

Habitats Regulations Assessment document: CSPA – tLSE 028

European Marine Site:	Coquet Island SPA
Generic sub-feature(s):	Pursuit & Plunge Diving Birds, Water Column
Gear type(s):	Gill nets
NIFCA tLSE type:	Detailed
Gear/feature interaction reference(s):¹	CSPA – 279 CSPA – 244

Revision history		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Revision</i>	<i>Editor</i>
23/12/2015	Document created	VR
08/02/2016	Document revised following consultation with Natural England (05/02/16)	SM
13/06/2016	Document revised following consultation with Natural England (10/06/16)	VR

Has Natural England been formally consulted on this tLSE (and do they agree)?	Yes
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Date of document completion/'sign-off':	13/06/2016
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Test for Likely Significant Effect (LSE)

CSPA - 279: Pursuit & Plunge Diving Birds

<p>1. Is the activity/activities directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2. What pressures (such as abrasion, disturbance) are potentially exerted by the gear type(s)?</p> <p><i>*Sensitivities as listed are based on DRAFT Interim conservation advice. No Regulation 33 or 35 Advice is available for Coquet Island SPA and best judgement has been used to determine which of these pressures are truly exerted by the gear type(s).</i></p>	<p>Above water noise (Sensitive)¹</p> <p>Collision ABOVE and BELOW water with static or moving objects not naturally found in the marine environment (e.g., boats, machinery, and structures)(Sensitive)²</p> <p>Introduction or spread of non-indigenous species (Sensitive)⁷</p> <p>Litter i.e. Ghostfishing (Sensitive)⁸</p> <p>Removal of non- target species (bycatch) (Sensitive)¹⁰</p> <p>Visual disturbance (Sensitive)¹³</p>
<p>3. Is the feature potentially exposed to the pressure(s)?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>4. What are the conservation objectives for the feature?</p> <p><i>*DRAFT interim conservation advice does not give definitive conservation objectives. However, completing an HRA without COs is difficult. The CO as listed in this document is based on current knowledge of the status, and the pressures, affecting designated features (see sections 4 &5).</i></p> <p><i>Expert judgement has been used to determine which features may be exposed to the pressure(s) resulting in inferred COs. These COs are assigned a degree of uncertainty i.e. a subjective confidence level based on evidence 'High', 'Medium', 'Low', and 'Unknown'.</i></p>	<p>Conservation objective for pursuit & plunge diving birds: Recover*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>the size of the population at a level which is above either the SPA Citation or an alternative baseline-population previously approved by Natural England Chief Scientist or that based on the current mean peak count or equivalent, whichever is the higher.</u> - <u>the abundance and structure of the assemblage at or above its current or target level (whichever is the higher) through restoring breeding productivity and adult survival.</u> - <u>the extent, distribution and availability of suitable breeding habitat which supports the feature for all necessary stages of its breeding cycle (courtship, nesting, feeding).</u> - water quality and quantity to a standard which provides the necessary conditions to support the SPA feature, where the supporting habitats of the feature are dependent on surface water. <p><i>Those conservation objectives that might be affected by gill netting activity are underlined.</i></p> <p><i>*Confidence level for interim, inferred Conservation Objective: MEDIUM (see section 6 for detail).</i></p>

<p>5. What are the potential effects/impacts of the pressure(s) on the feature, taking into account the exposure level?</p>	<p>Levels of netting activity within the surrounding waters of the Coquet Island SPA are currently very low, with just one or two boats known to set nets on an infrequent basis (Jon Green, pers. comms.). Observations from RSPB staff working on site during the summer breeding months have reported no sightings of nets being set, SPA bird species being caught or disturbed in close proximity of the SPA. Anecdotal advice from the RSPB warden, states that puffins have been caught in salmon nets at Druridge Bay (Paul Morrison, Coquet Island RSPB warden pers. comms. 24/04/2014), however these nets target migratory fish and are therefore regulated by the Environment Agency.</p> <p>Puffins (Pursuit and Plunge diving seabirds) <i>Fratercula arctica</i> are a qualifying feature for the Coquet Island SPA, with 11,400 breeding pairs representing 1.3% of the UK breeding population (1995)¹⁴. A puffin census is carried out every 5 years on Coquet Island. Since records began in 1975, the number of breeding pairs using the site has increased steadily and in 2009 15,812 breeding pairs were recorded¹⁵. Puffin numbers on Coquet Island SPA have however declined since the 2009 census to an estimated 12,000 breeding pairs (Paul Morrison, Coquet Island RSPB warden, pers. comms. 13/11/2015). This local decline is attributed to a reduction in sandeel stocks and the crushing of burrows by seals, however it reflects the decline of puffins reported at other breeding sites around Europe, as a result of which puffins are now listed as ‘Vulnerable’ on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.</p> <p>NIFCA Byelaw 6 (Fixed Engines) includes a number of technical, spatial and temporal restrictions designed to minimise the potential of accidental bycatch of birds and the low levels of activity are unlikely to be having a significant adverse impact on puffin numbers locally. However, given the status of puffins as a vulnerable species, more information is needed to confirm this.</p>
<p>6. Condition and Conservation Objective Inferences</p>	<p>No conservation objective is provided for the feature of ‘Pursuit and Plunge diving birds’ within the Coquet Island SPA. Since the 2009 census the population numbers of Atlantic puffins have declined (as mirrored at other breeding sites) from 15, 812 to current estimate of 12,000. Therefore NIFCA infer a ‘Recover’ CO for this site’s feature, with a ‘Medium’ confidence assigned.</p>

