NatureScot
Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

MULL OF GALLOWAY SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

CONSERVATION ADVICE PACKAGE

Mull of Galloway SAC/SSSI, RSPB Mog 2013 SCM

Site Details

Site name:	Mull of Galloway
Map:	https://sitelink.nature.scot/site/8336
Location:	South Western Scotland
Site code:	UK0030220
Area (ha):	137.14
Date designated:	17 March 2005

Qualifying features

Qualifying feature	SCM assessed condition	SCM visit date	UK overall Conservation Status
Vegetated sea cliffs (vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts) [H1230]	Favourable Declining	30 July 2013	Unfavourable – Bad

Notes:
Assessed condition refers to the condition of the SAC feature assessed at a site level as part of NatureScot's Site Condition Monitoring (SCM) programme.
Conservation status is the overall condition of the feature throughout its range within the UK as reported to the European Commission under Article 17 of the Habitats Directive in 2019.

Overlapping Protected Areas

Luce Bay and Sands SAC and Mull of Galloway SSSI

Key factors affecting the qualifying features

Vegetated sea cliffs
This habitat occurs on steep slopes fringing hard or soft coasts, created by past or present marine erosion, and supporting a wide diversity of vegetation types with variable maritime influence. Exposure to the sea and wind, and in particular salt spray blown on to the cliff face and cliff top is a key determinant of the type of sea cliff vegetation. The most exposed areas support maritime vegetation dominated by a range of salt-tolerant plants. More sheltered cliffs support communities closely related to those found on similar substrates inland, such as grassland and heath, with only a minor maritime element in the flora.

Key factors affecting the Mull of Galloway include changes in agriculture land use (fertiliser-drift and seed-throw) leading to over-enrichment, grazing practice and colonisation of the vegetated sea-cliffs by invasive native species (e.g. creeping thistle and bracken).

Further information about vegetated sea cliffs can be found on the JNCC website.

The profile and stability of the cliff face is one of the major determinants of cliff vegetation. Near-vertical cliffs support specialist crevice communities, while ledges occupied by breeding seabirds may develop specialist nitrophilous communities comprising plant species which are able to cope with heavy guano deposition. On less extreme slopes, species tolerant of exposure to wind and salt spray and of thin soils can find a foothold. The cliff top vegetation included in this habitat comprises maritime grassland and maritime heath.

Conservation Objectives for vegetated sea cliffs (vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts)

1. To ensure that the qualifying feature of Mull of Galloway SAC is in favourable condition and makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status.
Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) is considered at a European biogeographic level. When determining whether management measures may be required to ensure that the conservation objectives for this site are achieved, the focus should be on maintaining or restoring the contribution that this site makes to FCS. When carrying out appraisals of plans and projects against these conservation objectives, it is not necessary to understand the status of the feature in other SACs in this biogeographic region. The purpose of the appraisal should be to understand whether the integrity of the site (see objective 2) would be maintained. If this is the case then its contribution to FCS across the Atlantic Biogeographic Region will continue to be met. Further details on how these appraisals should be carried out in relation to maintaining site integrity is provided by objective 2 (including parts a, b, and c). If broader information on the feature is available then it should be used to provide context to the site-based appraisal. Note that “appropriate” within this part of the conservation objectives is included to indicate that the contribution to FCS varies from site to site and feature to feature.

2. To ensure that the integrity of Mull of Galloway SAC is maintained by meeting objectives 2a, 2b and 2c for the qualifying feature.
The aim at this SAC is to maintain the vegetated sea cliffs habitat in a favourable condition as a contribution to its wider conservation status. Therefore any impacts to the objectives shown in 2a, 2b or 2c below must not persist so that they prevent the achievement of this overall aim. When carrying out appraisals of plans or projects the focus should be on maintaining site integrity, specifically by meeting the objectives outlined in 2a, 2b and 2c. If these are met then site integrity will continue to be maintained. Note that not all of these will be relevant for every activity being considered. Any impacts on the objectives shown in 2a, 2b or 2c below must not persist so that they prevent the maintenance of site integrity. Temporary impacts on these objectives resulting from plans or projects can only be permitted where they do not prevent the ability of a feature to recover and there is certainty that the features will be able to quickly recover. This objective recognises that the qualifying habitat is exposed to a wide range of drivers of change. Some of these are natural and are not a direct result of human influences. Such changes in the habitats’ extent, distribution or condition within the site which are brought about by natural processes, directly or indirectly, are normally considered compatible with

