

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Plymouth Sound and Estuaries
Unitary Authority/County:	Cornwall, Devon, Plymouth
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SX472506
SAC EU code:	UK0013111
Area (ha):	6402.03
Component SSSI:	Lynher Estuary SSSI, Rame Head to Whitsand Bay SSSI, St John's Lake SSSI, Tamar-Tavy Estuary SSSI, Wembury Point SSSI, Yealm Estuary and Plymouth Sound Shores and Cliffs SSSI

Site description:

Plymouth Sound and Estuaries on the south-west coast of England includes the rias (drowned river valleys) of the rivers Tavy, Tamar, Lynher and Yealm. The first three of these join at the wide, rocky inlet of Plymouth Sound and the Yealm enters the adjacent Wembury Bay. The Yealm has good examples of habitats and communities that are characteristic of sheltered marine inlets with little freshwater input, including a range of sponge- and worm-dominated communities on lower shore mixed sediments. The upper parts of the Tamar and Lynher include a very well-developed estuarine salinity gradient. As a consequence, they exhibit one of the finest examples in the UK of changing estuarine communities with changing salinity regime. Rocky reefs in low salinity estuarine conditions far inland on the Tamar are very unusual and support species such as the hydroid *Cordylophora caspia*. The Plymouth Sound complex has a high diversity of habitats and communities characteristic of different salinities. Some of these support extremely rich marine flora and fauna, which include abundant southern Mediterranean-Atlantic species rarely found in Britain, such as the carpet coral *Hoplangia durotrix*. Notable habitats include intertidal and subtidal limestone reefs; offshore sub-tidal tide-swept reefs; tide-swept limestone channels; and subtidal sediments. The site is one of the chief rocky-shore strongholds for shore dock *Rumex rupestris* on the UK mainland.

Of particular importance are the Devonian limestone reefs running along the northern shore from West Hoe to Batten Bay. This relatively soft rock is extensively bored by the bivalve *Hiatella arctica* and the spionid worms *Polydora* spp., and harbours a rich fauna. In the subtidal zone this steep-sided, wave-sheltered reef is dominated by a dense hydroid and bryozoan turf with anemones and ascidians. The subtidal area is of particular importance for its kelp- and animal-dominated habitats. The area off Batten Bay contains the south-western kelp *Laminaria ochroleuca*, together with other uncommon species including the rare sea slug *Okenia elegans* and trumpet anemone *Aiptasia mutabilis*. In the approaches to Plymouth Sound, abundant populations of the slow-growing, long-lived, nationally important pink sea-fan *Eunicella verrucosa* occur.

The site contains large subtidal sandbanks, which consist of a range of sandy sediments within the inlet and on the open coast. These sediments include tide-swept sandy banks in estuarine habitats, sandy muds north of the Breakwater, muddy sands in Jennycliff Bay, fine sands with eelgrass *Zostera marina* and a rich associated flora and fauna in the Yealm entrance, as well as tide-swept sandy sediments with associated hard substrates colonised by distinctive communities of algae and invertebrates.

The well-developed salinity gradient supports Atlantic salt meadow together with natural transitions to brackish and freshwater communities, including reedbeds supporting the only UK population of triangular club-rush *Schoenoplectus triqueter*. Some stands of salt meadow are structurally and botanically diverse and include sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus* and saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardii*, with red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sea rush *J. maritimus* and thrift *Armeria maritima* at higher levels. The locally common parsley water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii* is also found in some parts of the site, and there are stands of sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, which is unusual in Cornwall.

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 salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- Estuaries
- Large shallow inlets and bays
- Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide. (Intertidal mudflats and sandflats)
- Reefs
- Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time. (Subtidal sandbanks)

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:

- Allis shad *Alosa alosa*
- Shore dock *Rumex rupestris*

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

Register reference number: UK0013111

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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