

A possible new marine Special Protection Area for birds in Northumberland

This Technical Information Note (TIN) has been prepared to help inform you about the development of recommendations for a new Special Protection Area (SPA) off the Northumberland coast and to add features to the Northumbria Coast, Coquet Island, and the Farne Islands SPAs. Other notes about the process for classifying marine SPAs and about the species to be protected within them are available. For details, see *Further Information below*.

Background

Lindisfarne, Northumbria Coast, Coquet Island, and the Farne Islands SPAs were classified under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (the Birds Directive). The UK Government has ongoing obligations under the Birds Directive, Natural England applies the selection criteria and advises Government on the sites that should be considered for designation and as part of this Natural England has:

- Reviewed information from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) based on survey work carried out in the waters around a number of seabird colonies.
- Reviewed current data of populations of auks (such as common guillemot and Atlantic puffin) and terns within existing SPAs in Northumberland.

As part of wider work to identify potential marine Special Protection Areas in UK waters, we are now compiling proposals for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider. These proposals are to:

- create a new Northumberland Marine SPA; and

- protect additional species within our existing SPAs.



Intertidal area at Lindisfarne SPA © Natural England/Cathrine Scott

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
- regularly occurring migratory bird species.

Birds falling into these categories in the Northumberland area include:

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- Annex I tern species that use relatively restricted areas around their breeding colonies for foraging; and
- Regularly occurring migratory auk species which, although they forage over much wider areas than terns, rely on restricted areas of water around their nesting islands for maintenance behaviours such as loafing (sleeping, resting or preening).

SPAs on land in the UK are now well established, but to provide seabirds, such as terns, with the protection they need, further work is required to establish SPAs at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying SPAs in the marine environment by November 2015.



Arctic tern, *Sterna paradisaea*, foraging near the Farne Islands SPA © Natural England/Tim Dixon

Northumberland: a unique place for seabirds

The Northumberland coast boasts four seabird colonies with significant populations of breeding seabirds: the Farne Islands, Coquet Island, Lindisfarne and the Long Nanny.

These nesting sites are already protected as SPAs in recognition of their European and international importance for breeding terns: Northumberland hosts Sandwich, common, Arctic, roseate and little terns.

Coquet Island is the only regular breeding site for roseate terns in England. In addition, the Farne Islands support large numbers of breeding Atlantic puffin and common guillemot, and this is also true for Atlantic puffin at Coquet Island. Both Coquet Island and the Farne Islands are also areas where internationally important

seabird assemblages of over 20,000 individuals can be found.

Review of current populations and designations in Northumberland

Natural England has a responsibility to make recommendations to Government regarding SPA site selection. As part of this process we have reviewed up to date seabird data for the Northumberland colonies and applied the SPA selection criteria to this. We will be recommending that the following features are added to the existing SPAs as follows:

- Coquet Island SPA - Atlantic puffin and internationally important seabird assemblages of over 20,000 individuals.
- The Farne Islands SPA - Atlantic puffin, common guillemot and internationally important seabird assemblages of over 20,000 individuals.
- Northumbria Coast SPA - Arctic tern (Long Nanny).

A marine SPA

The waters adjacent to seabird colonies are used by seabirds for a wide range of activities. Some species regularly make use of waters close to their breeding colonies for “maintenance” activities which include behaviours such as bathing or preening. All seabird species go out from and return to a central place (their nest) on every foraging trip. This constraint means that certain species have a limited foraging range. Therefore, the waters around the existing SPAs where birds breed need to be considered for protection.

In order to provide a good evidence base upon which to identify the sea areas that might be best afforded protection for the four larger species of tern, the JNCC conducted data recording of the distribution of terns’ foraging by tracking larger terns from colonies at the Farne Islands SPA (Sandwich tern and Arctic tern) and at the Coquet Island SPA (Sandwich, Arctic, common and roseate terns). Additional work combining shore based and at-sea surveys of

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the foraging distribution of little terns was also conducted at the Northumbria Coast SPA colony at Long Nanny.

On the basis of this survey work, and the development of statistical models of the tracking data that describe the environmental characteristics of the places where larger tern foraging was most concentrated, the JNCC provided suggestions as to the locations of the sea areas around colonies which might be most suitable for inclusion within SPA boundaries.

This work in Northumberland, and work the JNCC conducted around seabird colonies in 2001 regarding maintenance behaviours, resulted in the identification of possible marine SPA boundaries for:

- the main foraging areas of roseate, common, Arctic, Sandwich and little tern; and
- the areas used for maintenance activities by auks around Coquet Island and the Farne Islands.

Natural England is considering recommending a new marine SPA which we suggest is named the "Northumberland Marine SPA". It is proposed that this new marine SPA will cover an area from Scremerston, near Berwick-Upon-Tweed, in the north, to Blyth in the south (please see draft boundary on page 4). It will have its landward boundary at Mean High Water except around the existing island SPAs of the Farne Islands and Coquet Island, where the landward boundary will be defined by the Mean Low Water mark so as to abut the existing boundaries of those 2 SPAs where terns are already features. The seaward extent of the new boundary is a composite of various foraging ranges of tern species away from existing colonies and this area will extend to a maximum of 18km out to sea (please see mapped boundary).

