



**NatureScot**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

## Conservation and Management Advice

### **HANDA SPA**

**UK SITE: 9001241**

*DECEMBER 2024*

This document provides advice to Public Authorities and stakeholders about the activities that may affect the protected features of Handa Special Protection Area (SPA). It provides advice from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (operating under the name of and hereinafter referred to as NatureScot) under Regulation 33(2) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended in Scotland) to other relevant authorities on the Conservation Objectives for the Handa SPA, and any operations which may cause deterioration of natural habitats or the habitats of species, or disturbance of species for which the site has been designated. It covers a range of different activities and developments but is not exhaustive. It focuses on where there is a risk to achieving the Conservation Objectives. The paper does not attempt to cover all possible future activities or eventualities (e.g. as a result of accidents) and does not consider cumulative effects.

Further information on marine protected areas and management is available at -

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/marine-environment/marine-protected-areas/>

For the full range of MPA site documents and more on the fascinating range of marine life to be found in Scotland's seas, please visit -

[www.nature.scot/mpas](http://www.nature.scot/mpas) or <https://jncc.gov.uk/advice/marine-protected-areas/>

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## 1 Overview of document

This document provides details of the Conservation and Management Advice for the Handa Special Protection Area (SPA) and it is divided into eight main sections. The introduction in section 2 gives an overview of the Handa SPA and its contribution in terms of conservation and wider benefits. Section 3 provides an overview of the roles of the various bodies involved with advising, regulating and managing the SPA. Section 4 describes the protected features and their condition, and section 5 introduces the Conservation Objectives for the site. Section 6 describes the threats and pressures to which the protected features are sensitive, and section 7 provides the management advice for these activities. Section 8 identifies what further research and surveys may be required to increase our understanding of how the protected features utilise the marine protected area.

Annex 1 sets out the Handa SPA Conservation Objectives. Annex 2 provides supporting information relating to the protected features.

Throughout this document the term Special Protection Area (SPA) is used in relation to the site name, e.g. Handa SPA or in discussion of the specific legislation relating to the site. Otherwise the term Marine Protected Area (MPA) is used when discussing the MPA network generally. The term *qualifying features* is used in the Conservation Objectives to refer to those Annex 1 and regularly occurring migratory bird species that the Handa SPA has specifically been designated to protect. Within the wider document text, the term *protected features* is used to refer both to these specific site features and more generally to species or habitats protected through MPA designations.

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Purpose statement

The Handa Special Protection Area (SPA) has been designated to protect five species of breeding seabirds, and their supporting habitats. By doing so it contributes to the Scottish, UK and OSPAR MPA networks, the conservation of the wider marine environment around Scotland, and progress towards Good Environmental Status within the North-East Atlantic marine region.

The main purpose of the Handa SPA is to contribute towards the [Favourable Conservation Status](#) of the protected features in the Marine Atlantic Biogeographic Region. The Conservation Objectives form the framework for establishing appropriate management measures and assessing all future plans and projects that have the potential to affect the protected features of the MPA.

### 2.2 Conservation benefits

The conservation benefits for the Handa SPA are:

- Protecting internationally important numbers of guillemots (2.9% of the North Atlantic biogeographic population)
- Protecting internationally important numbers of razorbill (1.9% of the A.t. islandica biogeographic population)
- Protecting nationally important aggregations of breeding seabirds including kittiwake, guillemot, great skua, fulmar and razorbill.
- Protecting important waters immediately surrounding the seabird breeding colony, which birds use for resting, preening and other maintenance activities.
- Protecting important cliff habitats where the seabird protected features can nest.

- Protecting waters with rich marine habitats, including important shelf waters with areas of high productivity, that support a diversity of pelagic and demersal fish, bivalve molluscs, gastropods and crustaceans where the seabirds can feed.

### **2.3 Wider benefits**

The protected features of the Handa SPA provide ecosystem services locally and to the wider marine ecosystem. We describe these ecosystem services in terms of their functions (the support or provision of something to the wider ecosystem e.g. habitat, nutrient cycling, sediment stabilisation) and natural resources (e.g. fish and shellfish, aggregates, wildlife), which in turn lead to benefits for people.

Figure 1 illustrates how the protected features of the Handa SPA contribute to benefits for people. There can be many complex interactions and dependencies amongst the protected features, their functions, associated natural resources and the benefits we gain from them.

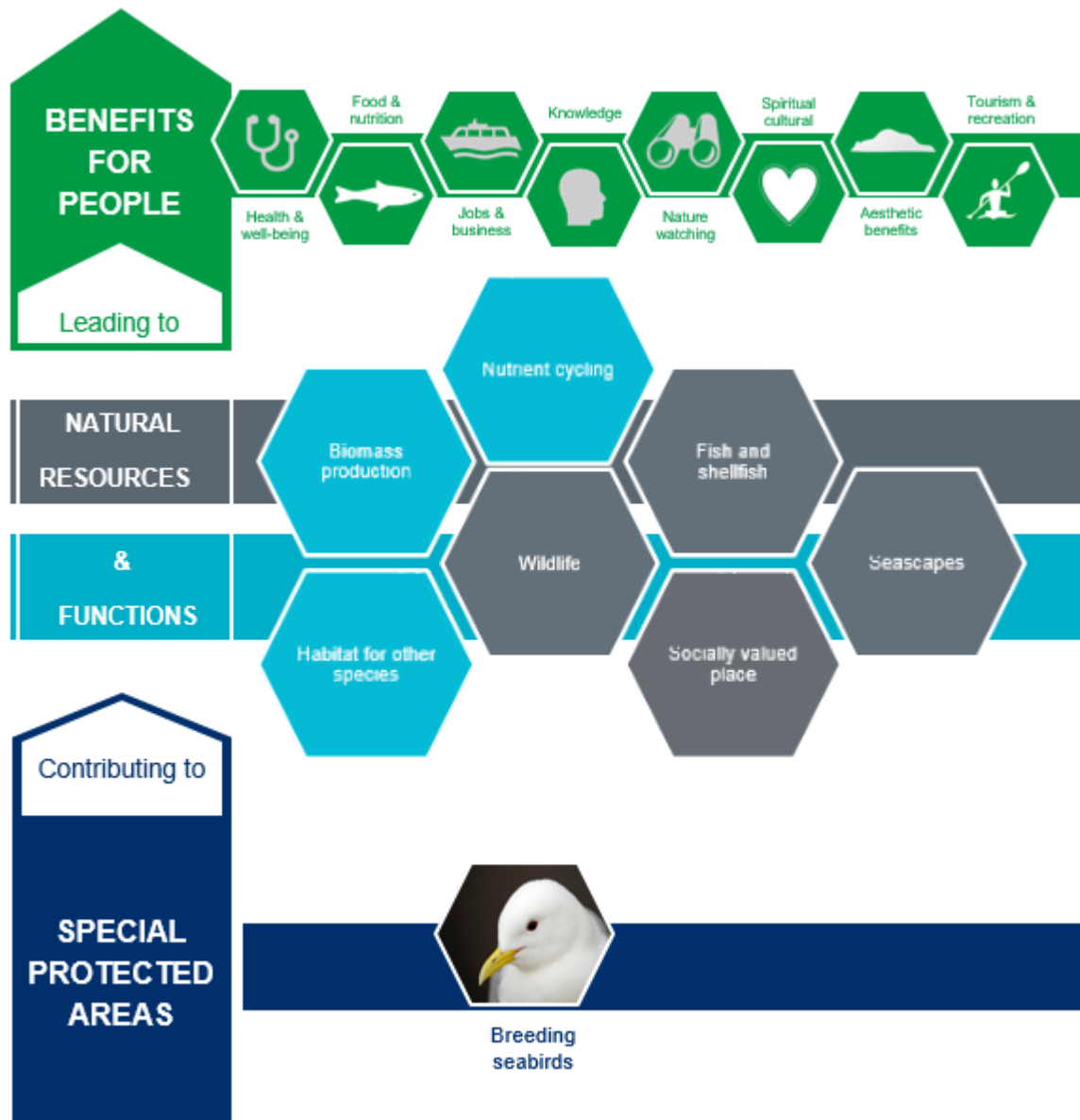
The protected features, especially when taken within the context of the whole SPA and/or local ecosystem, contribute to certain functions more than others, e.g. biomass production and nutrient cycling and are fundamental to the continued supply of natural resources and benefits associated with this SPA, and to the long-term health of the protected features.

In terms of resources, the SPA comprises a rich diversity coastal habitats. Handa is composed of Torridonian red sandstone with cliffs rising up to 100 meters high. The island also comprises sea caves and stacks as well as beaches in the south and east which are used by breeding terns. A range of maritime grassland and heath vegetation grows on Handa. The cliffs have tiers and ledges that make suitable nest sites for breeding seabirds, and the interior of this island is dominated by heather, which skuas use as breeding grounds. The boundary of the SPA extends approximately 2 km into the marine environment to include the seabed, water column and surface.

The rich and varied natural resources present within the SPA give rise to a wide range of benefits to people. The seascapes and wildlife within the SPA provide opportunities for tourism, recreation and wildlife watching and provide inspiration for artists and authors. Handa is one of the iconic visitor destinations in northwest Scotland, drawing in over 5000 visitors per year. Visitors to the island are also customers for local businesses including the ferry that takes visitors to the island, and cafes and accommodation in Tarbet, Scourie and the surrounding area. These visitor services provide long term employment in the area. The island is currently managed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The volunteer warden scheme provides high quality experience for participants who help with tasks such as assisting visitors ashore from the ferry, providing visitor information and counting seabirds. The warden scheme also enhances the experience of visitors to the island and helps to ensure that the nesting seabirds are enjoyed without disturbing them. The wardens themselves are also additional customers for local businesses. Fisheries and supporting businesses from local communities within and around the MPA utilise and benefit from the wildlife and the area's fish and shellfish resources, for example by providing fresh seafood to the local restaurants that are used by visitors to the island. Further benefits relating to health and well-being, food and nutrition also arise from the site's natural resources, resulting in a place where communities and visitors can spend time connecting with and enjoying nature.

The benefits that arise from the functions and natural resources of the MPA are typically small in the context of the whole of Scotland although Handa is so famous that even people who have not visited the island can enjoy it from afar through books, TV programmes and the internet. Handa is already a major local visitor attraction and the benefits from this MPA are of substantial importance locally for the people that use it as well as being important for

local ecosystem function. There is potential for benefits to be enhanced by improving the quantity or quality (health) of the protected features themselves.



**Figure 1. Benefits to people associated with protected features of the Handa SPA.**

#### **2.4 Contribution to policy commitments**

Managing the Handa SPA to maintain the protected features in favourable condition, will ensure the continued provision of the benefits above as well as the SPA's contribution to:

- An ecologically coherent network of MPAs which are well managed under the OSPAR convention and national legislation.
- Achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the protected features in the Atlantic Biogeographic Region.
- Progress towards achieving Good Environmental Status in relation to maintaining biological diversity and ensuring marine food web abundance and diversity.

- Making a significant contribution to the protection, enhancement and health of the marine area under the National Marine Plan.
- Restoring marine and coastal ecosystems and increasing the environmental status of our seas under the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.
- Helping to adapt to climate change under The Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme.

