

# Proposals for a marine extension to the Isles of Scilly Special Protection Area (SPA)

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about the development of recommendations to extend the Isles of Scilly Special Protection Area (SPA) to afford protection in the marine environment for seabirds. Other notes about the process for classifying SPAs and about the birds to be protected are available. For details see *Further Information* below.

## Background

The Isles of Scilly SPA was classified in 2001 under the European Commission's Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (the Birds Directive) as the site supports internationally important populations of European storm petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* and lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus*, as well as a breeding seabird assemblage of European importance. At present the SPA boundary only encompasses those areas used for nesting. The marine areas used by the seabirds are predominantly outside the existing SPA boundary.

The UK Government has ongoing obligations under the Birds Directive, the legislation that requires SPA classification, to identify and classify new 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. The proposals for this site are to:

- extend the Isles of Scilly SPA boundary to cover the marine areas used by seabirds for foraging and other behaviours;
- add the new features European shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*) and great black-backed gull (*Larus marinus*).

## Special Protection Areas

SPAs in England are classified by UK Government Ministers, under section 2 of the European Communities Act 1972. 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.

SPAs on land in the UK are now well established, but to provide seabirds, such as European shags, with the protection they need, further work is required to establish SPAs at sea. Natural England has commissioned surveys of marine waters around the Isles of Scilly to identify the areas used by seabirds. This information is used to propose a marine boundary extending

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from breeding colonies out to sea, within which 'hotspots' of usage are contained. Because of their ecological characteristics, European shags are the species most amenable to this approach.

### The Isles of Scilly: an important place for seabirds

The Isles of Scilly form an archipelago of over 200 low-lying granite islands and rocks situated in the South-West Approaches, 45 km south-west of Land's End at the extreme south-west of England.

The islands included within the SPA support a breeding seabird assemblage of European importance. The isolated nature of the islands and rocks, together with their low levels of disturbance makes them particularly suitable for nesting seabirds.

Compared to other sites in the UK, the site supports the fifth largest population of European storm petrels (and the largest in England), the sixth largest population of lesser black-backed gulls, the third largest population of European shags (and the largest in England), and the largest population of great black-backed gulls. The seabird assemblage includes at least eight other species, including Manx shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*, which only breeds at one other location in England.

The long history of seabird occupancy of the archipelago was first formally recognised in the early 1980s, when 26 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) were notified covering various islands. This was reinforced with the classification of the original SPA in the early 2000s. In reality, the Isles of Scilly have supported significant numbers of many seabird species for as long as records exist.

### A possible marine extension

The proposed new site is an expansion of the existing Isles of Scilly SPA. The features of the existing SPA (European storm petrel *Hydrobates*

*pelagicus*, Lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus graellsii*, seabird assemblage) are retained, and new qualifying features are added based on a review of current breeding bird abundance on the islands.

The proposed marine extension to the boundary of the Isles of Scilly SPA is based on the at-sea distribution of European shags. The marine boundary encompasses the key sea areas determined to be used (which may include foraging, resting, preening and other activities), bounded by a buffer around the colonies within which they breed to ensure flight-lines between nest sites and marine areas are contained. These areas add marine habitat which will be used by all features of the SPA, including birds forming part of the seabird assemblage.

A map showing the possible marine extension to Isles of Scilly SPA can be found on page 4.

### 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, Natural England will submit proposals 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.

In spring/ summer 2018, subject to UK Government Ministerial approval, the formal public consultation processes will commence and will last for twelve weeks. This period is an opportunity for stakeholders to formally submit views on the proposals. After formal consultation Natural England will consider the responses and submit final recommendations to Defra. Defra

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will then make a decision regarding the classification of the site.

### How can you get involved?

Natural England will be contacting a range of local stakeholders with an interest in the proposals during the informal dialogue period between 10<sup>th</sup> January and 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018. A formal public consultation is expected to follow in spring / summer 2018, when the full scientific case for the recommendations will be available.

We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the marine extension to the SPA boundary.
- 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 determine if an Impact Assessment is required and inform future management of the site.
- You have any information about your interests or activities in the area that could help us to determine the potential socio-economic and environmental impacts of the classification.

