

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

## Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

<b>Name:</b>	Chesil and the Fleet
<b>Unitary Authority/County:</b>	Dorset
<b>SAC status:</b>	Designated on 1 April 2005
<b>Grid reference:</b>	SY630795
<b>SAC EU code:</b>	UK0017076
<b>Area (ha):</b>	1631.63
<b>Component SSSI:</b>	Chesil Beach and The Fleet SSSI, Portland Harbour Shore SSSI, West Dorset Coast SSSI

### Site description:

The Fleet is the largest example of a lagoonal habitat in England and has features of both lagoonal inlets and percolation lagoons. It is bordered by the fossil shingle barrier beach structure of Chesil Beach, through which sea water percolates into the lagoon, but most of its water exchange occurs through the narrow channel that links it to Portland Harbour. A low freshwater input produces fully saline conditions throughout most of the Fleet, with reduced salinity occurring only in the west. The lagoon is extremely sheltered from wave action and has weak tidal streams, except in the eastern narrows and entrance channel. The tidal range is much smaller and temperature range far greater than on the open coast. The lagoon supports extensive populations of two species of eelgrass *Zostera* and three species of tasselweed *Ruppia*, including the rare spiral tasselweed *R. cirrhosa*, and a diverse fauna that includes a number of nationally rare and scarce species.

The 28 km-long shingle bar of Chesil Beach, with the contiguous Portland Harbour shore, is an extensive representative of perennial vegetation of stony banks, and most of it is relatively undisturbed by human activities. Much of the shingle bar is subject to wash-over and percolation in storm conditions and is therefore sparsely vegetated. It supports the most extensive occurrences of the rare sea-kale *Crambe maritima* and sea pea *Lathyrus japonicus* in the UK, together with other grassland and lichen-rich shingle plant communities typical of more stable conditions, especially towards the eastern end of the site. The inner shore of the beach supports extensive drift-line vegetation dominated by sea beet *Beta vulgaris* ssp. *maritima* and orache *Atriplex* spp. This community exists in a dynamic equilibrium with Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub, which it replaces in areas subject to disturbance, and is in turn displaced by the scrub after disturbance ceases.

Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub occurs as a band of shrubby sea-blite *Suaeda vera* and sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides*. The largest extent of this community lines much of the 13 km length of the seaward margin of the Fleet. The community forms a clear zone between the Fleet and the shingle vegetation of Chesil Bank.

**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:

- Coastal lagoons\*
- Annual vegetation of drift lines
- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- Mediterranean and thermo-Atlantic halophilous scrubs (*Sarcocornetea fruticosi*). (Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub)
- Perennial vegetation of stony banks. (Coastal shingle vegetation outside the reach of waves)

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: UK0017076

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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