

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 (1990), as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the 8th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2002) and Resolutions IX.1 Annex B, IX.6, IX.21 and IX. 22 of the 9th Conference of the Contracting Parties (2005).

Notes for compilers:

1. The RIS should be completed in accordance with the attached *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines for completing the Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands*. Compilers are strongly advised to read this guidance before filling in the RIS.
2. Further information and guidance in support of Ramsar site designations are provided in the *Strategic Framework for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Ramsar Wise Use Handbook 7, 2nd edition, as amended by COP9 Resolution IX.1 Annex B). A 3rd edition of the Handbook, incorporating these amendments, is in preparation and will be available in 2006.
3. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers should provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of all maps.

1. Name and address of the compiler of this form:

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:

Designated: 06 April 2005

3. Country:

UK (Northern Ireland)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Outer Ards

5. Designation of new Ramsar site or update of existing site:

This RIS is for: Designation of a new Ramsar site

6. For RIS updates only, changes to the site since its designation or earlier update:

a) Site boundary and area:

** Important note: If the boundary and/or area of the designated site is being restricted/reduced, the Contracting Party should have followed the procedures established by the Conference of the Parties in the Annex to COP9 Resolution IX.6 and provided a report in line with paragraph 28 of that Annex, prior to the submission of an updated RIS.

b) Describe briefly any major changes to the ecological character of the Ramsar site, including in the application of the Criteria, since the previous RIS for the site:

7. Map of site included:

Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps, including digital maps.

a) A map of the site, with clearly delineated boundaries, is included as:

- i) **hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;
- ii) **an electronic format** (e.g. a JPEG or ArcView image) *Yes*
- iii) a **GIS file providing geo-referenced site boundary vectors and attribute tables** *yes* ✓ -or- *no* ☐;

b) **Describe briefly the type of boundary delineation applied:**

e.g. the boundary is the same as an existing protected area (nature reserve, national park etc.), or follows a catchment boundary, or follows a geopolitical boundary such as a local government jurisdiction, follows physical boundaries such as roads, follows the shoreline of a waterbody, etc.

The site boundary is the same as, or falls within, an existing protected area.

For precise boundary details, please refer to paper map provided at designation

8. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):

054 32 47 N 005 29 02 W

9. General location:

Include in which part of the country and which large administrative region(s), and the location of the nearest large town.

The Outer Ards site is situated along part of the eastern shores of County Down, Northern Ireland and extends from Grey Point on the north Down coast to Ballyquintin Point in the south.

The largest nearby settlement is Bangor, population approx. 56,000 which is situated on the north coast of Co. Down, and is adjacent to the Ramsar site at this location. The site crosses the local council areas of North Down, and Ards.

Administrative region: Ards; Down; North Down

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **11. Area** (hectares): 1154.16

Min.	0
Max.	20
Mean	10

12. General overview of the site:

Provide a short paragraph giving a summary description of the principal ecological characteristics and importance of the wetland.

The Outer Ards site mainly encompasses intertidal areas, but with some additional adjoining areas of notable habitat. It includes sand- and mud-dominated shores, cobble and boulder beaches together with rocky shores. Offshore islands are also present. Adjoining habitat includes areas of dune and maritime grassland, maritime heath and cliff ledge vegetation, saltmarsh, tidal and non-tidal fens and wet flushes. Some areas still display the natural transition from maritime to terrestrial vegetation where a number of notable communities occur. At least 17 rare or local plant species have been recorded across the range of habitats within the area.

The Outer Ards is especially important for the breeding colony of Arctic tern *Sterna paradisaea*, together with the wintering populations of light-bellied brent goose *Branta bernicla hrota*, European golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, ruddy turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. Nationally important populations of 11 other species of bird have also been recorded within the Outer Ards site.

13. Ramsar Criteria:

Circle or underline each Criterion applied to the designation of the Ramsar site. See Annex II of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines* for the Criteria and guidelines for their application (adopted by Resolution VII.11).

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14. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 13 above:

Provide justification for each Criterion in turn, clearly identifying to which Criterion the justification applies (see Annex II for guidance on acceptable forms of justification).

