

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Sefton Coast
Unitary Authority/County:	Sefton
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SD281099
SAC EU code:	UK0013076
Area (ha):	4563.97
Component SSSI:	Sefton Coast SSSI

Site description:

The Sefton Coast in north-west England displays both rapid erosion and active shifting dunes. A substantial stretch of the dune system is fronted by shifting dunes. Marram *Ammophila arenaria* usually dominates the mobile dunes, amidst considerable areas of blown sand. Where rates of sand deposition decline, lyme grass *Leymus arenarius*, sea-holly *Eryngium maritimum* and cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* occur, with red fescue *Festuca rubra* and spreading meadow-grass *Poa humilis* present on the more sheltered ridges. Sea spurge *Euphorbia paralias* and the nationally scarce dune fescue *Vulpia fasciculata* are frequent, while sea bindweed *Calystegia soldanella* is very local. The area of dunes around Formby Point has been eroding since 1906 while areas north and south of this are accreting (where the nature of the coast allows). The rapid erosion is therefore reducing the area of shifting dunes at Formby, and high, steep eroding dunes abut the beach with extensive areas of blown sand immediately inland.

The sequence of habitats from foredunes to dune grassland and dune slack is extensive, and substantial areas of open dune vegetation remain. There are large areas of semi-fixed and fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation exhibiting considerable variation from calcareous to acidic.

There are extensive dune slacks dominated by creeping willow *Salix repens* ssp. *Argentea*; it has been estimated that 99ha, or 43% of the total English resource of the main dune slack community dominated by creeping willow occurs at this site. The species also dominates areas of free-draining dune grassland to a much greater extent than at most other UK sites. Despite some urban and recreational development, both successional and geomorphological processes are still active and the structure and function of the site as a whole is still well-conserved. Pools in the hollows and slacks amongst the more fixed dunes are the habitat of a large population of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*.

Some active formation can still be seen and a variety of successional stages are represented. The sequence from foredunes to dune grassland and dune slack is extensive. The site also contributes to the range and variation of humid dune slack vegetation, being a large and representative base-rich system towards the northern limit for some humid dune slack communities along the west coast of Britain.

A large population of petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii* occurs at this site. The plant was first recorded on the Sefton Coast at Ainsdale in 1861 and it is still found within the dune system between Southport and Ainsdale. It seems to prefer damp ground around the edges of dune slacks of fairly recent origin, with the largest populations found in slacks of less than 25 years old. The plant is often found in association with footpaths, where light trampling keeps the

ground vegetation sparse; infrequently-used paths or less-trampled edges of pathways seem to be favoured. Although the preferred habitat is short damp turf with plenty of bare patches, populations have been found growing amongst dense marram *Ammophila arenaria* with few other associated species.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Atlantic decalcified fixed dunes (*Calluno-Ulicetea*). (Coastal dune heathland)*
- Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (*Salicion arenariae*). (Dunes with creeping willow)
- Embryonic shifting dunes
- Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation (“grey dunes”). (Dune grassland)*
- Humid dune slacks
- Shifting dunes along the shoreline with *Ammophila arenaria* (“white dunes”). (Shifting dunes with marram)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*
- Petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (*).

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0013076

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs