



# Recreation and disturbance

## Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites Theme Workshop Note

### Introduction

Recreation and disturbance is one of the top ten pressures and threats affecting Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) interest features in England (2013 Article 17 data for England), and is particularly relevant to marine and coastal sites and birds. Hence it has been identified as a priority for the IPENS project to address.

A technical workshop was held on 27 August 2013, attended by five experts from Natural England and four representatives of other relevant organisations.

The workshop focused on prioritisation of the recreational activities that are issues for Natura 2000 sites, looked at cumulative impacts on sites, and explored new mechanisms to deal with this problem. The information gathered by the workshop will be used to shape the content of the IPENS Theme Plan.

The Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) has hosted a series of workshops with key stakeholders in order to gather views and ideas on how to resolve some of the issues affecting Natura 2000 sites. The views in this note are those of the workshop participants and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England or the Environment Agency.



## Key messages from the workshop

- The impact of housing development is a key issue, particularly because it is very difficult to assess. There is inconsistency in how the evidence base is used, and lack of clarity as to what extent remaining uncertainties can be addressed, given that modelling and research is costly.
- Both existing and future recreational pressure needs to be addressed, with many sites lacking a strategy for this, and disturbance failing to be accounted for in site assessment.
- Pro-active management for recreational pressure, eg through recreational management plans linked to socio-economic goals, could be a way forward. Strategic approaches include: understanding the extent to which the visitors' "catchment" is local, regional or national; understanding visitor motivation; and improving facilities where this has no negative impact, but discouraging it in sensitive locations.
- It is recommended that the sites where the existing or potential impact of recreation is greatest are the focus of work, and these should be addressed by 2020. Priority sites can be identified based on:
  - an overlay of activity intensities with the sensitivity of habitats and species to these activities (eg number of disturbance events)
  - local and national feature condition
  - relative contribution a site makes to Favourable Conservation Status for the sensitive features at the national level .
- There are significant evidence gaps in our understanding of disturbance distances and how disturbance events translate into population level effects.
- A better understanding is needed as to whether the current preference for soft, voluntary measures (eg communication, codes of conduct, signage) is successful in terms of achieving improved feature condition.

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## Envisaged next steps

- The content of the Marine and Coastal Recreation Theme Plan will be developed in conjunction with workshop attendees and invitees during 2014.
- Consideration should be given as to how the Theme Plan can be structured in order to provide a strategic overview of this topic, a mechanism for sharing best practices, and national guidance to ensure a consistent approach is taken in all sites where this is an issue.

# Workshop participants

The following organisations and Natural England staff participated in the workshop:

Senior Adviser, IPENS	Natural England
Specialist, Marine Operations	Natural England
Principal Adviser, Land Use	Natural England
Senior Specialist, Marine	Natural England
Senior Adviser, Landscape and Biodiversity	Natural England
European Marine Site Officer	Humber Estuary
	Welsh Natura 2000 Life + Project
	Marine Management Organisation

Image: Poole Harbour Special Protection Area (SPA)  
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