



Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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ULVA, DANNA AND THE MCCORMAIG ISLES
Site of Special Scientific Interest

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1581

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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.

Natural features of Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Tidal rapids	Not monitored to date	
Saline lagoon	Not monitored to date	
Mudflat	Not monitored to date	
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (June 2003)	
Maritime cliff	Favourable, maintained (June 2003)	
Vascular plant assemblage	Favourable, maintained (May 2007)	
Bryophyte assemblage	Unfavourable, declining (September 2005)	
Lowland wet heath	Favourable, recovered (July 2008)	
Lowland dry heath	Favourable, maintained (June 2008)	
Lowland calcareous grassland	Unfavourable, recovering (July 2008)	
Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>), breeding	Unfavourable, recovering (July 2004)	
Shag (<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>), breeding	Unfavourable, recovering (July 2004)	
Greenland barnacle goose (<i>Branta leucopsis</i>), non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2007)	
Greenland white-fronted goose (<i>Anser albifrons flavirostris</i>), non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2007)	
Whooper swan (<i>Cygnus Cygnus</i>), non-breeding	Favourable, maintained (March 2007)	

Features of overlapping SSSI and Natura sites that are not notified as natural features of Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA or SSSI)
Juniper on heaths or calcareous grasslands	Favourable, maintained (October 2008)	SAC
Marsh fritillary butterfly (<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>)	Favourable, maintained (August 2006)	SAC
Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Favourable, maintained (September 2003)	SAC
Dalradian geology	Favourable, maintained (May 2010)	West Tayvallich Peninsula SSSI

Description of the site

Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is situated on the Knapdale peninsula, approximately 15 km south west of Lochgilphead. The SSSI encompasses a richly diverse area of high quality semi-natural habitats on the Ulva peninsula and the small islands lying off the south-western tip of Danna.

The underlying geology has produced a set of ridges and valleys where bands of limestone interchange with acidic quartzite, schist and grits which makes for considerable variability in soil and microclimatic conditions. This variability is mirrored in the diversity of the vegetation which grows here. Furthermore, the history of low intensity farming has helped to nurture a number of rare plants and plant communities.

Of particular interest are the areas of calcareous grasslands, which follow the distribution of underlying limestone geology. These grasslands are species rich and in places support a good selection of orchids. Where more acidic rock types occur wet and dry heath communities have also developed with characteristic heath plant species. These areas also support ancient juniper scrub along the drier ridges.

The coastal fringes of the site include rock crevice vegetation which has been strongly influenced by the maritime conditions and at the north end of Danna and on the northern shores of Loch na Cille there are areas of well-developed saltmarsh.

The site also has a rich marine environment with intertidal communities of national importance. The rapids at the entrance to Linne Mhuirich support the most diverse flora and fauna to be found in Loch Sween while the intertidal mudflats on the shores of Loch na Cille and An Grianan lagoon support rich eel grass communities.

In addition the site supports a rich variety of bird life, including nationally important numbers of wintering Greenland white-fronted geese, barnacle geese and whooper swan. The range of breeding seabirds using the site includes the largest colonies of breeding shag and cormorant in the Mid Argyll district.

Part of Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI is also part of the Tayvallich Juniper and Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which along with the juniper scrub is designated for otters *Lutra lutra* and marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia*.

Corncrakes *Crex crex* have also been recorded with within the SSSI.

