Scottish Natural Heritage

EOLIGARRY **Site of Special Scientific Interest** **SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT** **Site code: 611**	**SNH, Uist and Barra office** **Western Isles Area** **Stilligarry** **South Uist** **HS8 5RS** **Tel: 01870 620238** **e: western_isles@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.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

Natural features of Eoligarry SSSI	Condition of feature (date monitored)
Coastal geomorphology of Scotland	Favourable, maintained (7 August 2002)
Machair	Favourable, maintained (10 September 2004)
Sand dunes	Favourable, maintained (10 September 2004)

Description of the site

Eoligarry, located at the north end of the island of Barra encompasses an extensive beach dune and machair complex which connects the high rocky outcrops of Ben Bhaslain in the south and Beinn Eoligarry in the north. The machair forms a wedge-shaped isthmus with its apex pointing south west and is bounded to the east and west by beaches of shell-rich sand. Traigh Mhor on the east side is a vast, flat sandy area of particular interest for the profusion of intertidal banks of cockle shells and for the series of large-scale intertidal ripples and sand bars, the formation of which may be related to local wave patterns. On the Atlantic west coast, Traigh Eais, composed of more mineral-rich sand, is backed by a series of dissected high dunes. Morphological studies indicate a general eastward movement of the sand here.

The dune and machair landforms comprise the main geomorphological interest of the site. There is a superb assemblage of features formed by Aeolian (wind-driven) processes, in combination, unusual in a Scottish context. These include steep-sided corridor blowouts (areas of bare sand), undercut machair along the eastern coastal edge which forms a 1 - 2 metre high vertical sand cliff. The geomorphological features of the site were monitored in August 2002 and found to be in favourable condition.

The machair vegetation closely reflects the geomorphological conditions and the influence of bedrock near the surface. There is a fine pattern of zonation of the vegetation related to the increasing stability inland. Patterns round individual blowouts with repeated sequences through various forms of mobile dune, semi-fixed dune and fixed dune grassland. Good areas of young dune slack are developing in areas of dune stabilisation and wet dune grassland lies on thinner sand close to the bedrock. On the southern flanks and summit crest of Beinn Eoligarry there are particularly good examples of climbing dunes. In the dry dunes and wet grassland there is a high density of primroses (*Primula vulgaris*). A burn flows through an area of marsh and fen at the south end. The machair and sand dune features of the site were monitored in September 2004 and found to be in favourable condition.

The site is used by feeding, nesting and overwintering birds including lapwing, snipe, fulmar and gulls and wintering oystercatcher, ringed plover and sanderling. Although these species use the site, they are not protected natural features of Eoligarry SSSI.

Past and present management

Past land use included grazing of the machair, small scale cultivation and cockle gathering on Traigh Mhor. Commercial air services have operated from Eoligarry since 1935, with planes landing on Traigh Mhor. In 1971 and 1994 construction of a hard airstrip was considered. A local referendum in 1996 found a majority in favour of a hard air strip, but at a site other than Eoligarry. From the 1950s until 1998, broken shell from Traigh Mhor was sold for harling, grit and paths. From the early 1960s until the early 1990s SOAEFD carried out a successful programme of fencing and marram planting operations on the western edge of the machair for dune stabilisation purposes.

Current grazing regulations for Eoligarry machair permit only grazing by cattle from May to October. Ardmhor machair is currently only grazed by sheep. Eoligarry common grazings ESA plan, which included rabbit control measures and stabilisation of areas of exposed sand within the machair behind the shore dunes, expired in 2007. The township aims to continue management as per the ESA by applying for agri-environmental support through the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

Traigh Mhor continues to be used as a landing strip for scheduled and occasional chartered flights. Small scale hand gathering of cockles for both domestic and commercial purposes occurs on Traigh Mhor. Informal recreational use occurs across much of the site, particularly the beaches. Although the island is growing in popularity as a holiday destination, numbers of visitors still remain relatively low. The various land uses that occur across the site have a negligible impact on the geomorphological interests of the site, however, the level and type of grazing is critical for continued botanical interest.

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

We wish to work with the owner and/or 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.

1. To maintain the geomorphology of the site in its present condition by ensuring any management activities do not adversely affect natural coastal processes. No fires should be started on the site or allowed to spread onto it as any burning would damage the dune vegetation and increase the risk of erosion.

2. To maintain the present condition and extent of the machair by ensuring grazing is maintained at a sustainable level.

3. To maintain the present condition of the sand dunes by ensuring any management activities do not adversely impact on the dunes. Vehicle use should be avoided on dunes where the main vegetation is marram grass because this could lead to large blow outs in the dunes and erosion that would be very difficult to control.

Front page photograph: View south along the dune ridge of Traigh Mhor, Eoligarry

Date last reviewed: 21 April 2009