### 3 Roles

This document provides advice for Handa SPA in relation to activities that may affect the protected features. More detailed advice can be provided to relevant authorities to inform their decision making as required. In doing this, our aim is to ensure the Conservation Objectives for the protected features are met.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended in Scotland) (the “Habitats Regulations”) under Regulation 33(2), make special provisions for the protection of European marine sites, requiring SNH (now referred to as NatureScot), to advise other relevant authorities of the Conservation Objectives for a site, and also of the operations which may cause deterioration of the habitats or species, or disturbance of species protected in the SPA.

It is the role of the relevant and competent authorities<sup>1</sup> to ensure that the activities they regulate, permit or license do not hinder the achievement of the Conservation Objectives of the Handa SPA. The management advice in this document is provided to assist authorities in managing the activities outlined in section 7 and undertaking Habitats Regulations Appraisals of plans and projects.

Stakeholders can provide additional evidence to support the development of management including local knowledge of the environment and of activities. This will contribute to the development of well-designed and effective management measures.

### 4 Protected features and status

The Handa SPA has been selected to become part of the UK’s SPA network, contributing to Scotland’s MPA network, which in turn has been established to help conserve and recover a range of Scotland’s important marine habitats, wildlife, geology and landforms.

The protected features of the Handa SPA are protected within the SPA throughout the year, irrespective of the season for which they qualified as a protected feature.

Table 1 provides a summary of the protected features within the MPA, their condition within the site (where known) based on the latest NatureScot [Site Condition Monitoring](#) assessment, and the broader conservation status of the protected features. Current trends for relevant seabird colonies can be found in JNCC (2021) and is based on trends derived from the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) including where available, Seabird Counts

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<sup>1</sup> A relevant authority is a body or authority that has a function in relation to land or waters within or adjacent to the site (Regulation 5) and include: a nature conservation body; a local authority; water undertakers; a navigation authority; a harbour authority; a lighthouse authority; a river purification board (SEPA); a district salmon fishery board; and a local fisheries committee. All relevant authorities are competent authorities. A competent authority is defined in Regulation 6 as “any Minister, government department, public or statutory undertaker, public body of any description or person holding a public office”. In the context of a plan or project, the competent authority is the authority with the power or duty to determine whether or not the proposal can proceed.

census data (Burnell *et al.*, 2023). Where the SMP data is more recent than the SCM data this has been used to inform the feature condition at the site.

**Table 1. Protected features and status for the Handa SPA.**

Feature condition refers to the condition of the protected feature at a site level. Broader conservation status is the overall conservation status of the feature within the UK and Europe. No assessment on the condition of the feature at the Marine Atlantic Biogeographic Region scale is available.

Protected Feature	Feature condition at site	Assessment year	Broader conservation status	
			UK <sup>2</sup>	European region <sup>3</sup>
Black-legged kittiwake (breeding)	Unfavourable, Recovering	2023	Red	Vulnerable
Common guillemot (breeding)	Unfavourable, No change	2023	Amber	Least concern
Great skua (breeding)	Favourable, Maintained	2023	Red	Least concern
Northern fulmar (breeding)	Unfavourable, Declining	2022	Amber	Vulnerable
Razorbill (breeding)	Unfavourable, Recovering	2019	Amber	Least concern

## 5 Setting Conservation Objectives

### 5.1 Background

Under Regulation 33(2) of the Habitats Regulations, NatureScot have responsibility for providing the Conservation Objectives for European marine sites in Scottish territorial waters. These site-level Conservation Objectives seek to define the contribution that each SPA should make to achieving Favourable Conservation Status for the protected features. They provide the framework for the setting of site conservation measures (management) and for the Habitats Regulations Appraisal of projects and plans.

Annex 1 sets out the Conservation Objectives for Handa SPA.

### 5.2 Relationship between feature condition and Conservation Objectives

The Conservation Objectives seek to *maintain* protected SPA features where evidence exists that a feature is in favourable condition in the site, or where there is uncertainty concerning the assessed condition of a feature (see section 4) but no reason to suspect deterioration in condition since designation. Where evidence exists or it is considered likely that a feature or its supporting habitats, resources or processes is declining and/or damaged

<sup>2</sup> Based on Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (BoCC5), for further details on definitions see Stanbury *et al.* 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Based on BirdLife International, 2021

and therefore not in a favourable condition in the site, the Conservation Objectives will seek to *restore* the protected feature.

The following protected feature is in favourable condition at Handa SPA: great skua. Therefore, the Conservation Objectives seek to *maintain* this condition.

The following protected features are in unfavourable condition at Handa SPA: kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar and razorbill. Therefore, the Conservation Objectives seek to *restore* this condition.

Breeding kittiwake are in unfavourable condition at Handa SPA due to a decline of 57% from around 10,732 pairs since designation (1990 citation) to around 4,589 pairs at the latest count (2023). The reasons for declines of kittiwakes at this SPA are uncertain however reduction of prey in their foraging areas (off-site factors) is considered a key contributing factor. On the Isle of May, kittiwake breeding success was found to be related to sandeel abundance and availability (e.g. Daunt *et al.* 2008; Poloczanska *et al.* 2004), this appears to be the case at Handa SPA also, where productivity has declined. Long-term diet studies have also highlighted a long-term decline in the overall prevalence of sandeels in kittiwake chick diet, concomitant with an increase in the relative prevalence of clupeids in Scottish waters (Wanless *et al.* 2018).

Breeding guillemot are in unfavourable condition at Handa SPA due to a decline of 42% from around 98,686 individuals since designation (1990 citation) to around 57,596 individuals at the latest count (2023). There has been no detectable change in the availability of suitable guillemot nesting habitat on Handa SPA, so the reasons for decline are thought to be due to off-site factors such as reduction in prey in foraging areas. Guillemot breeding success may be related to sandeel abundance and availability, as productivity of guillemot at Handa SPA has declined in recent years. Fish stocks suitable for guillemot food in the sea around Handa are thought to have reduced due to climate change as well as fisheries management.

Breeding fulmar are in unfavourable condition at Handa SPA due to a decline of 75% from around 3,500 pairs since designation (1990 citation) to around 860 pairs at the latest count (2022). The reasons for declines of fulmars at this SPA are uncertain however reduction of prey in their foraging areas is considered a key contributing factor. Fulmars are also known to be sensitive to disturbance, particularly during the incubation period. It is not known if this could be a contributing factor at this SPA. There is nothing to indicate that changes on site have contributed to the decline at Handa SPA.

Breeding razorbill are in unfavourable condition at Handa SPA due to a decline of 50% from around 16,394 individuals since designation (1990 citation) to around 8,207 individuals at the latest count (2019). There has been no detectable change in the availability of suitable razorbill nesting habitat on Handa SPA, so the reasons for decline are thought to be due to off-site factors such as reduction in prey in foraging areas.

### **5.3 Conservation priorities**

On the rare occasion where the need to favour the management of one protected feature of a site over another, conservation priority will be given to the most important species/habitats to take action for and/or the most important or urgent measures to be taken.

For the Handa SPA all protected features are regularly occurring migratory species. Therefore, no protected feature is favoured over another.

There are currently no apparent management conflicts between the protected features within the Handa SPA. However, given the interactions between predatory great skuas and the other seabird protected features, should future conservation measures be proposed to enhance the population of great skuas, impacts on other protected features will need full consideration.

#### **5.4 Overlapping Protected Areas**

The following protected area boundaries overlap with, or are immediately adjacent to, the Handa SPA:

- Handa Island Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- North West Sutherland National Scenic Area (NSA)
- Tarbet to Ruabha Ruadh Geological Conservation Review (GCR) site
- North West Highlands Geopark

Conservation measures in the overlapping protected areas need to ensure the Conservation Objectives of all the sites are met. Priority would be given to the SPA protected features. There are no apparent management conflicts between the protected features of the Handa SPA and the protected features of the other overlapping protected areas. Site information including the Conservation Objectives for the overlapping protected areas are available on [SiteLink](#).

## **6 Feature sensitivity**

The following section provides an overview of the pressures associated with human activities that are most relevant to the protected features. Further information on feature sensitivity, will be made available on Marine Scotland's [Feature Activity Sensitivity Tool \(FeAST\)](#)<sup>4</sup>. The information in FeAST will reflect our current understanding of the interactions between activities, pressures and features. It highlights that activities can give rise to a range of pressures, which the protected features may be sensitive to. Our assessment of sensitivity is based on a feature's tolerance (response to change) and its ability to recover.

### **6.1 Black-legged kittiwake (breeding)**

Kittiwakes may be susceptible to collision (Furness *et al.* 2013) and displacement (Peschko *et al.* 2020) from marine developments. They may also be vulnerable to oil spills (Mendel *et al.* 2008) and organochlorine pollution (Tartu *et al.* 2015), which can lead to lower adult survival and reduced breeding performance (Tartu *et al.* 2013; Svendsen *et al.* 2018). Kittiwakes are identified as potentially sensitive to accidental bycatch in fishing nets particularly in surface gears in UK waters (Bradbury *et al.* 2017). Kittiwakes may also be susceptible to disease (OSPAR Commission, 2009), including avian flu ([APHA](#)). Any reduction in prey items will also have an effect on kittiwake populations (Tasker *et al.* 2000), whether due to climate change (Sandvik *et al.* 2014) or industry (Bicknell *et al.* 2013). (See also *Sandeel sensitivity assessment in FeAST*).

### **6.2 Common guillemot and razorbill (breeding)**

Auks (guillemot and razorbill) may be prone to accidental bycatch in fishing nets particularly in surface gears (Zydelis *et al.* 2013). Depletion of prey resources either due to climate change or industry can also have effects on their populations (Mendel *et al.* 2008). These species are also susceptible to large scale mortality in major oil spills (Mendel *et al.* 2008), particularly during their flightless moult period. There is potential for impacts on auk

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.marine.scotland.gov.uk/feast/>

species due to collision with artificial structures under water (Furness *et al.* 2012). Auks may also be susceptible to disease, including avian flu ([APHA](#)). These species may be displaced as a result of marine developments (Furness *et al.* 2013) and vessel activities associated with marine developments (Furness, 2016). Guillemots and razorbills show sensitivity to visual disturbance associated with vessels (Cook & Burton, 2010) and for guillemots, noise disturbance due to marine industry may also occur (Leopold & Camphuysen, 2009). As these are species that feed in the water column, they can be potentially affected by any increase in turbidity that would affect their ability to successfully forage for their prey (Cook & Burton, 2010). (See also *Sandeel sensitivity assessment in FeAST*).

### **6.3 Great skua (breeding)**

Skuas are identified as among the most vulnerable species to collision mortality impacts in offshore wind farms (Furness *et al.* 2013). Skuas are susceptible to capture in longline fisheries (ICES, 2013). Skuas, especially those individuals specialising in seabird predation, can accumulate high levels of contaminants though no population level consequences of this seem apparent (Furness & Ratcliffe, 2004). Illegal shooting of great skuas is known to occur (Furness & Ratcliffe, 2004) but population level impacts are not known. Skuas are also vulnerable to diseases such as avian flu ([APHA](#)). Skuas are susceptible to disturbance at their breeding colonies. If disturbed so that their eggs roll from their nests, they will not attempt to bring the egg back into the nest and as a result the egg (or eggs) may fail to hatch (Furness, 1987). Any reduction of prey items (either directly captured or indirectly from kleptoparasitising other seabirds) will have a subsequent effect on skuas populations. Great skua are vulnerable to diseases such as avian flu. Declines in skua breeding populations and low breeding success have been linked to reduced sandeel abundance (Perkins *et al.* 2018) and decreases in fisheries discards (Caldow & Furness, 2000; Oswald *et al.* 2008).

### **6.4 Northern fulmar (breeding)**

Fulmars are one of the main seabird species taken as accidental bycatch in long-line fisheries in the northern hemisphere (Tasker *et al.* 2000; ICES, 2013) and are identified as among the species most sensitive to bycatch in surface gears in UK waters (Bradbury *et al.* 2017). Examination of corpses indicates high levels of plastic ingestion in fulmars, but there is currently a lack of published information on the population level impacts of this (van Franeker *et al.* 2011). Fulmars are also vulnerable to diseases such as avian flu ([APHA](#)). Human intrusions and disturbance of fulmars at their nest site can cause nest desertion if they are approached too closely, particularly if there is repeated disturbance during the sensitive egg incubation period. Fulmars are vulnerable to changes in their prey resource, whether due to changes in fisheries practices (Bicknell *et al.* 2013) or to large-scale climatic factors (Thompson & Ollason, 2001).

## **7 Management**

### **7.1 Conservation Measures**

The following conservation measures are currently in place for the Handa SPA:

- The Habitats Regulations require all plans or projects that may have an effect on the protected features of a SPA to be assessed against the Conservation Objectives for that site. This process is known as a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA). An HRA is a statutory procedure that ensures the integrity of the site is maintained. It also provides an opportunity to consider appropriate mitigation that can reduce impacts, avoid adverse effects and permit plans or projects to proceed having taken full account of the protected features of an SPA.

Other relevant measures include:

- The SPA overlaps with a number of notified Site of Special Scientific Interests and management changes described on their lists of Operations Requiring Consent, available on [SiteLink](#), must have prior consent from NatureScot.
- There are a range of management measures that are implemented by the Scottish Wildlife Trust who manage the island as a bird reserve on behalf of the landowner.

## **7.2 Advice to support management**

Table 2 provides NatureScot's advice on management for activities where we consider this may be necessary to achieve the Conservation Objectives for the protected features. The advice is focused on the activities that cause an effect (a pressure) that a feature is sensitive to. Pressures can be physical (e.g. abrasion of the seabed), chemical (e.g. introduction of pollutants) or biological (e.g. removal of prey resources). Different activities may cause the same pressure, e.g. fishing using bottom gears and aggregate dredging both cause abrasion which can damage the surface of the seabed.

Our advice takes a risk-based approach, i.e. we are focusing on providing advice where we believe there is a risk to achieving the Conservation Objectives. We have identified risks to achieving the Conservation Objectives where there is an overlap between protected features and activities associated with pressures that the features are sensitive to. We have provided management advice to support public authorities and others in managing these risks. Our advice is based on existing data and information on protected features and relevant activities, and our understanding of the relationships between the features and activities. We have identified a range of management advice:

- management to remove or avoid pressures;
- management to reduce or limit pressures; or
- no additional management required.

For our advice on fisheries management we have also stated where we think this should be 'considered.' This term is included to highlight that an issue exists, but circumstances mean that a specific recommendation for action cannot / or need not be made at this point. However, there is sufficient cause to make fishery managers aware of the issue and for them to consider if a fishery management measure may be helpful in achieving Conservation Objectives – particularly where there may be a synergy between the benefits of management actions for the fishery and the Conservation Objectives for the feature. The term 'recommended' highlights that an issue of fishery-feature interaction exists, there is a reasonable evidence base and a specific recommendation can be made/ justified.

New or other activities not identified within the table would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

We recognise that stakeholders can provide local environmental knowledge and more detailed information on activities, including in relation to intensity, frequency and methods. This additional information will help public authorities and others develop more specific management, focussed on the interaction between features and activities. If new information becomes available our management advice may be revised.

Table 2 describes the activities that are considered capable of affecting the protected features. Spatial data relating to the location and extent of the activities listed can be accessed on [Marine Scotland's National Marine Plan Interactive](#)<sup>5</sup> (where available). Activities

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<sup>5</sup> <https://marinescotland.atkinsgeospatial.com/nmpi/>

that are considered not likely to affect the protected features (other than insignificantly) are listed in Table 3.

### **7.3 Best Practice**

In our management advice for activities in Table 2 we refer to the development, adoption or use of 'best practice' as a way of managing interactions between activities and the features. Best practice is taken to mean approaches or procedures that are developed and accepted by regulators and relevant stakeholders as being an effective way of dealing with an interaction between a habitat or species and the pressures created by an activity. Much of this best practice is already being implemented by sectors and regulators, e.g. pre-application discussions between developers and regulators, the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code, Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and Technical Standards for Scottish Finfish Aquaculture.

**Table 2. NatureScot’s advice to support management for Handa SPA for activities which are considered capable of affecting the protected features.**

The text under the ‘Advice to support management’ columns provides NatureScot’s management advice for the features in relation to the activities (further details about the terminology used are provided in section 7.2). Where a cell is coloured grey this indicates that management is already in place, this includes where there are existing regulatory requirements for new proposals. Cells are also coloured grey where it is considered there is no additional management required to achieve the Conservation Objectives. An \* has been used to highlight those activities to which the advice under ‘*Boat use associated with both commercial and recreational activities*’ also applies. For some activities, the pressures associated with new proposals are considered unlikely to affect some the features either because these activities do not occur in the same locations as the features or the pressure is unlikely to be at levels that can affect the features (see also Table 3). In these cases, we have not provided advice however, where regulated; this does not exempt new plans or projects related to these activities undergoing a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA).

Activities considered capable of affecting the protected features	Advice to support management
	Kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar, great skua, razorbill.
<b>Aircraft (helicopter and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV))</b>	<p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) associated with UAVs within the SPA through effective mitigation such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• following the <a href="#">Good Practice Advice for drones and wildlife</a></li> <li>• seasonal restrictions to avoid sensitive time periods for those protected features most susceptible to disturbance and/or;</li> <li>• spatial restrictions.</li> </ul>
<b>Boat use associated with both commercial (includes ship to ship) and recreational activities</b>	<p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) associated with boat use during commercial and recreational activities through effective mitigation such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• following the <a href="#">Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code</a> (SMWWC);</li> <li>• seasonal restrictions to avoid sensitive time periods for those protected features most susceptible to disturbance and/or;</li> <li>• production of vessel management plans associated with activities that require a marine licence. This may include agreed routes and for boats, potential seasonal speed restrictions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Remove or avoid</b> any potential biosecurity threat as a result of any vessel landing at Handa SPA.</p>
<b>Commercial shipping*</b>	<p><b>No additional management required</b> for established routes.</p> <p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) for new routes or amendments to existing routes within the context of cumulative effects of all boat activity.</p>

Activities considered capable of affecting the protected features	Advice to support management
	Kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar, great skua, razorbill.
<b>Fishing - demersal mobile/active gear (inc. mechanical trawls and benthic trawls)*</b>	<p>Whilst we have limited understanding about the extent of interactions between benthic fisheries and prey-supporting habitat within the site, a principal objective of the management of the relevant fisheries should be to ensure that the fishing activity does not cause such disturbance to the benthic habitats that it adversely affects the abundance and availability of prey.</p> <p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (removal of prey species and abrasion of prey-supporting habitat) associated with fishing that has the potential to damage seabed habitat (in particular, sandeel habitat, herring spawning grounds) <b>should be considered.</b></p>
<b>Fishing – hydraulic dredge*</b>	<p>Hydraulic dredging has the potential to cause significant disturbance to the sedimentary habitats that support the prey species of the protected features, particularly for sandeel and herring.</p> <p>A principal objective of the management of the relevant fisheries should be to ensure that the fishing activity does not cause such disturbance to the benthic habitats that it adversely affects the abundance and availability of prey.</p> <p><b>Remove or avoid pressures</b> (removal of prey species and disturbance of prey-supporting habitat) associated with hydraulic fishing that has the potential to damage seabed habitat (in particular, sandeel habitat, herring spawning grounds) <b>is recommended.</b></p>
<b>Fishing – long-lining (not including jigging)*</b>	<p>Our current understanding is that long-line fisheries are largely restricted to offshore waters. Site-specific measures for long-lining are not currently considered appropriate due to the scale of the fishery, and the wide-spread interaction with seabirds. However, there is evidence of seabird bycatch in long-line (not jigging) fisheries which <b>we recommend</b> require wider seas management measures.</p>
<b>Fishing – pelagic*</b>	<p><b>Remove or avoid pressures</b> (removal of key prey species) associated with fishing for sandeels. There is no current targeted sandeel fishery within the SPA, this position should be retained.</p> <p>Pelagic fishing for herring/sprat may occur within or around the SPA. We <b>recommend</b> that a principal objective of the management of the fishery should be ensuring that the fishing activity does not prevent or disrupt the availability of prey species i.e. it should be considered as part of a broader ecosystem-based approach to management of this fishery.</p>
<b>Fishing – static gear (drift nets and bottom</b>	<p><b>Remove or avoid pressures</b> (entanglement) associated with the use of all static nets. Spatial exclusion of static nets in areas identified as being important for auks (as identified from habitat and dive depth preferences) <b>is recommended.</b></p>

Activities considered capable of affecting the protected features	Advice to support management Kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar, great skua, razorbill.
set nets inc. fyke nets)*	
Renewable energy (inc. wind)	<p><b>No additional management</b> for operational and for consented, but not yet constructed, offshore wind developments.</p> <p>There are new marine renewable development proposals within connectivity to the Handa SPA. Mitigation should focus on <b>reducing or limiting pressures</b> (disturbance, displacement, collision) on the protected features of the Handa SPA.</p>
Tourism & recreation (inc. jet-skiing, kite surfing, rowing, angling, boating, diving, kayaking and climbing)	<p><b>No additional management</b> for existing recreational activities (includes angling, boating, diving, kayaking) providing the <a href="#">Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (SMWWC)</a> is followed by water-borne recreational users. The SMWWC highlights why birds are sensitive to disturbance and offers practical advice on how to avoid disturbance.</p> <p><b>No additional management</b> for current levels of land-based tourism activities (walking) providing Scottish Outdoor Access Code is followed.</p> <p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) of protected features from jet-skiing and climbing the cliffs or crossing to the Great Stack when seabirds are nesting.</p> <p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) where an increase by water-borne or land-based recreational activities demonstrates there is evidence of impacts at particular locations and/or if there is a major increase in intensity of these pursuits within the SPA. There would be potential for some zonation of measures across the site given that some protected features exhibit behavioural sensitivity to disturbance.</p>
Wildlife tour operators*	<p><b>No additional management</b> for existing wildlife tours providing the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code is followed by Wildlife tour operators. The <a href="#">Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code (SMWWC)</a> should be followed by water-borne recreational users and Scottish Outdoor Access Code is followed by land users.</p> <p><b>Reduce or limit pressures</b> (disturbance) associated with an increase in wildlife tour operators if in the future there is evidence of impacts at particular locations and/or if there is an increase in intensity of these pursuits within the SPA. There would be potential for some zonation of measures across the site given that some protected features exhibit behavioural sensitivity to disturbance.</p>

**Table 3. Activities that are considered not likely to affect the protected features (other than insignificantly)<sup>6</sup>**

Activity	Comments
<b>Anchorage &amp; moorings</b>	Beyond pressures associated with the vessel traffic (covered in Table 2), we are not aware of any further pressures that have the potential to cause an adverse effect on the protected features.
<b>Fishing – static gear – Creels (including lobster, crabs and Nephrops)</b>	Fishing using creels takes place within the MPA. Whilst there is the potential for entanglement for all the protected features, the occurrence is thought to be rare and therefore we consider this method poses a low risk to the protected features.
<b>Fishing – line fishing (jigging)</b>	Beyond pressures associated with the vessel movement (covered in Table 2), this activity is not expected to have the potential to cause an adverse effect on the protected features.
<b>Fishing – hand gathering of mussels and oysters</b>	Hand-harvesting of mussels and oysters takes place within the MPA. Whilst there is potential for disturbance to the protected features, the occurrence is thought to be rare and therefore we consider this method poses a low risk to the protected features.

