



**YELL SOUND COAST
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

Site code: 1686

Northern Isles Area
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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 Yell Sound Coast SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Other relevant designations
Otter (<i>Lutra lutra</i>)	Favourable, maintained (June 2004)	Yell Sound Coast SAC

Features of overlapping SSSI or Natura sites that are not notified as natural features of Yell Sound Coast SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)	Designation (SAC or SPA)
Common seal (<i>Phoca vitulina</i>)	Favourable, maintained (August 2001)	Yell Sound Coast SAC
Coastal Geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable, maintained (December 2006)	The Ayres of Swinister SSSI

Description of the site

Yell Sound Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest consists of 11 separate areas in the north of Shetland: the islands of Brother Isle, Uynarey, Samphrey and Orphasey; Gluss Isle and Fora Ness (two islands connected to the mainland by ayres); the headlands of Calback Ness and Mio Ness; and stretches of coastline at Cul Ness, Lunna Ness and the Ness of Copister.

All of these areas contain the natural features essential for a thriving otter population. The peaty moorland is used to excavate holts. The low rocky coastline with shallow offshore waters provides feeding habitat. Otters forage for fish and crustaceans such as crabs among kelp forests and intertidal wrack. They utilise freshwater areas to wash sea-salt off their pelts and maintain them in pristine condition.

The site supports approximately 180 otters at higher densities than found anywhere else in Britain. This is thought to represent at least a fifth of Shetland's otters and is over 2.5% of the entire UK population. When last surveyed in June 2004, the site was assessed in favourable condition. It provided suitable habitats and evidence of otter activity including breeding was found in all areas.

At times the site also supports over 300 common seals which is more than 1% of the United Kingdom population. These use the offshore islands for hauling out, moulting and pupping.

Past and present management

Most of the site is unimproved moorland used for rough grazing by sheep, although some areas, notably at Copister and Lunna, have had some limited agricultural improvement. The presence of ruined buildings on some of the islands and headlands shows that some of these areas were settled and cultivated. Peat cutting is apparently now restricted to small banks on Lunna Ness and Gluss Isle but peat is likely to have been more extensively cut in the past. There are disused peat banks at Mio Ness and on the islands.

Sullom Voe Oil Terminal is situated to the south of the site and Calback Ness, which lies within the bounds of the Sullom Voe Oil Terminal, has not been grazed since the mid 1970s. Various oil containment boom sheds and navigation aids associated with the oil terminal lie within the site, notably at Calback Ness, Mio Ness and Gluss Isle. The pipeline from the Ninian Field, bringing crude oil to the Sullom Voe Terminal, makes landfall at Grutwick at Lunna Ness and crosses the Lunna peninsula, while a new gas pipeline has permission to make landfall just outside the SSSI at Mio Ness to supply a gas processing plant currently under construction. The aquaculture industry also has equipment and facilities within the site including water pipes and telephone cables on the Ness of Setter (Lunna) and a service shed and pier in Boatsroom Voe.

A company set up in 2001 in Hamnavoe markets organic seaweed products. Egg wrack is harvested by hand in the intertidal zone on a small area within the site.

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.

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. To maintain the population and distribution of otters within the site

Otters are not tolerant of dogs or intense human disturbance. Minimise impacts of coastal developments and maintenance works on otters. Raise awareness of visitors and others using Shetland's coastline for recreational activities both off-shore and on land, of otters' sensitivity to disturbance. Otters may also be affected by activities such as whelk collecting - which requires collectors to work along the shore for long periods – and creel fishing: lobster creels and crab pots can trap and drown otters.

2. To maintain the extent and condition of coastal habitats on which otters depend

These include undisturbed areas of coastal peat for shelter, sources of freshwater for washing their pelt and intertidal and offshore areas of kelp and seaweed that support their prey. Ensure that holts and freshwater areas are not damaged or destroyed. Retain agricultural practices compatible with the maintenance of coastal peatland, and seaweed harvesting at a level which allows regeneration. Where developments occur, mitigation measures should be put in place to avoid loss of habitat. Fish farms should be regulated so that their effluent does not cause degradation of otter foraging habitat.

Other factors affecting the natural features of the site

Pollution and litter: Although otters in Shetland do not have to contend with the high levels of pollution that limit their distribution in some parts of Europe, marine pollution is a constant threat. Otters in Shetland accumulate relatively high levels of mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The proximity of Sullom Voe Oil Terminal means there is risk of oil spill. Contingency measures are under constant review and the terminal's commitment to high standards minimises it. Marine litter, particularly fishing net and beer pack collars, can strangle and drown animals. Pollution and litter are issues that require measures at both local and international levels.

Management outwith the site: The SSSI extends to the low water mark but activities in the marine environment may also influence otters. Uses of the coastal waters in the area include salmon and shellfish farming and shipping. A considerable amount of traffic results from the oil industry, fishing, fish farming and recreational craft. Shetland's otters have however become accustomed to living with developments such as ferry breakwaters and the jetties at Sullom Voe.

Date last reviewed: 22 February 2011