



Scottish Natural Heritage

## **SOUTH COAST OF ARRAN SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**

### **SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 1451**

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#### **Purpose**



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

#### **Description of the site**

The South Coast of Arran Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is designated for both geological and biological features.

In terms of its geology, the site has important examples of dykes and sills. Dykes and sills are igneous intrusions which form when molten volcanic rock is forced upward to fill cracks which form in the Earth's crust. The numerous dykes exposed along the southern coast of Arran, known collectively as the Arran Dyke Swarm, are of international importance. About 200 dykes, varying greatly in thickness up to 30 metres, were formed around 60 million years ago during the Tertiary geological period. At Bennan Head, the cliffs expose a sill of great interest, consisting of granite and basalt which in some places appear to have been mixed in a molten state.



The most recent monitoring of the geological interest indicates that it is in favourable condition, and there is no evidence that it is being significantly damaged or obscured by any current activities.

In addition to its geological importance, sections of the site are also of considerable biological interest. The designated natural features are vegetated shingle and maritime cliff. Vegetated shingle occurs in a few locations within the site and supports a colony of the nationally scarce oysterplant. At the time of notification this colony was the largest in Ayrshire and one of the largest in south-west Scotland, although numbers are known to fluctuate. The condition of the vegetated shingle was considered to be in unfavourable condition, largely due to evidence of ongoing, unconsented shingle extraction and associated vehicle use.

The maritime cliffs and steep slopes in the western part of the site support grassland and scrub communities which contain numerous locally uncommon plants, including narrow-leaved everlasting-pea at the northern limit of its natural range in Britain. The maritime cliff habitat has not been formally monitored yet.

There are other coastal habitats of interest within the site, although these do not form notified natural features. Intertidal habitats include many rock pools and extensive kelp beds which support an unusual diversity of marine life. Landward, habitats include a narrow stretch of sand dune and coastal grassland extending from the western extremity at Torrylinnwater Foot to the burn at Torran Riabhach, and which contains a variety of species typical of this habitat. Further to the east, from the Bennan Head cliffs to Levenorroch Burn, the vegetation shows a transition from beach head saltmarsh, through fen and wet grassland on the wave cut platform, to willow scrub at the base of the cliff.

Natural features of South Coast of Arran SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Tertiary Igneous	Favourable – maintained (May 2005)
Shingle	Unfavourable – no change (June 2009)
Maritime cliff	Not previously monitored

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Aerial view of dyke swarm south of Auchenhew	Oysterplant

### Past and present management

Agricultural management within the site chiefly involves the grazing of sheep and cattle on the maritime cliffs and slopes and level areas next to the shore. Grazing helps to maintain the diversity of the vegetation in these areas and prevent encroachment of scrub into the grassland. Grazing animals appear to have little effect on the vegetated shingle.

Geological features are largely unaffected by agricultural or other management. Sewage outfall pipes are frequent at intervals along the shore, although these typically avoid the outcropping dykes and sills where they might obscure the interest.

There has been some extraction of shingle and gravel from the site for field drainage works, and vehicle tracks are evident through some areas of the foreshore. These activities are likely to have adversely affected the distribution and abundance of oysterplant in at least one location. This may also have been exacerbated by use of beach areas for informal recreation.

Approximately half of the non-intertidal area of the SSSI (mainly comprising the maritime cliffs and slopes) is managed positively through agreements with SNH and Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities (under the Scotland Rural Development Programme). These agreements provide mainly for appropriate grazing management, as well as bracken control and scrub clearance.

### **Objectives for Management** (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and monitor the effectiveness of the management agreements.

1. **To maintain the extent, composition and structure of the geological dykes and sills** by ensuring protection from damaging impacts, such as dumping or construction.

The site does not contain any rare minerals to provide enough interest to collectors. Sample extraction for scientific purposes is acceptable. Responsible sample extraction and collecting for scientific purposes should be carried out in accordance with the Geological Code.

Operations should be avoided which might damage or obscure the geological feature. Such potentially damaging activities might include dumping of materials on the foreshore and the construction of walls and pipelines.

2. **To maintain visibility and access to the rock outcrops** by safeguarding outcrops from obstruction.

There should be no tipping of any waste within the site. Waste materials including construction waste can obscure visibility and hinder access. Ensure access to the site follows the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

3. **To maintain the shingle habitat and enhance the distribution and abundance of oysterplant** by avoiding damage or disturbance.

Authorised and unauthorised shingle extraction has occurred over a number of years to the east of the Torrylinn Water. Unauthorised extraction in particular, and associated vehicle use, are likely to have caused declines in the abundance and distribution of oysterplant in this area.

Although non-native species are generally scarce, Japanese knotweed occurs towards the west of the site and has the potential to encroach on vegetated shingle to the detriment of oysterplant. Careful eradication and monitoring of Japanese knotweed will prevent any adverse effects.

4. **To maintain and enhance the condition and diversity of the maritime cliff plant communities** through appropriate grazing by livestock and by avoiding potentially damaging agricultural improvements.

The grassland communities of the cliffs and slopes require grazing to maintain their distinctive plant composition and diversity. Grazing also helps to prevent excessive spread of scrub communities which otherwise, at a modest level, add valuable diversity to the habitat.

Agricultural improvements such as fertiliser application, drainage and re-seeding can be very damaging to semi-natural plant communities and should be avoided where these could impact upon the SSSI.

Front page photograph: oyster plant growing on shingle, with Ailsa Craig in the background.

Date last reviewed: 31 March 2011