the site's conservation objectives. An exception to this is when the favourable condition of a habitat is dependent on halting or managing natural succession. An assessment of whether a change is natural or anthropogenic, or a combination of both, will need to be looked at on a case by case basis.

2a. Maintain the extent and distribution of the habitat within the site

The extent of the vegetated sea cliffs habitat at the Mull of Galloway is approximately 136.93 ha. This should be maintained.

Accurate measurement of the extent of this habitat is difficult due to its location on vertical or near vertical slopes, but does include where appropriate, the cliff-top maritime vegetation. The area figure, taken from the Standard Data Form, should therefore be used only as a guide, The objective is that there should be no measurable net reduction in the extent of the habitat and its distribution throughout the site should be maintained.

The extent of this habitat is largely determined by topography, being found on vertical or steeply sloping cliffs with exposure to salt spray and the wind. These factors limit the potential for expansion or loss of extent through natural processes.

The extent of the habitat on the SAC is also, in part, determined by the presence of banks and field dykes/fence lines that separate the cliff tops from adjoining agricultural fields.

2b. Maintain, the structure, function and supporting processes of the habitat

The structure of the habitat is influenced by geomorphological processes, degree of exposure to the wind and sea, associated salt spray on the cliff face and cliff tops and the surrounding agriculture land use. Exposed stretches of coast support salt-tolerant vegetation, while more sheltered areas support plant communities similar to those found inland such as grassland and heath. Soils are light, sandy and well-drained. Narrow strips of soil are often very shallow along the top of the cliffs. Scare rocks are mostly dominated by thick guano mostly from the breeding seabird populations.

Seabirds nest on the cliffs, but do not generally nest near the vegetated sea cliffs and are not influential in maintaining the qualifying habitat.

The natural processes of the sea cliffs and ecological transition to the clifftop areas can be disrupted by practices such as building coastal defenses, roads, and /or extraction of rock.

Agricultural land use has had an influence on the cliff grassland habitat. Unfenced areas and fences that are in poor condition have allowed livestock to graze the cliff tops, where grasses were palatable, sward was shorter and more species diverse. Consequences of this have been areas of erosion, and bare soil has been observed. Cliff tops/slopes are ungrazed in some areas due to the topography, and this is considered to be encouraging a rank sward in some areas, with resulting litter build-up and detrimental effect on species diversity. Changing grazing practices, where needed to prevent over-grazing, would be beneficial for the site's feature. Management to prevent and/ or remove the rank vegetation where it occurs should also be considered.

Fertiliser-drift and seed-throw from surrounding arable fields are potentially harming the qualifying grassland by enriching the soil and by the introduction of species that are not part of the habitat. The objective here is to avoid such impacts to the site to allow the grassland, including its typical species, to flourish.

2c. Maintain the distribution and viability of typical species of the habitat

Maritime cliff vegetation (slope and cliff top) varies according to a number of physical and

biological factors, but most important among these are climate, degree of exposure to sea-spray, geology and soil type, level of grazing, and the amount of seabird activity.

