

Proposals for a marine extension to the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area

This note has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about proposals to extend the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) into the marine environment. Other information notes explaining the process for designating SPAs and providing details about the bird species to be protected are available. For links to these documents, see *Further information* below.

Background

The Dungeness to Pett Level SPA was classified in 1999 under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive ('the Birds Directive'). The features and boundaries of this site were re-assessed in 2010. In June 2014 the site was re-classified as The Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay Special Protection Area with additional features and a revised boundary.

However, the UK Government has ongoing obligations under Article 4.1 of the Birds Directive regarding the protection of species of birds listed in Annex I of that Directive, or those otherwise considered to be regularly occurring migratory species. These ongoing obligations require the classification of the most suitable territories in number and size as Special Protection Areas for the conservation of these species in the geographical sea and land area where this Directive applies.

In seeking to fulfil this obligation, Natural England has reviewed information provided by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) based on survey work carried out in the waters around a number of seabird colonies.



Rye Beach © Natural England/Catherine Laverick

In light of this work, the area of sea adjacent to the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA; including areas of the marine environment to the east and west of this designation, are now being considered as an extension to the existing SPA under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive ('the Birds Directive').

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We are compiling recommendations for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider a marine extension to this area.

Special Protection Areas

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 to tackle declines in wild bird populations across Europe. Each member state agreed to identify SPAs to protect:

- Rare or vulnerable bird species from the list in Annex I of the Birds Directive; and
- Regularly occurring migratory bird species.

Birds falling into these categories in the Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay area include the Annex I tern species that use relatively restricted areas around their breeding colonies for foraging.

The network of SPAs on land in the UK is now well established. However to provide waterbirds and seabirds with the protection they need, further work is required to complete a network at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying a network of SPAs in the marine environment.

Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay: an important place for seabirds

The breeding tern colonies present at Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay regularly support more than 1% of the British populations of Annex I sandwich tern, common tern (both 'large tern' species) and little tern. Accordingly, the surrounding marine environment is an important foraging ground for terns during their breeding season (March – September).

A marine extension for foraging seabirds

All seabird species are 'central place' foragers, meaning they depart from and return to a central place (ie their nest) each time they forage. This constraint means that they have a limited

foraging range, and have a strong energetic incentive to forage as close to their colony as they can. The surrounding marine environment, around the existing SPA breeding colonies, needs to be considered for protection.

In order to provide a good evidence base on which to identify the sea areas that might be best afforded protection for the larger species of tern, the JNCC conducted a programme of survey work recording the distribution of foraging effort by tracking large tern species at selected colonies around the UK. Additional work combining shore-based and sea-based surveys of the near-shore distribution of little terns was also conducted at a number of colonies around the UK.

The possible alongshore extent of the boundaries include areas of the sea westwards of Bexhill to eastwards of Dymchurch. The area under consideration extends out from the existing SPA boundary which is currently limited to Lowest Astronomical Tide (LAT). A map of the area proposed for extension together with the existing designation can be found below.



Little tern © Natural England/Paul Lacey

What happens next?

Natural England is responsible for recommending potential SPAs in English waters (out to 12 nautical miles) to Defra for classification.

Once we have developed initial site recommendations for a new SPA and have held informal discussions with stakeholders, we will

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submit proposals (approved by our Executive Board) as formal advice to Defra.

In 2016, we aim to obtain Ministerial approval to start the formal public consultation process which will last for twelve weeks. After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra.

How can you get involved?

We are contacting stakeholders who may be able to provide information to support our proposals from 12th April over an initial three week period. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the adding of species to the existing Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA or the new marine extension.
- You hold any additional bird data that you would like to share with us to inform the recommendations.

Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [Establishing Marine Special Protection Areas](#). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN135: *Sandwich tern: Species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN138: *Common tern: Species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

- TIN139: *Little tern: Species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

If you would like to know more about the proposals or ask any questions, please get in touch with:

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To find out more about the work of Natural England, please visit:

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