<p>7. Is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant?</p>	<p>Alone:</p> <p>No</p> <p>* However a full Appropriate Assessment is required to confirm this.</p>	<p>OR In-combination</p> <p>No</p>
<p>8. Have NE been consulted on this LSE test? If yes, what was NE’s advice?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Synthesis of evidence and local knowledge informing this decision occurred between January 2014 and the date of this document’s creation with stakeholders (where appropriate) and other statutory authorities. Natural England (CS) was involved with this formal process.</p>	

Conclusion

Is the proposal likely to have a significant effect 'alone or in combination' on the Coquet Island SPA?

No, however a full Appropriate Assessment is required to confirm this.

Test for Likely Significant Effect (LSE)

CSPA – 244: Water Column

<p>1. Is the activity/activities directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site for nature conservation?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>2. What pressures (such as abrasion, disturbance) are potentially exerted by the gear type(s)?</p> <p><i>*Sensitivities as listed are based on DRAFT Interim conservation advice. No Regulation 33 or 35 Advice is available for Coquet Island SPA and best judgement has been used to determine which of these pressures are truly exerted by the gear type(s).</i></p>	<p>Barrier to species movement (Sensitive)</p> <p>Genetic modification & translocation of indigenous species (Sensitive)³</p> <p>Hydrocarbon & PAH contamination. Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC. (Sensitive)⁴</p> <p>Introduction of light (Sensitive)⁵</p> <p>Introduction of other substances (solid, liquid or gas) (Sensitive)⁶</p> <p>Introduction or spread of non-indigenous species (Sensitive)⁷</p> <p>Litter (Sensitive)⁸</p> <p>Organic enrichment (Sensitive)⁹</p> <p>Removal of non-target species (Sensitive)¹⁰</p> <p>Synthetic compound contamination (incl. pesticides, antifoulants, pharmaceuticals). Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC. (Sensitive)¹¹</p> <p>Transition elements & organo-metal (e.g. TBT) contamination. Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC. (Sensitive)¹¹</p> <p>Underwater noise changes (Sensitive)¹²</p> <p>Visual disturbance (Sensitive)¹³</p>
<p>3. Is the feature potentially exposed to the pressure(s)?</p>	<p>Yes</p>