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<sup>6</sup> Only the specific examples of activities listed in the table have been excluded, rather than the broad activity types. New plans or projects will still need to be considered by the relevant competent authority (see Annex 1 for further details).

## 8 Research and survey

We recognise that there are still important gaps in our understanding and knowledge of the features of this site. We will identify research and survey projects to inform our understanding of these aspects. The knowledge gaps identified below are not a commitment to undertake this work. However, by highlighting these gaps we hope to inform future discussions with parties interested in undertaking research in this site and/or on these features, to help direct research and improve understanding of monitoring needs. The following list of research and survey needs is not prioritised and is not exhaustive.

- Establish adequate baseline information for supporting habitats and prey species and gain an understanding of which prey items are the most important at a local scale within the SPA for all protected features.
- Establish a marine bird monitoring programme that informs changes in species populations and distributions at a site and SPA network level, and which may include monitoring of the supporting prey, habitats and processes within the SPA.
- Further understanding required on the reasons behind the protected features' decline at the SPA. Productivity estimates at the SPA would be beneficial to help understand this decline.
- Further ecological studies of all protected features habitat preferences and use, and movements within the SPA.
- Better understanding on the implications of new offshore developments around the site on the protected features.
- Oceanographic studies, such as sea temperature and acidity levels, how these might change in future, and the effects of such changes on prey availability for birds.
- Studies of food availability and competition for food between different fish predators (e.g., birds, seals, dolphins, porpoises, whales) in relation to fisheries policy.
- Improved understanding of what supporting processes the key prey species are reliant upon within the SPA.
- Additional research is required to better understand the relationships between the impact of dredging and benthic trawling on supporting habitats, their ability to support suitable prey and any consequential effect this may have on protected features.
- Understanding of the impact of tourism on the protected features at the SPA.
- Understanding of the impacts of non-native mammals on the protected features at the SPA.
- Investigation is required to assess the potential impact of highly pathogenic avian flu on the protected features both within the SPA and at a wider scale, in particular for great skua.
- Research required on the evolution of the HPAI virus, exposure and survival rates in affected seabird species following the 2021-2023 HPAI outbreak.
- Evaluate the potential mitigations that could be put into place to limit disease spread should another outbreak of HPAI occur at this, or any other SPAs.
- Better understanding of temporal foraging strategies of fulmar and great skua and whether there are any differences between daytime and night-time attraction of these species to fishing.

## Annex 1. Handa SPA Conservation Objectives

The box below provides the high-level Conservation Objective statements for the Handa SPA.

The full Conservation Objectives, which includes site-specific advice and information on the qualifying features that form part of this SPA, are provided in the tables that follow. The site-specific advice and information provides more detail in relation to each of the high level Conservation Objective statements for each feature, e.g. detail on the seasonal timings and what the supporting habitats and prey are for the qualifying features.

Information is also provided below on how minor changes to features should be considered and the influence of environmental change on features, particular in relation to climate change. Temporary impacts on the qualifying features resulting from plans or projects can only be permitted where there is certainty that the features will be able to quickly recover. Further details on the potential for each qualifying feature to recover are described in more detail in Annex 2 '*Factors determining the potential of features to recover*'.

A definition of the terms used is in the Glossary (Annex 3).

<b>Handa SPA</b>
Qualifying features: Breeding season: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Black-legged kittiwake (<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>)</li><li>• Common guillemot (<i>Uria aalge</i>)</li><li>• Great skua (<i>Stercorarius skua</i>)</li><li>• Northern fulmar (<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>)</li><li>• Razorbill (<i>Alca torda</i>)</li></ul>
The Handa SPA also supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breeding seabird assemblage (includes all qualifying features)</li></ul>
1. To ensure that the qualifying features of the Handa SPA are in favourable condition and make an appropriate contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status.
2. To ensure that the integrity of the Handa SPA is restored in the context of environmental changes by meeting objectives 2a, 2b and 2c for each qualifying feature:
2a. The populations of the qualifying features are viable components of the Handa SPA.
2b. The distribution of the qualifying features is maintained throughout the site by avoiding significant disturbance of the species.
2c. The supporting habitats and processes relevant to qualifying features and their prey resources are maintained, or where appropriate restored, at the Handa SPA.

## **1. To ensure that the qualifying features of the Handa SPA are in favourable condition and make an appropriate contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status.**

Achieving FCS is defined in terms of the natural range and population of the species and the extent of habitat necessary for long-term maintenance of populations. There is an important role for all protected sites in the UK in defining, achieving and maintaining FCS for any habitat or species. Achieving FCS requires that each parameter is either stable or increasing, exceeds the relevant reference value and has good prospects of continuing to do so in the foreseeable future (JNCC, 2018). Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) is assessed across the Marine Atlantic Biogeographic Region with individual SPAs and SPA networks contributing to FCS.

The conservation status will be taken as 'favourable' when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis;

When carrying out appraisals of plans and projects against these Conservation Objectives, it is not necessary to understand the status of the qualifying features within each individual SPA in this Biogeographic Region. The focus of the appraisal should be to understand whether the integrity of the Handa SPA would be maintained. If this is the case, then its contribution to FCS across the qualifying features' biogeographic range will be met. Similarly, when determining whether management measures may be required to ensure that the Conservation Objectives for this SPA are achieved, the focus should be on maintaining the contribution that it makes to FCS. Further advice on how these appraisals should be focussed in relation to maintaining site integrity is provided by Conservation Objective 2 (including parts a, b and c). If broader information (status, trends) on the qualifying features is available, it should be used to provide context to the site-based appraisal.

Note '*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 the Handa SPA is restored in the context of environmental changes by meeting objectives 2a, 2b and 2c for each qualifying feature:**

This objective recognises that kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar and razorbill are in unfavourable condition at the Handa SPA and consequently site integrity is compromised.

For Handa SPA, when carrying out appraisals of plans or projects, the focus of the appraisal should be to understand the impact of the plan or project on site integrity. For qualifying features that are in favourable condition this means maintaining that condition. For those features that are in unfavourable condition, it means ensuring that the plan or project does not prevent or reduce the potential for recovery. The expectation is not for the plan or project to restore site integrity. Should the plan or project compromise the ability of the qualifying features to recover (e.g. result in a further decline or accelerate the rate of decline, or prevent a recovery from occurring), then Handa SPA will not make an appropriate contribution to achieving FCS across the Atlantic Biogeographic Region. Similarly, when determining whether management measures are required to meet the Conservation Objectives, the focus is on ensuring the conditions are appropriate to support recovery and subsequently restore site integrity. Further advice on how these appraisals should be focussed in relation to site integrity is provided in 2a, b and c.

The breeding seabird assemblage is not considered further in the Conservation Objectives as each qualifying feature and 'named qualifier' of the assemblage are addressed individually.

Temporary impacts on these objectives resulting from plans or projects can only be permitted where there is a high degree of certainty that the features will be able to quickly recover from the impact and that impacts do not prevent the ability of unfavourable features to fully recover in the long-term.

***Environmental changes***

This Conservation Objective recognises that the qualifying features are part of a complex, dynamic and multi-dimensional marine environment. Marine birds depend on environmental conditions (for example water movement, up-wellings and prevailing weather) which vary over time and space. Consequently, marine bird species are exposed to a wide range of drivers of change. 'Environmental changes' for the purpose of these Conservation Objectives means any change to the qualifying features reflecting both natural population dynamics and also broader environmental changes (i.e. those related to climate change and environmental variability, management of which is beyond the scope of the SPA). The impact of human activities on the SPA that can be managed will not be considered as part of the broader context of environmental change (i.e. where required they should be managed).

Some site-level changes are natural and are not a direct result of human influences (e.g. population fluctuations arising from factors such as variable breeding success or weather conditions across the wintering range / shifts or changes in prey availability resulting from variability in

environmental factors processes such as water temperature and movements). Changes in the qualifying features' distribution and use of the site, which are brought about by entirely natural drivers, directly or indirectly, are normally considered compatible with the SPA's Conservation Objectives.

There may also be historical human influences that have now ceased but have modified and continue to drive change within the site. It is also recognised that climate change pressures could affect the qualifying features within the site. These changes cannot be prevented, so the Conservation Objectives seek at a site level to take account of them and where possible, improve the qualifying species' resilience to environmental change when considering future plans or projects. The magnitude of the future impacts will depend on the nature, scale, duration and intensity of the activity and the qualifying features tolerance and ability to recover from such an impact.

Additionally, management of human activities at a wider scale (i.e. regional, Scotland or the area covered by an international agreement such as the OSPAR convention) may also affect the qualifying features associated with this site (either by making a positive contribution or having a negative impact). Wider scale impacts may affect the ability of the qualifying features to recover from site level changes, and therefore additional precaution over the impacts of any future human activities may be necessary.

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.

In relation to Handa SPA and its qualifying features, the following effects of environmental change (climate change) are relevant. These effects should be taken into account when considering plans and projects as additional pressures may reduce the protected features' resilience to climate change, and conversely climate change impacts may start to hinder their ability to recover from human activities.

- **All qualifying features** - Under climate change, sea temperatures are predicted to increase, sea levels will rise and there could be increases in the frequency of stormy conditions. Increased levels of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> will also result in ocean acidification. Any of these factors could cause changes in bird abundance and distribution at the SPA due to changes in prey (species, availability and distribution).
- **For breeding seabirds** - climate change may result in effects at wintering grounds or in other parts of the overall breeding range which could have subsequent effects on their breeding population and distributions. In coastal breeding sites, increased flooding associated with storm tides may also cause nest site failures in breeding seabirds (Mendel *et al.* 2008). Increased storminess could also affect cliff-nesting seabirds, as eggs or chicks are more likely to be dislodged by waves, wind or rain. Parent birds may also find foraging more difficult during storms, reducing their ability to maintain their own body condition whilst also incubating or feeding chicks.
- **Auks (guillemot and razorbill)**: Auks may be vulnerable to extreme weather events, particularly winter storms, which have been linked to adult mortality and winter 'wreck' events (BirdLife International, 2022). Decreased survival rates in these species have been linked to increased sea temperatures and stronger winds (Votier *et al.* 2005; 2008; Sandvik *et al.* 2005).
- **Kittiwake**: Breeding phenology is affected by climate change, with a trend in later breeding being seen in kittiwakes (Wanless *et al.* 2009). Kittiwake breeding populations are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on the population dynamics and distribution of their preferred prey (e.g. Sandvik *et al.* 2014).

- **Great skua:** Great skuas are potentially vulnerable to direct and indirect (through changes to prey dynamics) impacts of climate change (Oswald *et al.* 2008).
- **Fulmar:** a species which has been identified as sensitive to climate change. Studies have demonstrated a link between a large-scale climatic factor, the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) on both survival and reproduction. Survival in fulmars, particularly of females, has been shown to be influenced by the NAO (Grosbois & Thompson 2005). Reproductive success at this colony has also been linked to winter NAO and lagged winter NAO, with year to year variation in breeding success strongly related to oscillations in the NAO (Thompson & Ollason 2001; Lewis *et al.* 2009).

