

Proposals for a Special Protection Area on Morecambe Bay and the Duddon Estuary and adjacent coast

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about the development of recommendations to combine and extend Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary Special Protection Areas (SPA) to create one SPA. Other notes about the process for classifying SPAs and about the birds to be protected are available. For details see *Further Information* below.

Background

Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary were classified as SPAs in October 1996 and August 1998 respectively, as both sites support internationally important populations of regularly occurring breeding seabirds and non-breeding waterbirds.

The UK Government has ongoing obligations under the Birds Directive, the legislation that requires SPA classification, to identify and classify SPAs. As part of work to identify potential marine SPAs in UK waters, Natural England is compiling proposals for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider as part of the commitment to improving seabird protection within the SPA network. Key elements of these proposals are to:

- Combine the two existing SPAs into one site to extend protection to little tern *Sternula albifrons* breeding colony in the Duddon Estuary.

- Extend the combined SPA in order to protect foraging areas of Sandwich terns *Sterna sandvicensis* and little terns.

Special Protection Areas

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

- rare or vulnerable bird species (as listed in Annex I of the Directive); and
- other regularly occurring migratory bird species.

Annex I species include Sandwich and little terns.

SPAs on land in the UK are now well established, but to provide seabirds with the protection they need, further work is required to

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establish SPAs at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying a network of SPAs in the marine environment by November 2015.

Morecambe Bay and Duddon Coastal SPAs: a special place for Sandwich and little terns

Morecambe Bay and the Duddon Estuary SPAs support important breeding colonies of several seabird species, including Sandwich and little tern. The breeding colonies for Sandwich tern are already protected in both SPAs, little tern breeding colonies are only protected in Morecambe Bay SPA. Tern species are called 'central place' foragers, meaning they move out from and return to a central place (their nest) on every foraging trip. Although this constraint means they have a limited foraging range and a strong energetic incentive to forage as close to their colony as possible, the areas utilised by both Sandwich and little tern extend outside the existing Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPA boundaries. These foraging areas need to be considered for protection.



Sandwich tern. © Andy Mason

Combining and extending existing SPAs

In order to provide a good evidence base on which to identify sea areas that might best afford protection for the larger species of tern (including Sandwich but not little terns), JNCC (the Joint Nature Conservation Committee) 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 UK colonies. The results from these surveys were used to inform generic models describing ecological requirements for foraging areas. These have been applied to Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary SPAs tern colonies to identify the foraging areas, which have shaped decisions about the proposals at these sites.

As shown in the map below we are developing recommendations to combine and extend existing sites to create one SPA that is ecologically coherent and delivers protection to the appropriate species.

The possible extension to the sites extends north along the Cumbria coast to Ravenglass and seawards to approximately 7 km at its widest point.

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 draft SPA, and held informal discussions with stakeholders, we will submit proposals (approved by our Executive Board) as formal advice to Defra.

The informal discussions are intended to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are aware of our proposal and to give them an opportunity to provide information to inform our recommendations.

Towards the end of 2015, subject to Ministerial approval, the formal public consultation processes will commence which will last twelve weeks. This period is an opportunity for stakeholders to formally submit views on the proposals. After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra. It is Defra's intention to have made a decision regarding the classification of the site by December 2016.

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How can you get involved?

We are contacting stakeholders with an interest in the proposals from 17th February 2015 over an initial eight week period. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals.
- You hold any additional bird data that you would like to share with us to inform the recommendations.
- You have any information about your interests or activities in the area that could help us determine the potential economic environmental and social impacts of the classification.

Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: [Establishing marine Special Protected Areas](#) and [Conservation Objectives for European Sites](#). In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN135: *Sandwich tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN139: *Little tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

- *European Site Conservation Objectives for Morecambe Bay Special Protection Area Site Code: UK9005081*
- *European Site Conservation Objectives for Duddon Estuary Special Protection Area Site Code: UK9005031*

If you want to know more

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

Helen Ake

Cumbria Area Team, Natural England, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Kendal, LA9 7RL
Telephone: 0300 060 0493 or email:

CumbriaMarineSPA@naturalengland.org.uk

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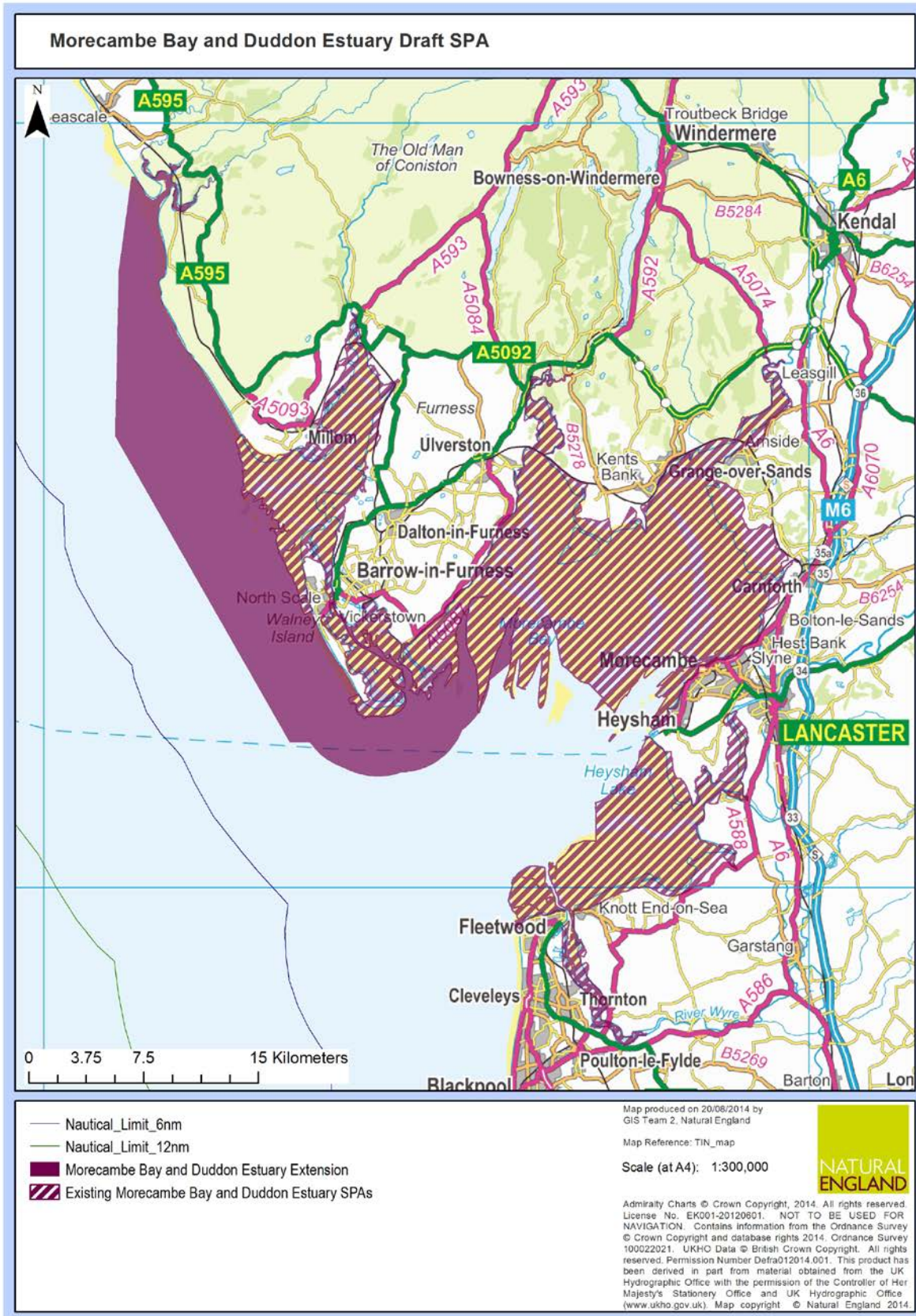
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ISBN 978-1-78354-133-1

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Map showing the proposals for a Special Protection Area on Morecambe Bay and the Duddon Estuary and adjacent coast