservation interest for Wetland & Waterbirds. In winter the site supports an internationally important population of Light-bellied Brent Goose (253 – all figures are five year mean peaks for the period 1995/96 to 1999/2000). A range of other waterfowl species occurs within the site, including Wigeon (107), Oystercatcher (289), Dunlin (392), Bar-tailed Godwit (33), Redshank (108) and Turnstone (29)<sup>6</sup>. The intertidal flats provide feeding areas for the wintering birds. The subtidal areas outside the SPA support a range of species including Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant and Red-throated Diver. Carlingford Lough SPA is of international importance for its Light-bellied Brent Goose population. Of note is the occurrence of Bar-tailed Godwit, a species that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive.

Management Considerations for the Irish Carlingford Lough SPA for the species of Brent Goose and Wetlands is on [page 6](#) on Conservation Objectives Series.

### **Carlingford Lough MCZ**

Carlingford Lough is a narrow and shallow sea lough that lies on the east coast of Ireland, located at the border of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The MCZ is located off the northern shore and lies north of the navigation channel in the inner part of the Lough. The MCZ consists of a shallow subtidal area of fine mud encompassing 3.23km<sup>2</sup>. The MCZ has been designated as it supports the habitat *Philine aperta* (White lobe shell) and *Virgularia mirabilis* (Seapen) in soft stable infralittoral mud. This habitat is only present in Carlingford Lough. The biotope 'Philine aperta and Virgularia mirabilis in soft stable infralittoral mud' is characterised on the basis of its epifauna. The habitat created by the Sea-pens offer shelter, food and oxygen to a diverse range of small benthic infaunal organisms such as the very rare sea cucumber, *Ocnus planci*, which has regularly been observed in the MCZ. The MCZ covers an area of 3.23km<sup>2</sup>

Activities and Potential Management Options are located in the Carlingford Lough MCZ [Report](#) on Page 14.

### **Carlingford Lough ASSI**

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<sup>6</sup> National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2020. SITE SYNOPSIS Carlingford Lough SPA

The limestones of Carlingford Lough were deposited in a shallow sea basin during the Carboniferous period 339 million years ago. They contain numerous fossils, such as brachiopods and solitary corals. Moraines and deposited sediments provide evidence of the movement of ice sheets and glaciers.

The site supports a range of unusual and rich littoral communities, including sheltered sands, muddy sands, muds and boulder shores. It exhibits a good natural transition from lower shore communities, through upper shore saltmarsh to fen vegetation. Mill Bay supports the largest intact block of saltmarsh in Northern Ireland. The saltmarsh here exhibits an extremely clear and characteristic successional zonation from open mud flats to upper brackish marsh, while displaying a classic pattern of drainage channels (creeks), pools (salt pans) and hummocks.

Carlingford Lough is also significant for wintering and breeding birds. Internationally important numbers of wildfowl on this site, including Great Crested Grebes and Red-breasted Merganser. The Carlingford Lough ASSI covers an area of 1105 hectares.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>MPA Type</b>
Coastal Saltmarsh	ASSI
Mudflats	ASSI
Great Crested Grebe	ASSI
Red-breasted Merganser	ASSI