## 2a. The populations of the qualifying features are viable components of the Handa SPA.

This objective seeks to specifically protect the qualifying features from **significant** mortality, injury or removal that can lead to a long-term decline of the feature(s) within the site. It protects the features from significant risk of incidental killing and injury from activities both within and outwith the site. Impacts and effects are considered 'significant' where they could result in a permanent reduction or continued decline in the population and consequently, reduction in the contribution Handa SPA makes to the maintenance of the qualifying features in their natural range in the UK. It should be ensured that the qualifying features are protected from anthropogenic pressures that could lead to a significant long-term decline in numbers using the site, such that recovery cannot be expected. Ensuring the capacity of Handa SPA to support all the essential behaviours and activities required to support viable populations of the qualifying features in the relevant season(s) are addressed by Conservation Objectives 2b and 2c.

At a site level, the population is considered to be viable if the species can carry out their life cycle functions relevant to the season(s) they are present, irrespective of dependencies such as immigration. For the qualifying features, the viability of the species within the Handa SPA is intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use foraging habitat in areas of functionally linked sea, within foraging range, outwith the site, in addition to the ability of the site to support breeding adult survival and chick-rearing.

When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should also be given to whether impacts outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective. This Conservation Objective is considered to be met if the conditions to support all the species' essential behaviours and activities are in place. This includes:

- avoiding effects within and outwith the site that could prevent or reduce the ability of the populations of qualifying features to recover.
- avoiding effects within and outwith the site that could lead to a permanent reduction in the populations of qualifying features through mortality, injury, or impacts caused by disturbance, displacement, barrier effects or reduction in mobile prey resources.
- maintaining the species' ability to use all areas of importance within the site (to be considered under Conservation Objective 2b)
- maintaining access to, and availability of, supporting habitats and prey within the site (to be considered under Conservation Objective 2c).

Where known, the populations of the qualifying features should be maintained at or above site reference populations, as detailed below. The site reference population may be revised from the baseline at designation where a) there is evidence to show that a population's size has significantly changed as a result of natural factors or management measures and has been stable at or above a new level over a considerable period (generally equivalent to at least one generation length for the given species) and/or b) to reflect any wider strategic objectives for the species (e.g. national or international species action plan). Where there is evidence to show that a qualifying feature has historically been more abundant than the stated minimum target and current level, the ongoing capacity of the site to accommodate the feature at such higher levels in future should also be taken into account.

All qualifying features are protected throughout the whole site, throughout the year. This means that irrespective of the season for which they are designated, the qualifying features are protected during both their breeding and non-breeding seasons when using the SPA.

Temporary short-term changes in the populations due to human activity may be considered not to compromise the Conservation Objectives within the site provided it can be demonstrated that the populations of any affected qualifying features can fully recover. Factors limiting the recovery of the qualifying features include: the average generation times, population growth rates, availability of prey and the timing and duration of the activity around vulnerable stages of their life cycles such as during moulting or chick-rearing period.

Direct mortality can arise from: collision (above and underwater); entanglement (incidental bycatch); and pollution. Indirect mortality can arise from loss of or damage to prey or prey-supporting habitats (e.g. through harvesting; physical removal of or damage to seabed; nutrient enrichment; changes to water temperature, salinity, or flows; introduction of invasive non-native species (INNS); pollution). Indirect mortality can arise from reduced ability to capture or access prey arising from e.g. increased water turbidity or displacement from foraging areas.

**The site-specific information includes a site reference population that is considered the most appropriate for assessments of plans and projects. Where this is based on the citation population at classification or recent surveys, the site reference population is rounded using standard procedures (Stroud *et al.* 2001).**

Feature	Site-specific advice	Site-specific information
Black-legged kittiwake	<p>Ensure the breeding population of kittiwake have the ability to recover to the site reference population.</p> <p><b>and</b></p>	<p>The site reference population for breeding kittiwakes at the Handa SPA is 11,000 pairs (based on 1990 citation). The latest count data available from SMP for Handa SPA in 2023 showed a 57% decrease of kittiwakes to 4,589 pairs. Kittiwake populations have declined in both Scotland and the UK, with decreases of 42% in their UK population since Seabird 2000 (1998-2002) and 57% in Scotland (Burnell <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p> <p>It is acknowledged that due to the steep national decline in kittiwakes it will be difficult to recover the kittiwake population to the site reference population. Reasons for the decline in kittiwakes at the</p>

	<p>Ensure kittiwakes are not at significant risk from injury or mortality.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure kittiwakes can move safely between the site and important areas of functionally linked sea outwith the sites.</p>	<p>Handa SPA, are not fully understood but are likely to be related to off-colony factors affecting their food supply. Wider pressures on kittiwakes, such as climate change, disease or predation, may limit the potential for kittiwakes to achieve Favourable Conservation Status. On site factors such as disturbance, vegetation changes and previous rat colonisation may also have contributed to their decline.</p> <p>When assessing the effects of any plan or project, consideration should be given to ensuring that the plan or project will not hinder the ability to recover. This will help ensure resilience within the wider kittiwake population.</p> <p>Plans or projects should also ensure that kittiwakes are not at significant risk from injury or mortality either within or outwith the SPA.</p> <p>The long-term recovery of kittiwakes at the Handa SPA is also intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use habitats in areas of functionally linked sea outwith the SPA. When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should therefore also be given to whether impacts on the population whilst outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective.</p>
Common guillemot	<p>Ensure the breeding population of guillemots have the ability to recover to the site reference population.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure guillemots are not at significant risk from injury or mortality.</p> <p><b>and</b></p>	<p>The site reference population for breeding guillemots at the Handa SPA is 99,000 individuals (based on 1990 citation). The latest count data available from SMP for Handa SPA in 2023 shows this number has declined by 42% to 57,596 individuals. Contrary to the Handa SPA trend, guillemot populations in the UK have decreased by 8% since Seabird 2000 (1998-2002) and 31% in Scotland (Burnell <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p> <p>No factors at the breeding colony appear to be the cause of this decline and thus the decline is likely to relate to their food supply in the marine environment.</p> <p>The long-term recovery of guillemots at the Handa SPA is also intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use habitats in areas of functionally linked sea outwith the SPA. When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should therefore also be given to whether impacts on the population whilst outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective.</p>

	Ensure guillemots can move safely between the site and important areas of functionally linked sea outwith the sites.	
Great skua	<p>Maintain the breeding population great skua at a stable or increasing trend relative to the site reference population.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure great skuas are not at significant risk from injury or mortality.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure great skuas can move safely between the site and important areas of functionally linked sea outwith the site.</p>	<p>The site reference population for breeding great skuas at Handa SPA is 66 pairs (based on 1990 citation). The last count from SMP at Handa SPA in 2023 showed this figure has increased by 27% to 84 pairs. However, the 2013 counts showed that the population had increased to 256 pairs, suggesting that the population trend on Handa has fluctuated in recent years. Great skuas have experienced a long-term increase within the UK (between 1969-2000) (JNCC, 2019). In the summer of 2021 and 2022 the great skua population was impacted by avian flu. Monitoring in 2023 indicated a decline of 76% in Scotland due to avian flu (Tremlett <i>et al.</i>, 2024).</p> <p>The long-term maintenance of great skuas at the Handa SPA is intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use habitats in areas of functionally linked sea outwith the SPA. When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should therefore also be given to whether impacts on the population whilst outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective.</p>
Northern fulmar	Ensure the breeding population of fulmars have the ability to recover to the site reference population.	The site reference population for breeding fulmars at Handa SPA is 3,500 pairs (based on 1990 citation), representing 0.7% of the GB population. The latest count data available for Handa SPA in 2022 shows this number has declined by 75% to 860 pairs. Fulmar populations in the UK have decreased by 35% since Seabird 2000 (1998-2002). In Scotland fulmar have decreased by 37% (Burnell <i>et al.</i> , 2023).

	<p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure fulmars are not at significant risk from injury or mortality.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure fulmars can move safely between the site and important areas of functionally linked sea outwith the site.</p>	<p>The decline is likely to relate to factors affecting their food supply within the marine environment. Fulmars are also known to be sensitive to disturbance, particularly during the incubation period.</p> <p>The long-term recovery of fulmars at the Handa SPA is intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use habitats in areas of functionally linked sea outwith the SPA. When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should therefore also be given to whether impacts on the population whilst outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective.</p>
Razorbill	<p>Ensure the breeding population of razorbills have the ability to recover to the site reference population.</p> <p><b>And</b></p> <p>Ensure razorbills are not at significant risk from injury or mortality.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure razorbills can move safely between the site and important areas of</p>	<p>The site reference population for breeding razorbills at the Handa SPA is 16,000 individuals (1990 citation), representing 11% of the GB population. The latest SMP count data available for the Handa SPA in 2019 shows this number has decreased by 50% to 8,207 individuals. This is contrary to the population trend for razorbills in the UK, which have increased by 18% since Seabird 2000 (1998 – 2000). However, in Scotland the opposite trend is emerging with razorbill populations having decreased by 2% in the same period (Burnell <i>et al.</i>, 2023).</p> <p>No factors at the breeding colony appear to be the cause of this decline and thus the decline is likely to relate to their food supply in the marine environment.</p> <p>The long-term recovery of razorbills at the Handa SPA is also intrinsically linked to their ability to access and use habitats in areas of functionally linked sea outwith the SPA. When assessing the effects of any plan or project consideration should therefore also be given to whether impacts on the population whilst outwith the SPA could affect achievement of this Conservation Objective.</p>

	functionally linked land outwith the site.	
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### **2b. The distribution of the qualifying features is maintained throughout the site by avoiding significant disturbance of the species.**

This objective seeks to ensure that the qualifying features can continue to use and access all areas within the Handa SPA used for breeding, feeding, moulting, roosting, loafing, shelter and other maintenance activities. Changes in the distribution of the qualifying features are most likely to be brought about through disturbance, therefore this objective relates to avoiding significant disturbance. Disturbance associated with human activity may take a variety of forms including: noise, light, sound, vibration, trampling, presence of people, animals and structures, as well as displacement and barrier effects on the species. The type of disturbance, its duration and the area over which the qualifying features are likely to be affected are important considerations in any appraisal of disturbance.

Disturbance can, for example, result in changes to feeding or roosting behaviour, increased energy expenditure due to increased time spent moving to avoid stressors, abandonment of nest sites and desertion of supporting habitat (both within or outside the protected area where appropriate). This may affect successful chick rearing in the breeding season, feeding and/or roosting, and/or may reduce the availability of suitable habitat as birds are displaced and their distribution within the site contracts.

'Significant disturbance' should be interpreted to mean disturbance that affects the integrity of the site through alteration of the distribution of the qualifying features such that recovery cannot be expected or effects can be considered long term. It is expected that significant disturbance will lead to more than a transient effect on the distribution of the qualifying features. It may result in the following types of effect:

- Contributes to the long-term decline in the use of the site by the qualifying features.
- Changes to the distribution of the qualifying features on a continuing or sustained basis.
- Changes to the qualifying features behaviour such that it reduces the ability of the species to survive, breed or rear their young.

There are two main ways in which the qualifying features' continued access to suitable resources could be restricted and distribution affected and this is where assessments should be focussed:

1. Large scale physical barriers, or;
2. Significant disturbance which alters their distribution within the site or disrupts important behaviours.

