Seas off St Kilda
Proposed Special Protection Area

Gannets dive into the sea to catch fish often at depths of more than 15 metres © Dr Matt Doggett

One of Europe’s best wildlife sites
The proposed Seas off St Kilda Special Protection Area (SPA) covers the waters around the St Kilda archipelago, more than 50 km west of North Uist in the Outer Hebrides. In spring and summer, this part of the Atlantic Ocean teems with more than 600,000 pairs of seabird, most of which breed on St Kilda.

More than 7% of Britain’s breeding gannet population exploits the Seas off St Kilda, capturing mackerel, herring, sandeel, and other fish for themselves and their young. Not only gannets feed here – other iconic St Kilda seabirds such as fulmars, puffins, and the nocturnal storm-petrels occur in large numbers. The seabirds of St Kilda comprise the largest, oldest and most spectacular marine seabird community in western Europe and one of the most important in the whole North Atlantic.
The proposed Seas off St Kilda SPA is close to the continental shelf edge where the seabed drops sharply from a depth of about 100 m in the east of the area to more than 400 m in the north-west. The shelf edge is a zone of high productivity of fish and other small marine organisms. The concentration of these important prey items makes these waters important feeding grounds for seabirds. In 2014, the shelf edge to the north-west of St Kilda was classified as a Marine Protected Area (Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope Nature Conservation MPA) for its benthic habitats.

Seabirds breeding on St Kilda are already protected on land and in the waters immediately surrounding the colony by the existing St Kilda SPA. Although capable of flying hundreds of kilometres, gannets nesting on St Kilda feed mostly in the productive and readily accessible waters around the islands. The new proposed Seas off St Kilda SPA will complement the existing protection and ensure that the marine foraging area and the prey on which the seabirds depend are equally protected. The proposed Seas off St Kilda SPA will therefore augment the existing protected area; the seabirds will be protected from their nesting sites all the way out to their most important feeding sites.

Proposed qualifying interests:

Breeding
Atlantic puffin
Common guillemot
European storm-petrel
Northern fulmar
Northern gannet
Making a response and further information

To make a response online or for more information about the proposals please go to www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/SPAconsultation.

If you are unable to make an online response, please contact us and we will send you a copy of the response form.

Email: seabirds@jncc.gov.uk

Post: JNCC, Marine SPA consultation,
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To see this leaflet in Gaelic please go to www.snh.gov.uk/MarineBirdSPAs