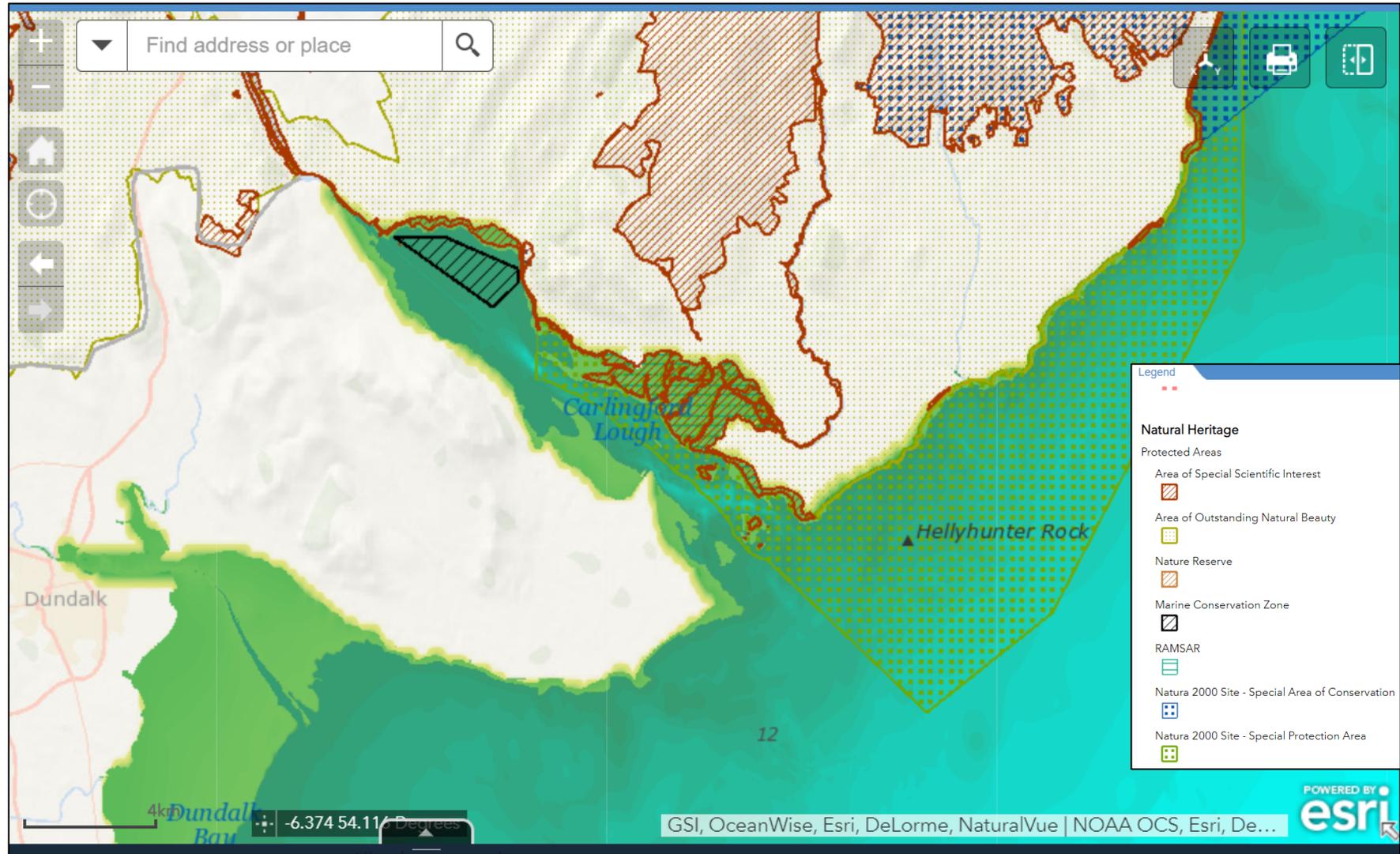
### **Additional Information of Interest**

Currently from the Irish legislative viewpoint there are 34 aquaculture sites operating off the southern shore of Carlingford Lough. The inner bay is used to produce mussels, while the outer bay is used to produce oysters and mussels. Oyster production is carried out within and throughout the majority of the SPA. There is a Fisheries Natura Declaration (under Regulation 9 of the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Sea-fisheries) Regulations 2013) in place overlapping with the SPA, prohibiting the production of mussels or harvest of seed stock from this area<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Marine Institute, 2019. Carlingford Lough Special Protection Area (004078): Appropriate Assessment of Aquaculture

# Appendix 1: Marine Protected Areas Carlingford Lough (Northern Ireland)



## Appendix 2: Marine Protected Areas Carlingford Lough (Ireland)