Temporary short-term disturbances due to human activity may be considered not to compromise the Conservation Objectives within the site provided it can be demonstrated that the population can fully recover with a high degree of certainty. Factors limiting the recovery of the qualifying features include the timing, frequency and duration of the activity around vulnerable stages of their life cycle such as during moulting or chick-feeding period.

**All qualifying features are protected throughout the whole site, throughout the year.** We anticipate that some locations within the Handa SPA will be more, or less, important than others for individual species. Distributions within the site may also change over time in response to a range of abiotic and biotic factors (e.g. changes in abundance or quality of prey resources at particular locations, numbers of each qualifying feature within the site as a whole, seasonal fluctuations or trends in prevailing weather conditions etc.). In some cases detailed bespoke surveys of bird numbers and distributions, to determine qualifying features' current usage of particular locations within a proposals area of influence, may be required to complete the necessary assessments.

Direct displacement/redistribution of the qualifying features can arise from: barriers to movement to and between foraging and roosting locations; and visual disturbance (e.g. associated with vessel movements). Indirect displacement/redistribution can arise from loss of or damage to prey or prey-supporting habitats (e.g. through harvesting; physical removal of or damage to seabed; nutrient enrichment; changes to water temperature, salinity, or flows; introduction of INNS; pollution (e.g. light, noise, chemical)).

**For breeding seabirds:** Disturbance to foraging birds may reduce the time spent feeding or cause them to move to different areas that are less energetically profitable. Disturbance that creates an avoidance response or disrupts/reduces incubation, chick-rearing, foraging or resting behaviour can also put increased energetic demands on birds during an already energetically expensive season. Ensuring safe movement within and between the breeding colony and those areas used for foraging, roosting and other maintenance behaviours (see also 2c) is important to meet the energetic demands required to achieve or maintain body condition needed to support migration and successful breeding and for subsequent winter survival,. Barriers to movement may reduce access to preferred foraging habitat and cause sub-optimal foraging.

Feature	Site-specific advice	Site-specific information
Black-legged kittiwake	<p>Ensure kittiwakes continue to have access to and can utilise all optimal habitats suitable for all relevant aspects of their life cycle associated with the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Avoid significant disturbance to kittiwakes and ensure individuals can move safely</p>	<p>Kittiwakes are migratory species with the vast majority of adults from North Atlantic colonies such as the Handa SPA appearing to winter in the west Atlantic between Newfoundland and the mid-Atlantic ridge with relatively small numbers wintering in the North Sea and west of the British Isles. Kittiwakes are present at the Handa SPA during their breeding period from mid-April to end of August. However, feeding aggregations may still be seen around the Scottish coast until late October/early November. They will therefore be present during both the breeding and non-breeding seasons although they will mainly use the marine part of the site more in the non-breeding season with both the breeding cliffs and the marine part of the site being used in the breeding season.</p> <p>In the Handa SPA kittiwakes will nest on steep, coastal cliffs and offshore stacks. Kittiwakes also require access to areas of freshwater such as the lochs in the middle of Handa which they require for bathing. For roosting, they may use manmade walls and sandy shores. The largest kittiwake colonies at this SPA are found on the high cliffs to the north and west of the island. Kittiwakes at the Handa SPA will use both inshore waters within 1km of their colony for loafing, preening, bathing and other important maintenance behaviours, and further offshore waters and shelf waters for foraging. In the</p>

	between these areas within the site.	breeding period, the mean maximum foraging range for kittiwakes is 156.1+/- 144.5km, though they will forage further, with a maximum range of 770km (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019). After breeding, kittiwakes will also use sandy beaches near their breeding grounds to moult in large flocks of individuals.
Common guillemot	<p>Ensure guillemots continue to have access to and can utilise all optimal habitats suitable for all relevant aspects of their life cycle associated with the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Avoid significant disturbance to guillemots and ensure individuals can move safely between these areas within the site.</p>	<p>Guillemots remain near their breeding colonies throughout the year and will continue to attend their breeding sites at Handa SPA frequently during the non-breeding period, particularly from February onwards. Their breeding season is from April until mid-August. From the beginning of August to mid-October they will remain on the waters by Handa SPA, where adults will undergo a flightless moult period.</p> <p>During the breeding season guillemots will be widely distributed throughout the Handa SPA with their distribution is centred around the high cliffs to the north and west of the island and surrounding waters. They use areas close to the coast as well as offshore waters in which to forage, rest, and carry out other maintenance activities. In the breeding period, the foraging range of common guillemot has a mean maximum of <math>73.2 \pm 80.5</math> km, with a maximum range of 338km (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019). Guillemots forage both at the seabed (demersal) and within the water column (pelagic), primarily during daylight hours (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017). They have an average dive depth of 42m, though can forage up to 200m depth (Ropert-Coudert <i>et al.</i> 2018).</p> <p>Guillemots may fly in small groups and will often form large rafts on the sea close in the colony before heading out on a foraging trip. When ready to fledge the chick will leave the nest site and joins the male of the pair on the sea, where they travel further out to sea together and remain close for around two months (Harris &amp; Wanless, 2003).</p>
Great skua	<p>Ensure great skuas continue to have access to and can utilise all optimal habitats suitable for all relevant aspects of their life cycle associated with the sites.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Avoid significant disturbance to great</p>	<p>Great skuas are a migratory species. Their main wintering distribution ranges from the Celtic Sea to southern Europe and to the coast of northwest Africa. The Bay of Biscay is of particular importance for wintering birds (Furness, 2007; Magnusdottir <i>et al.</i> 2012). However, some great skuas do remain in Scottish waters. Great skuas are present at Handa SPA during the breeding period from April to mid-September and are present in the waters surrounding the SPA throughout the year.</p> <p>Great skuas nest on moorland in the interior of Handa SPA, with most pairs setting up territories in the western part of the island. Great skuas feed by kleptoparasitising other seabirds, by predating eggs, chicks and adult birds and by scavenging as well as by foraging at sea. Fishery discards have been an important food source in the past. They have a mean maximum foraging range of <math>443.3 \pm 487.9</math>km during the breeding season, but may forage over 1000km (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019). Great skuas can dip under the surface or grab from the surface but will not generally dive under (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998), though they can submerge up to 0.5m (Furness, 1987). Great skuas feed only during the day (Furness</p>

	<p>skuas and ensure individuals can move safely between these areas within the sites.</p>	<p>1987). Breeding skuas will often bathe communally in freshwater. At Handa SPA the lochs in the middle of the island are the main freshwater bodies used for bathing.</p>
Northern fulmar	<p>Ensure fulmars continue to have access to and can utilise all optimal habitats suitable for all relevant aspects of their life cycle associated with the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Avoid significant disturbance to fulmars and ensure individuals can move safely between these areas within the site.</p>	<p>Fulmars have their main breeding period at the Handa SPA from April to mid-September. Despite dispersing large distances during the non-breeding period, fulmars will regularly visit their colonies over the non-breeding period and thus will be present at Handa SPA at some stage throughout the yearly cycle.</p> <p>Fulmars at the Handa SPA will nest on grassy ledges by cliffs, or on the ground, with a small scrapping and pieces of vegetation on the ground. Their largest numbers are found on the cliffs on the northern and western sides of the island.</p> <p>They use areas close to the coast as well as offshore waters in which to forage, rest, and carry out other maintenance activities. Fulmars have a large foraging range of <math>542.3 \pm 657.9</math>km during the breeding period, though distances of 2890km have been recorded (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019). Fulmars forage both during the day and at night. They are surface feeding predators and scavengers, able to dive usually less than 5m (Edwards <i>et al.</i> 2013).</p>
Razorbill	<p>Ensure razorbills continue to have access to and can utilise all optimal habitats suitable for all relevant aspects of their life cycle associated with the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Avoid significant disturbance to razorbills and ensure individuals can move safely</p>	<p>Razorbills will be present during their breeding period at the Handa SPA from March to September. They will then undergo a flightless moult period from mid-August to end of October and may winter in UK waters or move further east to Norway or Denmark (Furness, 2015). It is not known where razorbills from the Handa SPA winter.</p> <p>Razorbills at the Handa SPA will nest in crevices in cliffs, often mixing with common guillemots on the same ledges on the high cliffs on the northern and western sides of the island. They may also nest amongst boulders and rocks on grassy slopes or rocky beaches. Razorbills use areas close to the coast as well as offshore waters in which to forage, rest, and carry out other maintenance activities.</p> <p>In the breeding period, razorbills have a mean maximum foraging range of <math>88.7 \pm 75.9</math>km (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019). Razorbills are pursuit divers which make frequent dives of up to 140m, though average dive depth is around 15m (Ropert-Coudert <i>et al.</i> 2018). Most dives are under one minute. Razorbills will regularly roost on the sea overnight and may drift with the tide during their rest (Cooper <i>et al.</i> 2018).</p>

	between these areas within the site.	
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**2c. The supporting habitats and processes relevant to qualifying features and their prey resources are maintained, or where appropriate restored at the Handa SPA.**

This objective seeks to maintain the current extent, quality and distribution of supporting habitats within the site as well as ensure a sufficient food supply within the site. It also recognises however, that the populations of breeding kittiwake, guillemot, fulmar and razorbill using the Handa SPA are in unfavourable condition and that this may, in part, be due factors within the SPA.

The qualifying features require suitable habitat for breeding, shelter, roosting, foraging, loafing, moulting and other maintenance activities. The variety, quality, abundance and availability of food resources on which the qualifying features depend is important for ensuring adult fitness, survival and breeding success. The supply of food resources is supported by environmental processes.

In the terrestrial environment, supporting habitats refer to the characteristics of the sea cliffs and coastal slopes, moulder beaches, freshwater pools and lochs, heathland and moorland relevant to their use by the qualifying features. Supporting processes relates to wider processes such as factors affecting coastal erosion, factors affecting vegetation formation, and hydrology of freshwater lochs, all of which will influence the habitat types and prey distribution available for the qualifying features.

In the marine environment, supporting habitats refer to the characteristics of the seabed and water column relevant to their use by the qualifying features. Supporting processes relates to wider oceanographic processes such as up-wellings, tidal flows, hydrological movements which may be necessary for the habitat, and thus affects nutrient cycling and prey distribution.

Maintenance of prey species and their supporting habitats is important to maintain the conditions required to support the qualifying features populations.

Temporary short-term changes in supporting habitat and/or food resources due to human activity may be considered not to compromise the Conservation Objectives within the site provided it can be demonstrated with a high degree of certainty that the populations of any affected qualifying features can fully recover. The species-specific information includes a summary of available information on food resources and where known, the distribution of the key supporting habitats and associated processes within the Handa SPA.

The overall water body condition status relevant to Handa SPA was assessed as “Good”<sup>7</sup>. This assessment includes consideration of water chemistry, pollutants, the physical condition of the water body, plant and animal communities, including plankton, and the risk from invasive non-native species.

There is currently insufficient information to provide quantitative advice on the environmental processes associated with the supporting habitats and prey of the qualifying features at Handa SPA.

