

SOLENT AND SOUTHAMPTON WATER SPA

This document summarises the key issues and findings of the Habitats Directive Review of Consents for the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA)

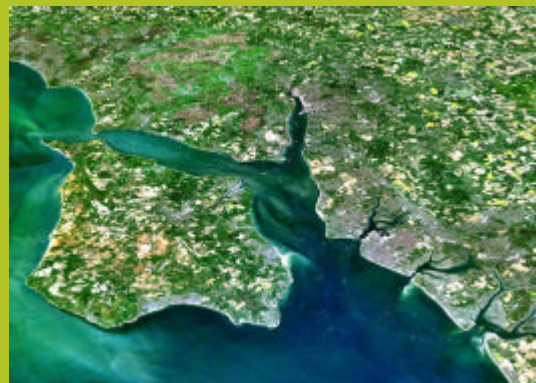
About this site

The Solent and Southampton Water SPA is located on the south coast of England. The area covered extends from Hurst Spit to Hill Head along the south coast of Hampshire, and along the north coast of the Isle of Wight from Yarmouth to Whitecliff Bay.

The site consists of a series of estuaries and harbours with extensive mud-flats and saltmarshes, together with adjacent coastal habitats. These include saline lagoons, shingle beaches, reedbeds and grazing marsh.

The mud-flats support beds of eelgrasses and have a rich invertebrate community that provide food for estuarine birds.

Aerial view of the Solent coastline



In summer, the site is important for breeding seabirds, including gulls and four species of terns. In winter, the SPA supports a large and diverse variety of waterbirds, including geese, ducks and waders. Dark-bellied Brent Geese also feed in surrounding areas of agricultural land outside the SPA.

There are two pairs of Mediterranean Gulls (representing at least 20 per cent of the British breeding population) and the area regularly supports at least 20,000 waterfowl. Over winter, around 54,000 individual waterfowl flock to the site.

Review of Consents

Solent Maritime SAC suffers from **nutrient enrichment**, which causes excessive growth of green weed across the site. This green weed can form dense mats within the intertidal areas throughout sheltered areas of the site, inhibiting the natural functioning of these habitats. Sources of nutrients to the site include:

- coastal background seawater in the English Channel
- consented point source discharges (e.g. sewage treatment works)
- natural and diffuse sources in rivers and streams
- landfill leachate from historic unlicensed and current licensed waste sites

Mediterranean Gull

There are two pairs representing 20% of the British breeding population on this site.



There is evidence of **toxic contamination** within certain areas of the site. For example, tri-butyl tin (TBT) concentrations exceed the Environment Quality Standard (EQS) for this substance at the head of Southampton Water and in the middle of the Solent. Levels are likely to be of concern throughout the site and are from historic use as an anti-fouling paint on boats.

The Review of Consents investigation has identified an area of **thermal pollution** occurring over the shallow intertidal zone on the western shore of Southampton Water. Thermal plumes may affect the distribution of fish.

There are areas of **organic enrichment** on the western shore of Southampton Water. This can make sediments anaerobic (low or lacking in oxygen) which can effect the distribution or composition of designated habitats.

Reductions in freshwater flows into the SPA may pose a risk to site's integrity. Recent research indicates that freshwater creeks flowing over intertidal areas are an important resource to many bird species. Birds use such freshwater zones at times of low tide for feeding, drinking, bathing and shelter. Licensed abstractions can have an adverse effect by reducing the amount of freshwater available.

Conclusions

- Stage Three considered 743 permissions, assessing whether or not they were having an adverse effect on the SPA. The impacts assessed included nutrient enrichment, toxic contamination, thermal pollution, organic enrichment, and reductions to freshwater flows.
- Stage Four demonstrates the need to modify 10 discharge consents, 14 abstraction licences and one waste management licence, to remove their proportional contribution to impacts upon the site.
- We do not propose to revoke any permissions as a result of this review for the Solent and Southampton Water SPA.
- We recommend a number of other actions that are necessary in order to restore the SPA to favourable condition. These include tackling diffuse sources of nutrients within the catchment, in particular run-off from agricultural land that drains into the Solent and Southampton Water via rivers and streams.

For more details about this process, contact Jo Simmons

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Further information can be found at:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk under Southern>Habitats Directive
or visit www.naturalengland.org.uk for contacts within Natural England

For guidance e-mail: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

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