



Scottish Natural Heritage

ST NINIAN'S TOMBOLO
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1475

Ground Floor
Stewart Building
Alexandra Wharf
Lerwick
ZE1 0LL
Tel: 01595 693345
E: north@snh.gov.uk

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.

| Natural features of St Ninian's Tombolo SSSI | Condition of feature (date monitored) |
|---|--|
| Coastal geomorphology of Scotland | Favourable maintained (July 2002) |

Description of the site

A tombolo is a coastal landform which consists of a beach or bar, that links two islands, or joins an island to a larger landmass. It is created and maintained by waves which move sand and shingle along the coastline in their direction of travel. In most circumstances, sediment is either carried only in one direction or moves backwards and forwards with changing wind and wave direction. Where waves meet a small island before reaching the coast, they can bend around it so that they meet on the far side. In these circumstances, sediment carried by the waves coming from both sides is deposited where they meet and can build up to form a tombolo.

St Ninian's tombolo links St Ninian's Isle and the Shetland Mainland. It is believed to consist of a shingle core, covered with sand and, at about 500 metres in length, is the largest sandy tombolo currently active in Britain. It is a classic site for coastal geomorphology. The forces that formed it are still active and its width and height above sea level change seasonally and from year to year as sand is built up and removed again by the waves. The SSSI includes the dunes and dune grassland at each end of the tombolo which constitute about half of the area of the site. These areas are part of the overall sediment system because in the long term there is an exchange of sand between them and the tombolo, through erosion and dune formation.

Past and present management

The tombolo links to the land at both ends through a small area of low sand dunes. The adjoining land has probably been used for grazing livestock for many centuries and some parts may also have been cultivated in the past. The dunes and machair at the island end of the site are still grazed throughout the year by sheep. There is a car park surfaced with hard core at the mainland end, which is also used for stock feeding in winter. The tombolo is used as vehicle access to the island for the owner.

During the 1970s and early 80s, sand was extracted from the dunes at the eastern end of the site and this has reduced the area of dunes. The resulting sand pit is now filling with blown sand and revegetating naturally.

The tombolo is a popular tourist beach in Shetland and provides access on foot for visitors to the archaeological site on St Ninian's Isle. It also attracts recreational vehicles, especially scrambling bikes and quads. This does not damage the tombolo where the tracking is restricted to soft sand below the high water mark, as wind and tides soon restore the natural shape. Use of vehicles within the dunes however leads to erosion and is damaging to the structure of the site.

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

We wish to work with the owner and land managers 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 its management.

The objectives for management of the site are:

1. **To maintain the landforms of the tombolo in favourable condition by:**
 - allowing the natural processes of sand deposition and erosion to continue uninterrupted. Developments or activities which may reduce the supply of loose sand and sediment to the tombolo should be avoided, especially the removal of sand.
 - avoiding non-natural erosion of the sand dunes at either end of the tombolo. Visitors should be encouraged to avoid taking short cuts or driving any kind of vehicle across the dunes as this will lead to erosion. Alterations to the parking area or access track should also avoid creating any further bare patches of sand. Stock feeding should be restricted to the paved parking area as trampling of the dunes will also lead to erosion. Rabbit grazing has also been recorded as contributing to erosion and measures to control the population would be beneficial.

Date last reviewed: 15th December 2011