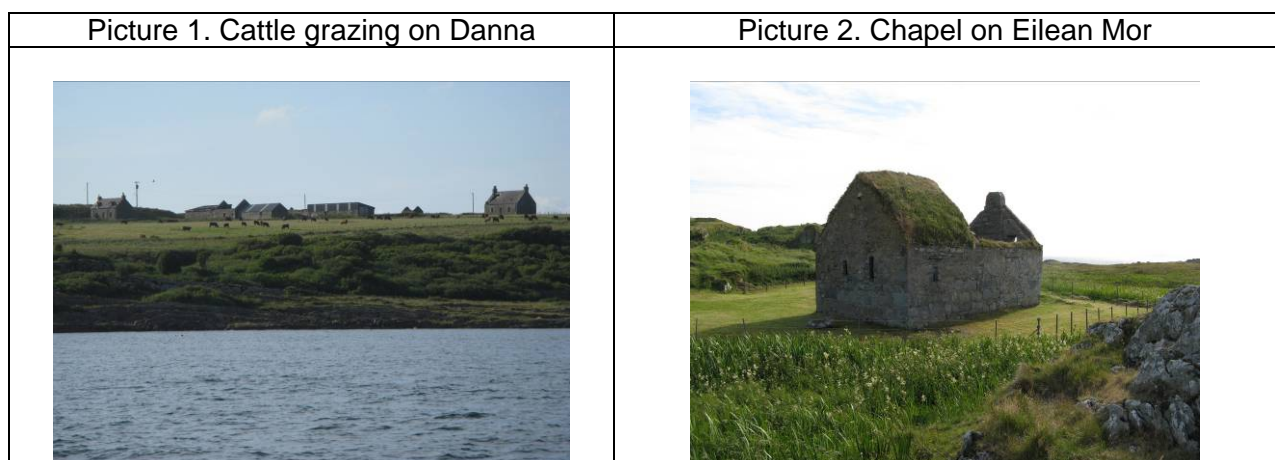
During the most recent site condition monitoring, the majority of site features were found to be in favourable condition. However, when monitored in 2005 the bryophyte assemblage feature

was found to be in unfavourable declining condition due to scrub encroachment and the calcareous grassland feature, monitored in July 2008, was found to be in unfavourable recovering condition due to undergrazing on Eilean Mor.

When monitored in 2004 the breeding cormorants and shags within the SSSI were also found to be in unfavourable condition due to predation, on chicks and eggs, by mink. However as mink control has been carried out their status is currently considered to be recovering.

The lowland wet heath feature of the site, previously assessed as being in unfavourable condition, was monitored again in 2008 with revised monitoring targets and is now considered to be in favourable, recovered condition.

At present the tidal rapids, saline lagoon and mudflat features of the site have not yet been monitored to date.



Past and present management

Livestock farming has been the main land use within the SSSI in the past and continues to be the principal land use today.

Between 1987 and 2010 various management agreements were in place between SNH and owners of the SSSI to support positive management of the site. An umbrella agreement with the owners covered the whole mainland area of the site, while issues relating to specific parts of the site were dealt with by management agreements for individual management units. These agreements regulated stocking levels throughout the year to help maintain grazing-dependant habitats, such as the limestone grassland and juniper scrub. Several exclosures were also established to provide further control over stock distribution, allow grazing to be more targeted and to encourage juniper and woodland regeneration. Invasive species control such as blackthorn, gorse and bracken was also supported to prevent further spread of these species across the site. Some compensatory payments were also made for the loss of production during geese feeding periods and for allowing the geese to graze undisturbed.

A separate management agreement was established with the owners of Eilean Mor and funded mink control, blackthorn cutting costs and the maintenance of stock grazing on the island. These agreements have all since expired.

Between 2004-2007 SNH funded further mink control on the McCormaig Isles and in 2007-2010 the trapping effort was extended to the mainland around Danna and Kilmory peninsulas where mink are thought to set off to the McCormaig Isles from. The funding for this mink control

contract has recently expired.

At present management of the site is supported through the Scottish Rural Development Programme, with two Rural Priorities Schemes running concurrently and covering the majority of the site. The principal aim of these schemes is to ensure that important habitats and species within the SSSI are conserved, enhanced and where possible encouraged to expand in their range. Under the two schemes, management established under the previous management agreements have continued and activities such as controlled grazing to enhance the mosaic of habitats and provide optimal habitat for marsh fritillary butterfly, invasive species control, topping of rushes to enhance wetland habitats and bracken control are being supported.

Other sections of the SSSI could also benefit from the Scottish Rural Development Programme and application to this scheme should be considered in the future.

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 to monitor the effectiveness of the management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, where such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi – SiteLink facility).

1. Maintain and enhance the rich mosaic of habitat types within Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI.

The principal factor ensuring the favourable condition of habitats within the SSSI is the grazing regime which is set out in the RDC-rural priorities scheme. At present this appears to be having a beneficial effect on the lowland heath, saltmarsh, maritime cliff and juniper scrub features of the site. Although the calcareous grassland feature was found to be in unfavourable condition, due to a previous lack of grazing on Eilean Mor, grazing is now taking place on the island. Therefore the current grazing regime should continue and be reviewed if necessary, to ensure that grazing and trampling pressure from stock is at a level which allows plants to flower and set seed.