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. Running concurrently with this process will be the work to add new features to existing SPAs in Northumberland.

Towards the end of 2015, we hope to obtain Ministerial approval to start the formal public consultation process which will last twelve weeks. This period is the 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 Government's intention to make a decision regarding the site's classification by December 2016.

How can you get involved?

We are contacting stakeholders with an interest in the proposals from 31st July 2014 over an initial twelve week period. We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the adding of species to the existing SPAs or the new Northumberland Marine SPA.
- 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 socio-economic 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:

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- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN123: *Common guillemot: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN125: *Atlantic puffin: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN135: *Sandwich tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN136: *Roseate tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN137: *Arctic tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN138: *Common tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN139: *Little tern: species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

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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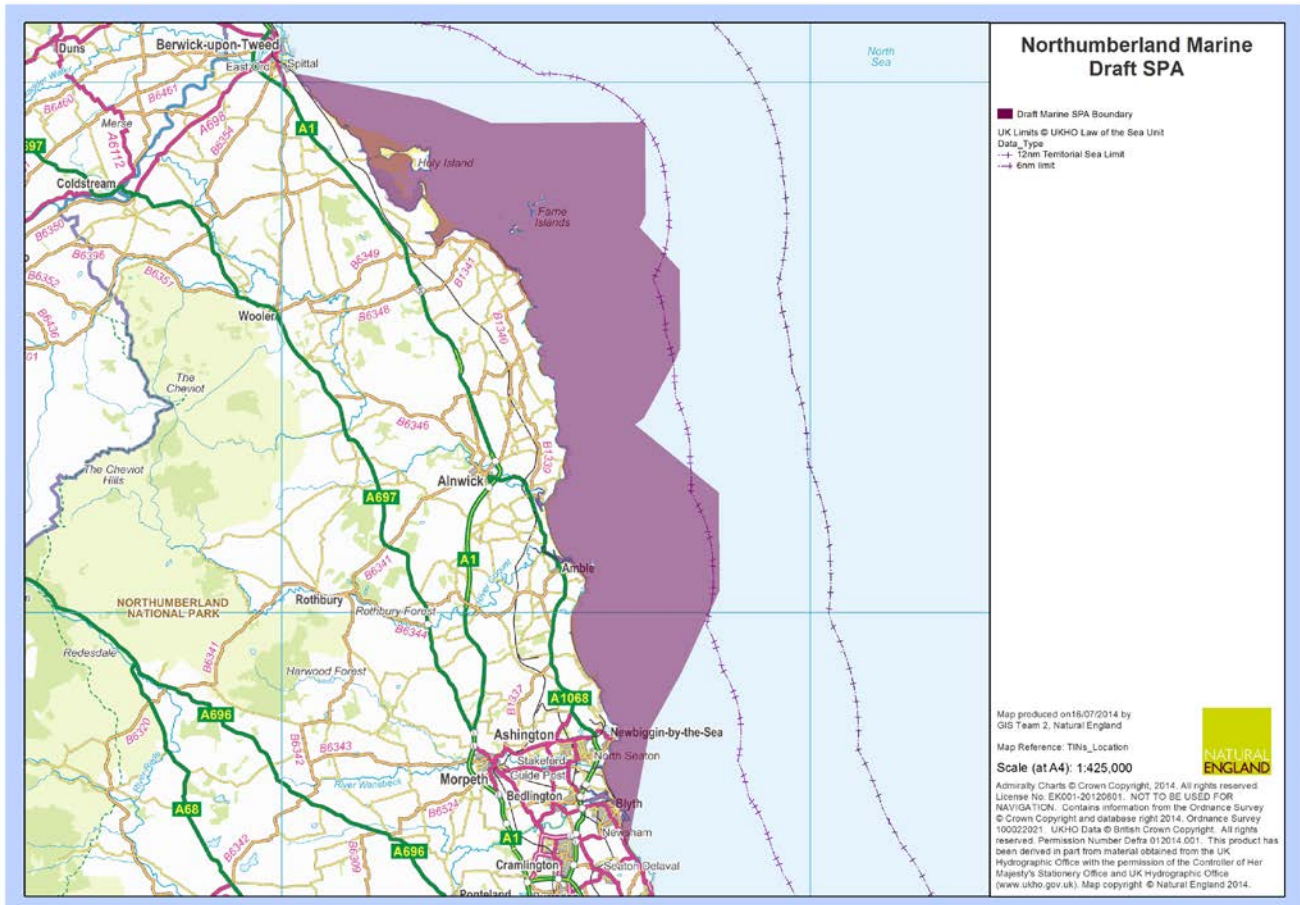
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Possible Northumberland Marine SPA boundary