



Scottish Natural Heritage

**BOGSIDE FLATS  
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 239**

19 Wellington Square  
Ayr  
KA7 1EZ

Tel: 01292 261392  
Fax: 01292 269439

## 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

Bogside Flats, situated around the common estuary of the Rivers Irvine and Garnock, contains the only extensive expanse of estuarine saltmarsh and mudflats between the Solway Firth and the Inner Clyde estuary.

The biologically productive saltmarsh and mudflats are the best example of this habitat type in Ayrshire and they display a variety of plant and animal communities representative of different degrees of tidal inundation.

The saltmarsh habitat is considered to be in a favourable condition. All the possible saltmarsh habitat zones (upper, middle, and lower saltmarsh) are present. This is unusual as lower saltmarsh is not common in Scotland. The target number of indicator species present was exceeded for all three zones as well as within the pioneer saltmarsh that was also found within the site. Pans and creeks are present within the saltmarsh generally and no rare or negative indicator species were found. The only damage to the saltmarsh of any kind has resulted from the past fortification of the banks of the River Garnock with rock armouring. Although this affected the pioneer saltmarsh, the river banks are now mostly vegetated and the rock armouring is not visible in all places. Therefore this does not render the habitat in unfavourable condition. The transitions from saltmarsh to terrestrial habitats are also intact. The condition of the mudflat habitat has not yet been assessed.

The site also includes the adjacent coastal grassland and developing heath. The intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh and grassland are extensively used by migrant and wintering wildfowl and waders. The large wintering populations of eider, red breasted merganser and cormorant are nationally significant. Of regional significance are the populations of golden plover, redshank, wigeon, lapwing, dunlin, oystercatcher, shelduck and whooper swans. Overall this is one of the most important feeding and roosting areas for wildfowl and waders in Ayrshire.

Natural features of Bogside Flats SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Saltmarsh	Favourable, maintained (August 2002)
Mudflat	Not yet monitored

### Past and present management

In the past the estuary suffered severe industrial pollution that created very acid conditions and increased organic nutrients, copper and zinc. Since the demise of the heavy and chemical industries in the Garnock catchment and the construction of a long sea outfall in 1981 pollution in the estuary has decreased. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) currently classifies the Garnock/Irvine Estuary as 'Good' with 'high water quality' and a 'good overall ecological status'.

The lower reach of the River Garnock was previously dredged on a regular basis to ensure that shipping could have access to the Garnock Wharf. The wharf is now derelict and the River Garnock has not been dredged since the early 1980's. To ensure the passage of recreational craft and access to the former shipyard where the former clipper ship 'Carrick' is stored, the River Irvine requires intermittent dredging adjacent to the SSSI.



Eider ducks winter within the site (male top and female below)

Part of the grassland area within the east of the site was previously used as part of Bogside Racecourse. Historically this area had been mined for coal and during the Second World War it provided the site for a small anti-aircraft battery.

In recent years the area around the SSSI has attracted interest from industry, tourism and housing development. Part of the Garnock East area, to the north of the SSSI has planning approval for sand quarrying. This supersedes an expired approval for a 'waste disposal land raise' at the same location.

The Ardeer peninsula to the west of the River Garnock was the site of Alfred Nobel's explosive factory (established in the early 1870s) and more recently the site of 'the Big Idea' millennium building, which opened in 2000 but closed in 2003. This area is now being considered for redevelopment with new residential, industrial and recreational opportunities being cited. It is anticipated that when proposals are brought forward there may be a need to carry out restoration works (e.g. removal of bridges or pipes) within the SSSI. Although a number of different options have been proposed some of these may lead to adverse impacts on the SSSI and therefore, any future development requires careful consideration and planning.

Adjoining the site at its southern edge there is a leisure and harbour development near the mouth of the estuary at Irvine Harbour. Further mixed-use development of this area, part of the Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Area, is planned for 2010. These works are all out-with the SSSI, but care will be needed to ensure that disturbance within the SSSI is minimised.

In March 2009 the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) acquired the Marress Field on the Eastern bank of the River Irvine within the SSSI. The Bogside RSPB reserve is managed as a grazed floodplain for the benefit of birdlife in the area.

Leisure and recreational pursuits undertaken within the site include angling, walking, bird watching, and horse riding. These are generally at low levels and cause no problems. Wildfowling is legal below the Mean High Water Spring tide level, however due to the nature of the location it seldom takes place.

Informal bait and crab collecting is a frequent occurrence, and may cause temporary and localised disturbance to roosting or feeding wildfowl. At current levels, this activity is unlikely to have an adverse effect on the distribution and abundance of important bird species.

### **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 management.

1. **To maintain the extent and condition of saltmarsh habitat** by ensuring protection from damaging impacts.

The light grazing which currently occurs within parts of the site should continue and opportunities for the introduction of grazing within parts of the old race course should be explored. Appropriate grazing levels help ensure that undesirable species are prevented from dominating as they suppress botanical diversity.

The features of the site should also be safeguarded from tipping or other obstruction, such as the construction of pipelines, dumping of waste or coastal protection works. Any future coastal protection or flood prevention works would need to ensure there are no adverse impacts on the saltmarsh.

2. **To maintain the extent and forage value of intertidal mudflats** by minimising or avoiding damaging impacts including harmful pollution.

It is important that the water of the estuary and hence the mudflats remains free of pollution to enable invertebrates to thrive which in turn provide food for waterfowl. In the past ICI undertook various works to mitigate the effects of pollution on the estuary including the long sea outfall and a treatment system to prevent contaminated groundwater reaching the estuary from former operational areas and a closed special waste site. SNH seek to be closely involved with future development plans to ensure that any development in the area is undertaken in a sustainable manner and does not compromise the integrity of Bogside Flats SSSI.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) carries out periodical surveys to check discharges and to monitor the quality and biological status of the mudflats and receiving waters.

### **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

**Wintering birds** – The site holds important populations of wintering waterfowl and waders. It is important that any land management practices – existing and proposed – and any land use changes are carefully planned to avoid disturbance to wintering birds. SNH will assist land managers and others in planning existing or proposed land uses in a manner sensitive to the needs of the site.

**Recreation** - Access to the site and adjoining land should follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) to ensure disturbance to the wintering birds is minimised.

Front page photograph: View of the saltmarsh habitat looking towards 'The Big Idea' (closed 2003).

Date last reviewed: 4 February 2011