<p>4. What are the conservation objectives for the feature?</p> <p><i>*DRAFT interim conservation advice does not give definitive conservation objectives. However, completing an HRA without COs is difficult. The CO as listed in this document is based on current knowledge of the status, and the pressures, affecting designated features (see sections 4 &5).</i></p> <p><i>Expert judgement has been used to determine which features may be exposed to the pressure(s) resulting in inferred COs. These COs are assigned a degree of uncertainty i.e. a subjective confidence level based on evidence 'High', 'Medium,' 'Low', and 'Unknown'.</i></p>	<p>Conservation objectives for supporting habitat 'Coastal and offshore waters' for <u>all</u> designated SPA bird features are to Maintain*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <u>availability of preferred prey species (e.g. sandeel and sprat) at preferred prey sizes (Arctic tern, Sandwich tern, Roseate tern)</u> <p><i>*Confidence level for interim, inferred Conservation Objective: LOW (see section 6 for detail).</i></p>	
<p>5. What are the potential effects/impacts of the pressure(s) on the feature, taking into account the exposure level?</p>	<p>Levels of netting activity within the surrounding waters of the Coquet Islands SPA are currently very low, with just one or two boats known to set nets on an infrequent basis. Observations from RSPB staff working on site during the summer breeding months have reported no sightings of nets being set within the close vicinity of Coquet Island (Paul Morrison, Coquet Island RSPB warden pers. comms. 24/04/2014).</p> <p>Bottom set, static netting activity within the district predominantly targets whitefish e.g. Cod, Saithe and Flatfish or lobsters for which mesh sizes are too large to capture smaller prey species such as sandeel and sprat, which are the target species of the classified bird species. Static netting in the district, particularly at current low levels, is therefore not deemed to have a significant adverse impact on the water column within the Coquet Island SPA.</p>	
<p>6. Condition and Conservation Objective Inferences</p>	<p>No evidence is available on the current condition of the 'water column' within the Coquet Island SPA. In lieu of a definitive conservation objective for this feature, a CO of 'Maintain' has been inferred, based on a low level of confidence.</p>	
<p>7. Is the potential scale or magnitude of any effect likely to be significant?</p>	<p>Alone:</p> <p>No</p>	<p>OR In-combination</p> <p>No</p>

8. Have NE been consulted on this LSE test? If yes, what was NE's advice?	Yes Synthesis of evidence and local knowledge informing this decision occurred between January 2014 and the date of this document's creation with stakeholders (where appropriate) and other statutory authorities. Natural England (CS) was involved with this formal process.
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Conclusion

Is the proposal likely to have a significant effect 'alone or in combination' on the Coquet Island SPA?

No.

References

1. ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea), 2013; Stillman et al., 2007; Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) Consulting, 2012. 'Whilst activity would cause pressure, impact considered better captured by 'visual disturbance'. **706 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
2. Davenport and Davenport, 2006. 'Collision can occur as a result of this activity in instances where a vessel is used.' **150 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
3. Gubbay and Knapman, 1999; Kaiser et al., 2001; Sewell et al., 2007; Sewell and Hiscock, 2005. 'Fishing can lead to genetic selection for different body and reproductive traits, result in changes in the genetic makeup of populations and can extirpate distinct local stocks.' **256 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
4. Ware, 2009. 'Fishing vessels could result in hydrocarbon contamination but considered unlikely to generally occur at level that would cause concern (with exception of large scale pollution event).' **258 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
5. BirdLife International, 2012b 'Lighted vessels pose a collision risk to many species of birds. Birds drawn to light often become disoriented and collide with these structures, resulting in injury and death.' **323 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
6. Ware, 2009. 'Vessels used during these activities could result in e.g. oil slicks but considered unlikely to generally occur at level that would cause concern (with exception of large scale pollution event).' **684 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
7. ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea), 2009. 'The introduction and movement of invasive non-indigenous species may occur as a result of vessel movements, hull fouling and fishing activities.' **619 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
8. Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) Consulting, 2012 'Discarded/lost lines, hooks and nets which could be problematic for mobile species. Other types of litter generated by activity generally not considered to occur at level that would cause concern.' **190 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
9. Dayton et al. 1995. 'Discarded fish or fish that experience fishing mortality that are retained within the marine environment decompose and add organic material to the benthic environment.' **752 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
10. Gubbay and Knapman, 1999; ICES (International Council for Exploration of the Sea), 2013; Kaiser et al., 2001; Sewell and Hiscock, 2005; Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) Consulting, 2012. 'Pressure may be exerted by by-catch associated with fixed nets and lines. However, vulnerability of feature to pressure will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.' **543 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
11. OSPAR Commission, 2011. 'Could occur as a result of vessels associated with this activity. Generally considered unlikely to occur at level that would cause concern (with exception of large scale pollution event).' **166 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
12. Thomsen and Intersessional correspondence group on underwater noise (2007 - 2009), 2009. 'Pressure (e.g. increase in noise above ambient level) would be exerted via vessel movement, gear deployment/towing/hauling and the use of fish finding sonars.' **536 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
13. Stillman et al., 2007; Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) Consulting, 2012. 'May result from the presence/movement of the vessel and potentially also the presence/movement of the gear. Magnitude of pressure would depend on nature and scale/intensity of activity.' **362 (UK9006031_Coquet_Island_SPA_Advice_on_Operations)**
14. Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), 2001. Coquet Island SPA Site Summary. Available online: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1991>
15. RSPB species count data for Coquet Island 1975 – 2010. Provided by RSPB warden Paul Morrison 05/02/2016.