Ramsar criterion 6 – species/populations occurring at levels of international importance.

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species with peak counts in winter:

- Light-bellied brent goose, *Branta bernicla hrota*, 209 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the population (5-year peak mean 1991/92 – 1995/96)
East Canada/Ireland
- Ringed plover, *Charadrius hiaticula*, 516 individuals, representing an average of 1.2% of the population (5-year peak mean 1991/92 – 1995/96)
Europe/Northwest Africa
- European golden plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*, 2109 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the all-Ireland population (5-year peak mean 1991/92 – 1995/96)
apricaria, P. a. altifrons Iceland & Faroes/E Atlantic
- Ruddy turnstone, *Arenaria interpres interpres*, 1210 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the population (5-year peak mean 1991/92 – 1995/96)
NE Canada, Greenland/W Europe & NW Africa

Contemporary data and information on waterbird trends at this site and their regional (sub-national) and national contexts can be found in the Wetland Bird Survey report, which is updated annually. See www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm.

15. Biogeography (required when Criteria 1 and/or 3 and /or certain applications of Criterion 2 are applied to the designation):

Name the relevant biogeographic region that includes the Ramsar site, and identify the biogeographic regionalisation system that has been applied.

a) biogeographic region:

Atlantic

b) biogeographic regionalisation scheme (include reference citation):

Council Directive 92/43/EEC

16. Physical features of the site:

Describe, as appropriate, the geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth, water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; downstream area; general climate, etc.

Soil & geology	acidic, basic, neutral, shingle, sand, mud, clay, nutrient-poor, sedimentary, sandstone, igneous, slate/shale, gravel, pebble, cobble, boulder
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Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, coastal, subtidal rock (including rocky reefs), shingle bar, subtidal sediments (including sandbank/mudbank), intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), open coast (including bay), islands, cliffs, intertidal rock
Nutrient status	mesotrophic
pH	acidic, circumneutral
Salinity	brackish / mixosaline, saline / euhaline
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Aldergrove, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/aldergrove.html) Max. daily temperature: 12.5° C Min. daily temperature: 5.8° C Days of air frost: 39.1 Rainfall: 862.4 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1313.7

General description of the Physical Features:

The Outer Ards Peninsula is the most sheltered stretch of open rocky coast in Northern Ireland. The width of this rocky intertidal zone is determined by the orientation of outcrop but generally comprises low platforms, up to 200 m across, separated by wide areas of mobile sediments. Other habitats represented include intertidal areas of boulder, cobble, gravel, sand- and mud-flats, together with dune and maritime grassland, maritime heath and cliff-ledge vegetation, as well as saltmarsh, tidal and non-tidal fens and wet flushes. The site contains about 8% of the Northern Irish coastline and has a very high proportion of offshore reefs and islands.

17. Physical features of the catchment area:

Describe the surface area, general geology and geomorphological features, general soil types, general land use, and climate (including climate type).

Surface area Catchment not delineated
 General geology Sedimentary rocks of Silurian age – shales, sandstones
 General geomorphology Glacial drift with extensive drumlin fields
 General soil types Dominated by mineral gleys and brown earths
 General land use Dominated by pasture for livestock and silage production

18. Hydrological values:

Describe the functions and values of the wetland in groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilization, etc.

Shoreline stabilisation and dissipation of erosive forces

19. Wetland types:

Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
D	Rocky shores	34
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	31
A	Shallow marine waters	18
Other	Coastal mosaic	16
H	Salt marshes	1

20. General ecological features:

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site, and the ecosystem services of the site and the benefits derived from them.

The maritime vegetation along this exposed coastline has been strongly influenced both by the physiography and by human activity. Most of the terrestrial semi-natural vegetation is now confined to a narrow, fragmented shoreline strip and includes areas of dune and maritime grassland, maritime heath and cliff ledge vegetation. Some areas still display the natural transition from maritime to terrestrial vegetation, most typically in sheltered bays, where saltmarshes give way either through brackish fen to freshwater fen, or through inundation grassland to wet flushes and maritime grassland. Incorporated within these transitions are a number of notable vegetation communities, including those characterised by sea-purslane *Atriplex portulacoides* and by saltmarsh flat-sedge *Blysmus rufus*. On the rocky shores the sequence is more abrupt, with cliff ledge vegetation giving way to maritime grassland and in a few locations, maritime heath. The maritime cliff community characterised by spring squill *Scilla verna* is particularly notable.

