

## DUNGENESS SAC

This document summarises the key issues and findings of the Habitats Directive Review of Consents for the Dungeness Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

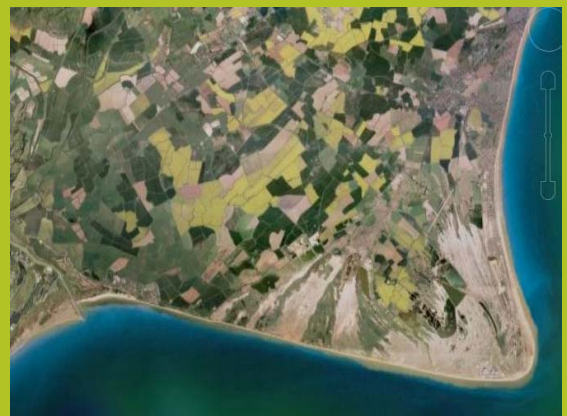
### About this site

Dungeness SAC is a low-lying coastal area covering approximately 32 square kilometres, located on the south east coastline between Rye and New Romney in Kent.

It is one of the largest expanses of shingle in the world and it is this feature that makes it such a unique landscape. The site encompasses both wetland and shingle habitats and a variety of diverse ecosystems are found throughout the site.

These include saltmarsh, saline lagoons, sand dunes, ditch systems, and vegetated shingle as well as the extensive shingle deposits and those unique habitats associated with the latter. These features host a wide variety of fauna, some of which are nationally rare. The area also supports large numbers of breeding and over-wintering birds.

Satellite view of Dungeness



The shingle beach of Dungeness, commonly known as the Denge gravels, has been formed from storm beach deposits that are currently understood to have accumulated within the last 2000 years. The beach is replenished by long shore drift actions that occur in a west to east direction along the coast, maintaining the largest shingle system in the UK.

The site is designated as a Special Area of Conservation for its annual vegetation of drift lines, and the perennial vegetation of stony banks. The latter forms the largest feature and has the most diverse and extensive examples of stable vegetated shingle in Europe, particularly for Broom and Blackthorn. A particular feature of the site is the smaller depressions within the shingle structure, which support fen and open water communities. The SAC also supports the Great Crested Newt.

### Review of consents

The designated features and particularly sub-features of the SAC are reliant to some extent on the hydro-geological conditions that prevail across the site. The shingle ridges are drained by ditches, which are interconnected to main channels that discharge to the estuary. This system, influenced by the weather, dictates the water levels within and across the site and will influence the water levels within the gravel depressions that support fen and open water communities. Within the review of consents, transition mires and quaking bog communities were used to represent the water level requirements of the SAC sub-features (the Open pits). These swamp communities can be sensitive to significant or dramatic changes in their hydrological regime, such as lowering of the groundwater table.

## The lagoons and Burrow Pits in Dungeness SAC



Source: [www.rspb.org.uk/.../sites/england/lydd.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/.../sites/england/lydd.asp)

For these reasons, licenced abstractions within the SAC catchment were thought to pose a risk to the integrity of the site, as they could potentially act in combination with each other to impact upon the natural hydrological regime of the Denge gravels.

The environmental outcomes for the site require groundwater levels to remain within a certain range to maintain the swamp communities.

One abstraction licence, which permits the abstraction of groundwater from a number of boreholes within the gravels, could not be shown to have no adverse effect on the SAC because of it's potential to significantly lower groundwater levels within the designated area. Some of the boreholes abstracting closest to the Open pits pose a significant risk to these features.

The abstraction licence is held by Folkestone and Dover Water Supply Company (FDWS) and is used for public water supply. To remove the risk of adverse effect on site integrity, it is necessary to modify the licence, by imposing conditions that will require the water company to cease abstraction from those boreholes closest to the pits, when groundwater levels reach the lower end of the range prescribed for the wetland communities.

FDWS will have to undertake further work to identify an alternative source of supply and modify their abstraction regime, to comply with the proposed new conditions of their abstraction licence. This work will take place over the next few years.

## Conclusions

- We assessed 196 permissions in Stage three of the review of Consents.
- We will affirm 195 permissions that can be shown to have no adverse effect on site integrity.
- We propose to modify one abstraction licence, which is held by Folkestone and Dover Water Supply Company for public water supply.
- The licence is to be modified to ensure that abstraction ceases when groundwater levels reach a minimum predetermined level required by the wetland communities.
- We will work with the water company over the next few years to ensure that the restrictions placed on them by this modification can be implemented without compromising their water supply requirements.

For more details about this process, contact Jo Simmons  
[jo.simmons@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:jo.simmons@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Further information can be found at:

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) under Habitats Directive  
or visit [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) for contacts within Natural England

For guidance e-mail: [enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)

customer service line

08708 506 506

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

incident hotline

0800 80 70 60

floodline

0845 988 1188