### 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](#)

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### 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:

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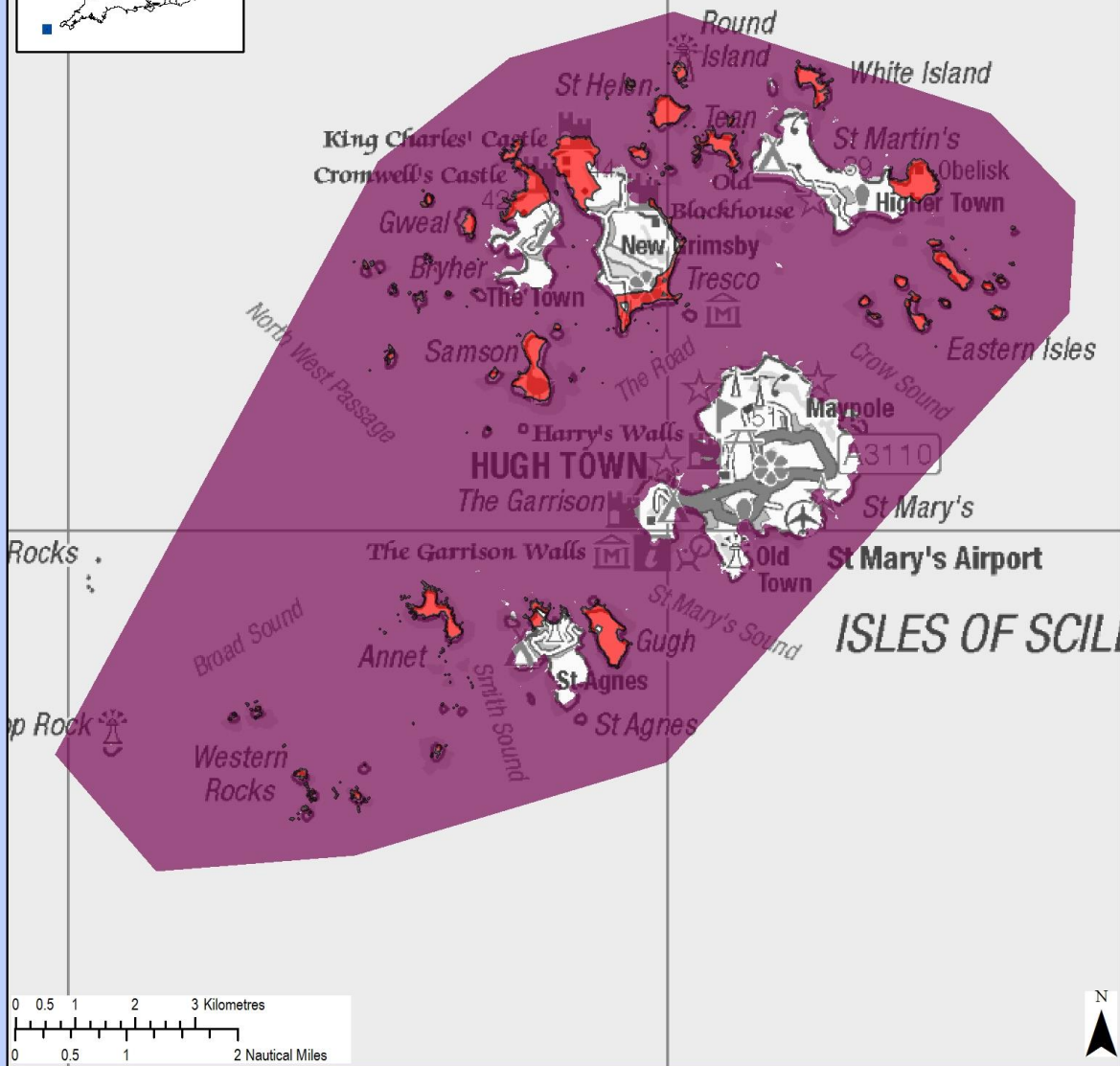
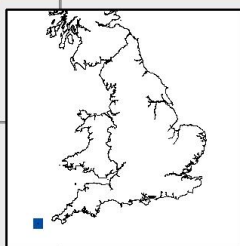
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## Draft Isles of Scilly Special Protection Area Extension



**Legend**

- Isles of Scilly SPA
- Draft Isles of Scilly SPA Extension

Map produced on 05/01/2018 by M292034, Natural England.

Map Reference: DB\_Maps\_A4\_Portrait\_Nov2017

Scale (at A4): 1:95,000



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