Dense stands of bracken occur across the site and may lead to the unfavourable condition of some habitats, therefore bracken control, as prescribed in the Rural Priorities Scheme, should continue.

In addition the use of vehicles within the SSSI should be sensitive to the features of interest and avoid damaging these habitats, in particular the saltmarsh, which is susceptible to erosion and physical damage.

2. Maintain viable populations of notable bryophyte and vascular plants species within the SSSI and where possible encourage the expansion of their range.

Baseline population figures and the locations of important nationally scarce bryophyte and vascular plant species within the SSSI have now been recorded and can be used for future site

condition monitoring, which will aim to relocate these plants and record any population changes. At the most recent site condition monitoring the vascular plant assemblage was assessed as being in favourable condition and current management is considered to be benefitting the assemblage component species.

The bryophyte assemblage however, was found to be in unfavourable declining condition. The reason for this being that enclosure fencing has resulted in scrub encroachment across some calcareous rock outcrops with interesting bryophyte communities. Therefore scrub control may need to be introduced in these areas and in the long term the location of enclosures may need to be reviewed, to ensure they are in the optimal position for the bryophyte and juniper/woodland interests of the site.

3. Maintain the high quality and species rich marine environment within Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI.

The rich marine environment within Ulva, Danna and the McCormaig Isles SSSI is a fragile environment and any change in water quality would have major detrimental effects on the marine life. As such, application of fertilisers, pesticides and weedkillers within the mainland section of the SSSI should be sensitive to the adjoining marine environment.

Any changes to the tidal regime would also have damaging effects on the marine life, in particular the animals and plants which are present within Linne Mhuirich rapids. Therefore the narrow entrance to Linne Mhuirich sea loch should remain unobstructed to allow the natural flow of tides.

The shallow depth of the rapids and nearby lagoons also makes the marine life vulnerable to impact damage from recreational craft. Therefore an increase in public awareness of the fragility of the area should encourage sensitive usage of waterways.

4. Maintain suitable habitat for all of the notified, wintering and breeding, bird species within the SSSI.

Current management appears to be benefitting the wintering populations of Whooper swan, Greenland barnacle and white-fronted geese within the SSSI and the low levels of disturbance also contribute to the suitability of the site for wintering wildfowl. Therefore the current grazing regime should continue and disturbance levels should remain low.

The numbers of breeding cormorants and shags within the SSSI have declined since the sites notification and this is thought to be primarily due to predation, on chicks and eggs, by mink. Trapping efforts appear to have allowed the breeding populations within the SSSI to have become more stable in recent years. Therefore it is vital that mink control is continued within the SSSI and SNH staff should work with owners of the SSSI, and investigate possible routes of funding to ensure that mink predation does not lead to further declines in the breeding cormorant and shag populations within the SSSI.

The McCormaig Isles are also a popular destination for tourists in power boats and sailing yachts during the summer months and these visitors can cause disturbance to nesting seabirds. The bothy on Eilean Mor provides information about the island and should be used to raise awareness of the importance of the McCormaig Isles for breeding seabirds and the damaging effects human disturbance can cause during the breeding season.

Fluctuations in prey availability may be another factor contributing to the decline of breeding cormorant and shag populations within the SSSI. Natural fluctuations in prey availability do occur, however increasing evidence suggests that climate change may be having a detrimental

effect on prey availability and therefore breeding success of UK seabird populations. Continued research should shed further light on the effects of climate change, however in the meantime SNH will continue to monitor the populations of breeding cormorants and shags within the SSSI as part of the site condition monitoring programme.

5. Maintain suitable habitats for the overlapping marsh fritillary and otter features of Tayvallich Juniper and Coast Special Area of Conservation.

One of the principal aims of the current grazing regime within the SSSI is to maintain and enhance the site for the marsh fritillary butterfly. Therefore grazing patterns, as set out in the RDC – rural priorities scheme should be maintained at present and reviewed if necessary to ensure the site provides optimal habitat for the marsh fritillary butterfly.

The overlapping SAC is also notified for otters and owners and occupiers of the SSSI should avoid causing disturbance to otters, particularly during breeding seasons.

Date last reviewed: 21 January 2011