Feature	Site-specific advice	Site-specific information
Black-legged kittiwake	<p>Maintain or enhance the extent and distribution of the supporting habitats for kittiwakes within the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure the variety and abundance of food resources and the condition of supporting habitats and associated processes have the ability to recover.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Existing water quality should be maintained and any increase in eutrophication or water turbidity, where this could reduce supporting</p>	<p>Kittiwakes at Handa SPA will use steep, coastal cliffs and offshore stacks for nesting. Their nest is made of compacted mud, grass, feathers and occasionally seaweed (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998). Kittiwakes require access to areas of freshwater such as the lochs in the centre of the island for bathing and may use manmade walls and shores for roosting.</p> <p>Kittiwakes at Handa SPA will use inshore waters within 1km of their colony for loafing, preening, bathing and other important maintenance behaviours, and waters further offshore and shelf waters for foraging. Kittiwakes may also use shorelines to moult in flocks.</p> <p>Kittiwakes diet consists predominantly of shoaling marine fish and invertebrates (e.g. squid and shrimps) obtained at depths up to 4m below the sea surface. During the breeding season they may also feed on intertidal molluscs, crustaceans (e.g. crayfish), earthworms and plant matter (del Hoyo <i>et al.</i> 1996) and may use seaweed for foraging due to the association of seaweed with benthic infauna (Goodship &amp; Furness, 2019). Diet studies from the Isle of May, showed sandeel to be an important prey item, as well as sprat, rockling and gadids (JNCC, 2019).</p> <p>Reduction in important prey items such as sandeels, capelin and herring have population level effects on kittiwake such as increased mortality and a reduction in breeding (e.g. Daunt <i>et al.</i> 2008; Mitchell <i>et al.</i> 2020). Food supplies at different life stages may also affect future reproduction, for example early diet in developing kittiwakes can affect chick survival (Christensen-Dalsgaard <i>et al.</i> 2018; Hatch <i>et al.</i> 2013).</p>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sepa.org.uk/data-visualisation/water-classification-hub/>

	habitats and/or prey, should be avoided.	Information is lacking on the supporting habitat for kittiwakes at Handa SPA but may relate to the availability of cliff nesting habitat. In the marine environment the supporting processes may relate to water quality (nutrients and turbidity) and water flow.
Common guillemot	<p>Maintain or enhance the extent and distribution of the supporting habitats for guillemots within the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure the variety and abundance of food resources and the condition of supporting habitats and associated processes have the ability to recover.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Existing water quality should be maintained and any increase in eutrophication or water turbidity, where this could reduce supporting habitats and/or prey, should be avoided.</p>	<p>Guillemots at Handa SPA require suitable habitat for breeding, foraging, resting, and other maintenance activities. They will use cliff ledges as their nesting habitat. Guillemots use areas close to the coast as well as offshore waters in which to forage and rest. Guillemots forage both at the seabed (demersal) and within the water column (pelagic) up to 200m, primarily during daylight hours (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017).</p> <p>Breeding guillemot feed on small schooling fish including sandeels, capelin, sprats and juvenile herring and cod (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017). They may also consume molluscs, marine worms, squid, crustaceans and amphipods.</p> <p>The key supporting habitats for guillemots at Handa SPA will relate to the availability of suitable cliff-nesting habitat.</p> <p>The key supporting processes for guillemots at Handa SPA are water quality (nutrients and turbidity), tidal cycles, and water flow. As they are a species that feeds in the water column, they can be potentially affected by any increase in turbidity that would affect their ability to successfully forage for their prey (Cook &amp; Burton, 2010). Studies have shown guillemots foraging in areas at fronts between thermally distinct bodies of water (BirdLife International, 2022). They show a weak preference for such regions and for substrate containing a relatively low proportion of gravel (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017). They have also been observed to forage in riptides (Wanless <i>et al.</i> 1990).</p>

Great skua	<p>Maintain the extent and distribution of the supporting habitats for great skuas within the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Maintain the variety and abundance of food resources and the condition of supporting habitats and associated processes.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Existing water quality should be maintained and any increase in eutrophication or water turbidity, where this could reduce supporting habitats and/or prey, should be avoided.</p>	<p>Great skuas nest on moorland , mainly in the western part of Handa SPA. They also use lochs and freshwater pools within the SPA to bathe communally. They use the surrounding marine waters and further offshore waters for foraging.</p> <p>Great skuas are opportunistic, diurnal foragers with a wide prey base including adults, chicks and eggs of other seabird species, terrestrial mammals, pelagic fish, demersal fish from fishery discards, prey gained from kleptoparasitism of other seabirds, and carrion (Furness, 1987). Where sandeels are available, adults preferentially feed their chicks on these high quality prey item rather than, for example, fishery discards such as haddock or whiting (Furness, 1987). Colony location may affect prey type consumed: in one study comparing pellets it was found that on St Kilda 44-65% of great skua pellets contained seabirds, compared to on Foula where only 12% of pellets did (Phillips <i>et al.</i> 1997), though it is not known if this pattern remains in recent years.</p> <p>Great skuas often feed in groups, especially when shoaling fish are near the surface. They can dip under the surface or grab from the surface but don't generally dive under (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998), though they can submerge up to 0.5m (Furness, 1987).</p> <p>The supporting processes for great skuas may be indirectly linked to what their prey and host species require. In the Handa SPA the availability of suitable nesting habitat will also be important.</p>
Northern fulmar	<p>Maintain or enhance the extent and distribution of the supporting habitats for fulmars within the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure the variety and abundance of food resources and the</p>	<p>Fulmars require suitable habitat for breeding, foraging, loafing, and other maintenance activities within Handa SPA. Fulmars at Handa SPA nest on grassy slopes and cliff ledges around the coast amongst boulders on steep hillsides inland, or around stone dykes and ruined buildings. Fulmars at Handa SPA will forage in the offshore waters, often over shelf-break waters, feeding within 5m of the surface.</p> <p>Fulmars forage both during the day and at night, taking a wide range of prey, particularly small fish, zooplankton (especially copepods and amphipods), shrimp, squid, jellyfish, crustaceans, offal from fisheries, and carrion (BirdLife International, 2019).</p>

	<p>condition of supporting habitats and associated processes have the ability to recover.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Existing water quality should be maintained and any increase in eutrophication or water turbidity, where this could reduce supporting habitats and/or prey, should be avoided.</p>	<p>The key supporting habitats for fulmars at the Handa SPA may relate to the availability of suitable grass and ledges for nesting. In the marine environment the presence of shelf breaks are often important, where there are areas of high biological productivity due to the oceanic thermal fronts (Edwards <i>et al.</i> 2013).</p>
Razorbill	<p>Maintain or enhance the extent and distribution of the supporting habitats for razorbill within the site.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Ensure the variety and abundance of food resources and the condition of supporting habitats and associated processes have the ability to recover.</p> <p><b>and</b></p> <p>Existing water quality should be maintained</p>	<p>Razorbills at the Handa SPA require suitable habitat for breeding, foraging, resting, and other maintenance activities. They may use crevices and ledges on cliffs, boulders, rocks on grassy slopes, or rocky beaches for their nesting habitat. They will use inshore waters for foraging, but may also feed further offshore in deeper pelagic waters, particularly preferring to feed at shelf waters due to their productivity (Linnebjerg <i>et al.</i> 2013). Razorbills will also use the marine waters for roosting overnight and will drift with the tide during their rest (Cooper <i>et al.</i> 2018).</p> <p>Razorbills are a pursuit diver which make frequent, shallow dives in the pelagic zone (Thaxter <i>et al.</i> 2010; Linnebjerg <i>et al.</i> 2013). They have a foraging depth of up to 140m (Jury, 1986) though average dive depth is 15m (Ropert-Coudert <i>et al.</i> 2018) and most dives are under 1 minute (Ropert-Coudert <i>et al.</i> 2018). Razorbills will feed on small fish (e.g. sandeels, clupeids, capelin, sprat, juvenile herring and cod), crustaceans and polychaetes (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017). They may also steal fish from puffins at certain colonies (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998). Razorbill distribution has been linked to substrate type, relating to their main prey item, the sandeel (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017).</p> <p>The key supporting processes for razorbill at the Handa SPA in the terrestrial environment may relate to suitable cliff-nesting habitat. In the surrounding waters by the Handa SPA supporting processes may include water quality (nutrients and turbidity), tidal cycles, water temperature and water flow. As they are a species that feeds in the water column, they can be potentially affected by any increase in turbidity</p>

	any increase in nutrients, turbidity or contaminants where this could reduce supporting habitats and/or prey, should be avoided.	that would affect their ability to successfully forage for their prey (Cook & Burton, 2010). Razorbills tend to use areas where mixing of cool and higher sea surface temperatures exist (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017).
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## Annex 2. Supporting information

### *Factors determining the potential for feature recovery.*

Feature	Factors determining the potential for feature recovery
<p><b>Black-legged kittiwake</b></p>	<p>Kittiwake estimated generation length is 9.8 years and age of first breeding is 4 years old (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). Maximum age recorded is around 29 years (Fransson <i>et al.</i> 2010). Kittiwake clutch size is 2 (1-3) (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998). Fledglings typically depart colonies between late July and mid-August, dispersing rapidly from colonies, leaving the area about 10 days on average after their first flight (Coulson, 2011). Adult survival rates vary with period and colony but range from 0.8-0.93, with an average survival of 0.854 (Coulson, 2011; Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015). Any effect on adult mortality can potentially have serious effects on breeding numbers. As a long-lived seabird species, the adult will balance parental investment into their current breeding attempt with their own need to survive, and future reproductive attempts.</p> <p>A wide-scale tracking study found that the vast majority of adults from North Atlantic colonies appear to winter in the west Atlantic between Newfoundland and the mid-Atlantic ridge with the relatively small numbers wintering in the North Sea and west of the British Isles coming mostly from colonies in the British Isles or in the Barents Sea (Furness, 2015). Feeding aggregations may be seen around the Scottish coast until late October/early November (Forrester <i>et al.</i> 2007). Numbers of kittiwakes passing through UK waters in spring and autumn vary strongly from year to year apparently in relation to weather conditions (Furness, 2015). Pressures in these wintering or passage grounds could limit potential for populations to recover from impacts arising in breeding areas.</p> <p>Adult moult may begin during the breeding season but in general will occur after breeding. This species will often moult in large flocks of several thousand individuals on sandy beaches between the breeding grounds and the open sea (BirdLife International, 2022). Any pressure (e.g. disturbance) to these moulting flocks may have subsequent effects on their energy expenditure and hence their survival.</p> <p>Kittiwakes are surface feeders and are therefore limited to those prey found in the upper 1m of the sea (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998). Kittiwakes have a high reliance on sandeel as their main prey (Daunt <i>et al.</i> 2008), and as such are judged to be one of the most vulnerable species in terms of breeding success in relation to sandeel abundance (Furness &amp; Tasker, 2000). This means they may be less resilient to a loss of sandeel prey resource, and thus their recovery would be compromised.</p>
<p><b>Common guillemot</b></p>	<p>Guillemot estimated generation length is 14.8 years and age of first breeding is 4 years (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). Guillemots can live in excess of 40 years (Fransson <i>et al.</i> 2010), though the average lifespan is likely to be less than 25 years. Guillemots lay a single egg and will not relay if the egg is lost (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998), meaning they have a slow reproductive rate. As with many species, productivity of first time breeders is relatively low, and for guillemots stabilises from the fifth breeding attempt (Crespin <i>et al.</i> 2006). When ready to fledge the chick will leave the nest site and joins the male of the pair on the sea, where they then travel further out to sea together and remain close for around two months (Harris &amp; Wanless, 2003). In this post-fledgling period, the chicks will be vulnerable to predation at this lifestage being less able to</p>

