

Proposals for a Special Protection Area between Falmouth Bay and St Austell Bay

This note has been prepared to help inform stakeholders about proposals to designate a Special Protection Area (SPA) between Falmouth Bay and St Austell Bay along the south coast of Cornwall. Other notes about the process for designating SPAs and about the birds to be protected are available. For details see *Further information* below.

Background

The area of sea between Falmouth Bay and St Austell Bay is being proposed as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the European Commission Conservation of Wild Birds Directive ('the Birds Directive').

Natural England has reviewed advice from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee based on survey work carried out around the UK coast. This has included an assessment of new and existing seabird data in the Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay area, which has shown that this location supports important populations of rare wintering birds.

We have compiled recommendations for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to consider an SPA to protect these internationally important birds.

The pSPA includes an area from Nare Point in the west to Southground Point in the east, and including parts of Carrick Roads and the Helford Estuary. The area under consideration extends out from the mean high water mark out to the 49 m depth contour, including the intertidal zone. A

map of the area proposed for designation can be seen on page 3.



Rosemullion Head from the South West Coast Path © Colin Milner

Special Protection Areas

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

- rare or vulnerable bird species from the list in Annex I of the Birds Directive; and

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- other regularly occurring migrant birds.

The network of SPAs on land in the UK is now well established, but to provide waterbirds and seabirds with the protection they need, further work is required to complete a network at sea. The UK Government is committed to identifying a network of SPAs in the marine environment by 2015.

The Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay area: a special place for seabirds

The south Cornwall coast supports important populations of rare wintering birds, which arrive in October, and spend the winter months feeding on crustaceans and small fish, before they return to their breeding grounds in March. Migrations can take place as early as August and as late as May for some of the bird species.

Surveys have identified that the area currently supports nationally important numbers of Annex I species great northern diver, black-throated diver and Slavonian grebe. The area is the most important site in the UK for wintering black-throated divers and the most important site in England for Great northern divers with Slavonian grebe present in numbers triggering SPA qualification.

What happens next?

Natural England is responsible for recommending potential SPAs in English waters (out to 12 nautical miles) to Defra for classification.

Informal consultation was held with stakeholders in 2012/2013 and site recommendations submitted for Ministerial approval in January 2014. Ministerial approval was granted to start the formal public consultation in January 2014, which will last twelve weeks. All interested stakeholders and organisations have the opportunity to input during the public consultation.

After the consultation we will consider the responses and submit our final recommendations to Defra.

How can you get involved?

We are contacting key stakeholders with an interest in the pSPA in January 2014. We welcome your comments on the site recommendations and the associated Impact Assessment. We recommend that you visit <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/conservation/designations/spa/falmouth-staustell-consultation.aspx> and first read the Consultation document which provides guidance to stakeholders for the formal consultation, followed by the Departmental Brief setting out the scientific case for the pSPA and then the consultation Impact Assessment.

We would like to hear from you if:

- You wish to discuss further the scientific proposals for the pSPA.
- You hold any additional bird data that you would like to submit to us to inform the recommendations.
- You have any information about your interests or activities in the area that could further inform the Impact Assessment.

Further information

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk. In particular see:

- TIN120: *Establishing marine Special Protection Areas*
- TIN130: *Great northern diver species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN131: *Black-throated diver species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*
- TIN164: *Slavonian grebe species information for marine Special Protection Area consultations*

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

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ISBN 978-1-78354-080-8

Appendix 1 Map showing the location of the Falmouth Bay to St Austell Bay potential Special Protection Area (pSPA)