Typical species that colonise the cliff slope on this site are Red fescue *Festuca rubra;* Thrift *Armeria maritima;* Sea campion *Silene uniflora;* Scot's lovage *Ligusticum scoticum;* Sea plantain *Plantago maritima;* Ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolate;* roseroot *Sedum rosea;* wild angelica *sylvestris;* wild carrot *Daucus carota;* common sorrel *Rumex acetosa;* wild hyacinth *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus;* sea mayweed *Tripleurospermum maritimum;* sea spleenwort *Asplenium maritimum;* primrose *Primula vulgaris;* Scurvy-grass *Cochlearia officinalis.*

Typical species on the clifftop maritime grassland, of which is dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus,* Sea campion *Silene uniflora,*Sea plantain *Plantago maritima,* Wild carrot *Daucus carota,* Common sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and Thrift *Armeria maritima* were recorded as occasional, Ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, Bluebell *Hyancinthoides non-scripta*, Common centaury *Centaurium sp* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa.*

Typical species on the clifftop maritime heath which is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bell heather *Erica cinerea* is present, Sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina;* birdsfoot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus;* wild thyme *Thymus praecox;* tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and spring squill *scilla verna*

This SAC is the most northerly and the only recorded site in Scotland, of Small restharrow, *Ononis reclinata*, found at only three other sites within the UK. Currently it is not known if this plant is still present at the Mull of Galloway.

Appropriate grazing pressure and the appropriate timing of it is generally required to allow flowering and fruiting of cliff top vegetation and maintain the maritime grassland and maritime heath.

Excessive tracking/trampling by livestock, visitors and vehicles can contribute to a deterioration in the habitat structure, leading to a reduction or loss in the typical/indicator species for this habitat, and could lead to deterioration and/ or loss of the cliff-top vegetation.

Colonisation of the vegetated sea-cliffs by invasive native species, such as: creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense,* spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare,* perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne,* broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius,* common ragwort *Senecio jacobaea,* white clover *Trifolium repens,* stinging nettle *Urtica dioica,* hogweed, bramble, and bracken could all result in loss of the typical species of the habitat as they are outcompeted. The numbers and distribution of such species should be restricted as far as possible.

Cultivation of arable fields right up the boundary of the SAC, is causing problems from the increasing presence of some agricultural weeds, which are affecting sward height in some of the maritime cliff grassland.

Fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis)*, Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla)* and Razorbill (*Alca torda)* are qualifiers of the SSSI and are also considered typical species of the SAC because they depend on the physical characteristics of the sea cliffs, and the relative lack of disturbance they provide for breeding. The cliffs of the Mull of Galloway SSSI support the largest seabird colony on mainland southwest Scotland.

Conservation Measures

Mull of Galloway SAC is notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and management changes described on the SSSI list of Operations Requiring Consent must have prior consent from SNH (NatureScot).

Current and recommended management for vegetated sea cliffs

Issue	Measure	Responsible party
Grazing impacts	Ensure an appropriate light seasonal grazing regime to allow flowering and fruiting of cliff-top vegetation to prevent loss of typical species and habitat deterioration. Maintain fences/dykes and ensure they are secure.	Land managers, Landowners, Nature Scot
Excessive tracking/trampling by livestock / visitors / vehicles	Ensure vehicle-tracking is minimal to prevent loss of typical species. Interpretation signs to inform visitors as to key species and why paths are narrowed. This will help typical species to thrive and help with erosion.	Land managers, Nature Scot, Dumfries and Galloway Planning Authority
Excessive Disturbance	Ensure no significant disturbance to seabirds through human activity during their breeding seasons from sea, air or landwards.	Land managers, Landowners, NatureScot
Colonisation by vigorous / invasive native species	Ensure colonisation of this habitat by vigorous native species, such as thistle, ragwort, bracken is minimal: to prevent loss of the typical species.	Land managers, NatureScot,
Habitat Management	Support management that helps to restore the qualifying grassland, RSPB have their own 10 year management plan.	NatureScot, landowners, Land managers.
Research and monitoring	To identify emerging impacts on the habitat and their causes, in order to understand the long term issues, and to inform future management.	NatureScot, Landowners, Land managers
Cultivation of arable fields	Ensure the creation of buffer zones between field boundaries and the SAC to help prevent enrichment and reduce weed spread.	NatureScot, Landowners, Land managers

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Approved on 24 February 2020 by:

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International Designations	Tayside and Grampian