	<p>escape predators (from late July-end of August during fledging). Adult survival is estimated as being 0.935 (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020) and average productivity 0.672 (Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015). Any effect on adult mortality can potentially have serious effects on breeding numbers. As with other long-lived seabird species, the adult will balance parental investment into their current breeding attempt with their own need to survive, and future reproductive attempts.</p> <p>The majority of guillemots in UK waters during the non-breeding season are likely to be from UK colonies (Furness, 2015). Few adults move beyond UK waters, although immatures range more widely during the non-breeding season (Furness, 2015). Non-breeding adults tend to remain near their breeding colonies throughout the year and attend their nest ledges, except during their flightless moult period from beginning of August to mid-October. Pressures during this moult period, where adults will be flightless for 1-2 months, could have a subsequent effect on reproduction or survival.</p> <p>Guillemots are not particularly agile in the air and they find take-off from water difficult (Bédard, 1985), which may limit their ability to avoid e.g. fast moving vessels. A guillemot's foraging technique means that they only carry one fish back to their chick at a time, whereas other auk species can carry multiple fish. This limits the quantity of prey they can bring back to their chick each day. As guillemots can dive deeply, they can feed both at the seabed (on demersal prey) and in the water column (on pelagic prey) (Wakefield <i>et al.</i> 2017), meaning they may have more flexibility in the prey items they can forage on, depending on their availability. Guillemots, as with other auk species, have a high wing loading, meaning that there is a high energetic cost of flight (Thaxter <i>et al.</i> 2010). This may mean if they have to travel further to find food they may suffer energetically (Masden <i>et al.</i> 2010).</p>
<b>Great skua</b>	<p>Estimated generation length for great skua is 15.0 years with their age of first breeding being between 6-7 years (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). This is a long generation length which makes this species less resilient to recovery from factors which either directly or indirectly effect their population. Their maximum lifespan has been recorded as around 33 years (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). Great skuas have one brood with a clutch size of normally 2 eggs (10-20% of pairs lay a single egg); they may relay if they lose their eggs early in the season (Furness 1987). Adult survival rates have been estimated at 0.915 (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020) and average productivity is 0.651 (Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015). The high adult survival suggests that any effect on adult mortality can potentially have serious effects on population numbers.</p> <p>Great skuas are a migratory species with the main wintering distribution ranging from the Celtic Sea to southern Europe and to the coast of northwest Africa (Furness, 2007). Few birds remain in the North Sea in winter. The Bay of Biscay is of particular importance for wintering birds (Magnusdottir <i>et al.</i> 2012). Great skuas from the UK breeding colonies that migrate from the Celtic Sea to the coast of West Africa may be subject to pressures there that could limit the potential for populations to recover from impacts arising in wintering areas (e.g. bycatch over winter period). Skuas are site faithful to their territory (Furness, 1987); such high site fidelity may limit individual ability to adapt to changes within breeding areas and hence potential for population recovery from perturbations.</p> <p>Great skuas are known to be opportunistic foragers who will kleptoparasitise other seabirds for their food as well as being a predator and a scavenger (Furness, 1987). Great skuas have a wide prey base (Furness, 1987) which</p>

	<p>may mean they are more resilient to changes in particular prey populations and abundance. They have been known to be able to increase predation on other seabirds in times of poor fish supply, showing they have a degree of foraging plasticity.</p>
<p><b>Northern fulmar</b></p>	<p>Estimated generation length is 25.3 years (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020), one of the longest in any bird species, meaning they may be less resilient to any negative effects on their population. Fulmars generally begin breeding ~10 years old (Dunnet, 1991) and can continue to breed into old age; some individuals still recorded as breeding in their late 40s (P.Thompson, unpub.data). Maximum longevity is recorded as being 51 years (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). Reproduction rates in fulmars are slow with clutch size being 1 egg, one clutch per year. Fulmars may not breed every year (Ollason &amp; Dunnet, 1988), deferring by at least a year if poor food conditions exist such that the adult cannot reach good body condition to breed, or if the bird's partner has not returned and a new partnership may need to establish. Adult survival rates have been estimated at 0.971 (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020), one of the highest of all seabird species, and average productivity as 0.419 (Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015). Changes in adult survival rates are most likely to drive population change.</p> <p>The fulmar non-breeding population will be mixed individuals across many differing colonies. Tracked birds from Scotland disperse during the non-breeding period to the West Atlantic, to the Labrador Sea, across to the Barents Sea and northern Norway, to the west of Ireland, and some may remain within North Sea waters (Quinn, 2014). There are sex differences in foraging such that female fulmars tracked from Scotland travelled further on average and towards the West Atlantic, compared to males which on average remained closer to the colony over the non-breeding period (Quinn, 2014). There therefore may be different pressures in the wintering grounds for females and males. Despite dispersing large distances in the non-breeding period, from November onwards fulmars will regularly visit their breeding colonies; from January onwards numbers will increase at the colony (Quinn, 2014). In April, breeding fulmars undertake a pre-laying exodus (Macdonald, 1977), an important period of foraging to ensure body condition is ready for the energetically expensive egg laying period. Fulmars may be particularly sensitive to disturbance during their egg laying period, and may abandon their nest if disturbed, leaving the egg vulnerable to predation. During chick-rearing it is common for both pair members to forage away from the nest (Mallory <i>et al.</i> 2008), leaving the chick to defend itself with its ability to expel oil and vomit. Fulmars are highly site faithful, which may limit individual ability to adapt to changes within these areas and hence potential for population recovery from perturbations.</p> <p>The majority of the fulmar's primary moult is usually post-breeding during September and October (Quinn, 2016). It is thought that individuals undergoing wing moult may remain largely flightless for the period of wing moult (Warham, 1996), thus making them more vulnerable to pressures during this time. In a typical year, a full wing and tail moult should be completed by the end of February (Ginn &amp; Melville, 2000). In unusual years (e.g. 2004, during a winter wreck event), 60% of birds examined from a wreck were still in primary moult in February, compared to 8% in a normal year (van Franeker,</p>

	<p>2004), indicating in years of poor food supply the energetically expensive period of moult may be delayed or arrested.</p> <p>Fulmars have a wide prey base (BirdLife International, 2022), so they should be more resilient to changes in prey abundance. However, in the past, population increases and decreases have been linked to changes in anthropogenic food sources such as offal discharges (Tasker, 2004). Fulmars are surface feeders which scavenge on anything that looks like prey. Thus, can be more susceptible to ingesting non-prey items, such as marine litter. Fulmars have the ability to forage widely across large distances (Woodward <i>et al.</i> 2019) which means they may be more resilient to changes in prey abundances closer to their breeding colonies.</p>
<b>Razorbill</b>	<p>Estimated generation length of razorbills is 16.4 and they are a long-lived species, having been recorded to live up to 42 years old (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020). Razorbills first breed around 5 years old (Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015) and, as with other auks, only lay 1 egg (Snow &amp; Perrins, 1998). Razorbills may defer breeding for a year when conditions are not favourable. Adult survival rates have been estimated at 0.906 (Bird <i>et al.</i> 2020) and productivity as 0.570 (Horswill &amp; Robinson, 2015). As with other long-lived seabird species, the adult will balance parental investment into their current breeding attempt with their own need to survive, and future reproductive attempts.</p> <p>Razorbills breed around the north Atlantic in eastern North America, Greenland, the White Sea, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Faroe Islands, GB, Germany and France (BirdLife International, 2022; Furness, 2015). Razorbills wintering in UK waters are thought to derive mainly from breeding populations in the UK, Iceland, Faroe Islands and Norway (Furness, 2015). Scottish breeding razorbills are thought to move east to southwest Norway and Denmark, or the southern North Sea to winter (Furness, 2015). Pressures in these wintering grounds, especially during their vulnerable flightless moult period (from mid-August-end of October), could limit potential for populations to recover from impacts arising in breeding areas.</p> <p>Nest site fidelity has been shown to be high in razorbills (Harris &amp; Wanless, 1989), which may limit individual ability to adapt to changes within their breeding areas, and hence potential for population recovery from perturbations.</p> <p>Razorbills are pursuit divers which tend to make frequent, shallow dives in the pelagic zone (Thaxter <i>et al.</i> 2010; Linnebjerg <i>et al.</i> 2013). Razorbills will regularly roost on the sea overnight and will drift with the tide during their rest (Cooper <i>et al.</i> 2018), which may make them more vulnerable to pressures that occur during the night. Highest rates of feeding for chicks have been recorded at dawn (Conder, 1950), suggesting this is a particularly important time for them to commute between foraging grounds and their breeding colony. Razorbills, as with other auk species, have a high wing loading, meaning that there is a high energetic cost of flight (Thaxter <i>et al.</i> 2010). This may mean if they have to travel further to find food they may suffer energetically (Masden <i>et al.</i> 2010).</p>

### Annex 3: Glossary for Conservation Objectives and References

#### Glossary

Conservation Objective term	Definition
Distribution	The “distribution” is how the qualifying feature is spread out within the site.
Favourable condition	This refers to the assessed condition of a feature through Site Condition Monitoring. Features considered to be in favourable condition for the purposes of these Conservation Objectives are those that have an assessed condition of either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favourable Declining - The attribute targets set for the natural feature have been met, but evidence suggests that its condition will worsen unless remedial action is taken.</li> <li>• Favourable Maintained - the attribute targets set for the natural features have been met, and the natural feature is likely to be secure on the site under present conditions.</li> <li>• Favourable Recovered - the condition of the natural feature has recovered from a previous unfavourable condition, and attribute targets are now being met.</li> </ul>
Generation length	Generation length is “the average age of parents of the current cohort”. Generation length therefore reflects the turnover rate of breeding individuals in a population (IUCN, 2019).
Maintain	Where a qualifying feature of the SPA is assessed as being in favourable condition the conservation objective is ‘maintain’. This means that the various attributes of the feature should be kept at that favourable level. This can include increasing/improving condition as well, but not a permanent decline.
Marine birds	This term encompasses true seabirds and waterfowl (seaducks, divers, and grebes).
Metapopulation	A group of connected populations of a species within a defined area, where the individual populations may interact with one another.
Restore	Where a qualifying feature of the SPA is assessed as being in unfavourable condition the conservation objective is ‘restore’. This means that the various attributes of the feature should be returned to the favourable level by increasing/improving condition.
Site integrity	The integrity of a site is defined in general terms as the coherence of its ecological structures and function, across its whole area, which enables it to sustain the habitat, complex of habitats and and/or the levels of populations of the species for which it was designated.
Site reference population	This refers to the estimated population figure for the site and should be used to form the basis of carrying out HRAs. In most cases, the site reference population will be the baseline population (figure at designation). However, where recent surveys show a population to have increased or stayed stable, the current population is considered the most appropriate population figure to use for HRA’s.
Supporting habitats and processes	This includes the following environmental conditions (but is not limited to) which are important for maintaining/restoring the protected features, e.g. hydrography and supporting water currents, chemical water quality parameters, suspended sediment levels, radionuclide levels.

Conservation Objective term	Definition
Unfavourable condition	<p>This refers to the assessed condition of a feature through Site Condition Monitoring. Features considered to be in unfavourable condition for the purposes of these Conservation Objectives are those that have an assessed condition of either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unfavourable recovering - One or more of the attribute targets have not been met on the site, but management measures are in place to improve the condition.</li> <li>• Unfavourable no change - One or more of the attribute targets have not been met, and recovery is unlikely under the present management and activity on the site.</li> <li>• Unfavourable declining - One or more of the attribute targets have not been met, evidence suggests that condition will worsen unless remedial action is taken.</li> </ul>
Waterfowl	Encompasses seaducks, grebes and divers.

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