At least seventeen rare or local plant species have been recorded for the area. These include wetland plants from intertidal muds (eelgrass *Zostera marina* and narrow-leaved eelgrass *Z. angustifolia*), saltmarshes (lax-flowered sea-lavender *Limonium humile* and hard-grass *Parapholis strigosa*) and freshwater marshes (blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* and slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis*). Strandline species include grass-leaved orache *Atriplex littoralis*, frosted orache *A. laciniata*, sea radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus* and slender thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus*. Also present are dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* at Cloghy, rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, sea pearlwort *Sagina maritima* and upright clover *Trifolium striatum*. Some of the coastal grasslands, such as Cloghy, are important for grassland fungi, such as white waxcap *Hygrocybe virginea*, Russian-leather waxcap *H. russocoriacea*, cow-horn coral-fungus *Clavulinopsis corniculata*, olive-coloured earth tongue *Microglossum olivaceum* and purple-brown earth tongue *Geoglossum atropurpureum*.

Sedimentary shores in Outer Ards are among the best examples of their types in Northern Ireland, with their characteristic species, such as lugworm *Arenicola marina*, common cockle *Cerastoderma edule*, and sand mason *Lanice conchilega*, depending on exposure and sand texture. Several rocky shores display classic shore zonation with boulders and associated communities. Acorn barnacles *Semibalanus balanoides* and brown seaweeds, such as channelled wrack *Pelvetia canaliculata*, spiral wrack *Fucus spiralis* and oarweed *Laminaria digitata* occur on the rocks and boulders, whilst the rockpools host green algae such as *Enteromorpha* spp. and *Cladophora* spp.

There are significant populations of both grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* and common seal *Phoca vitulina* using the offshore islands and reefs as haul-outs, pupping and mating sites. These islands are very important for the colony of breeding Arctic tern *Sterna paradisaea*. The range of shoreline habitats along the Outer Ards coast supports a wide variety of bird species of both international and national importance, such as light bellied brent goose *Branta bernicla hrota*, ruddy turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, European golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, great cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, common eider *Somateria mollissima*, Eurasian curlew *Numenius arquata*, dunlin *Calidris alpina*, northern lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Eurasian oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, purple sandpiper *Calidris maritima* and common redshank *Tringa totanus*.

Ecosystem services

21. Noteworthy flora:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

HIGHER PLANTS

Eelgrass *Zostera marina* Nationally rare
 Narrow-leaved eelgrass *Zostera angustifolia* Nationally rare
 Lax-flowered sea-lavender *Limonium humile* Nationally rare
 Hardgrass *Parapholis strigosa* Nationally rare
 Blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus* Nationally rare
 Slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* Nationally rare
 Grass-leaved orache *Atriplex littoralis* Nationally rare
 Frosted orache *Atriplex laciniata* Nationally rare
 Sea radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* ssp. *maritimus* Nationally rare
 Slender thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus* Nationally rare
 Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* Nationally rare
 Rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum* Nationally rare
 Sea pearlwort *Sagina maritima* Nationally rare
 Upright clover *Trifolium striatum* Nationally rare

LOWER PLANTS

Olive-coloured earth tongue *Microglossum olivaceum* Nationally rare

22. Noteworthy fauna:

Provide additional information on particular species and why they are noteworthy (expanding as necessary on information provided in 12. Justification for the application of the Criteria) indicating, e.g. which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc., including count data. *Do not include here taxonomic lists of species present – these may be supplied as supplementary information to the RIS.*

Birds**Species Information**

None reported

23. Social and cultural values:

Describe if the site has any general social and/or cultural values e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological sites, social relations with the wetland, etc. Distinguish between historical/archaeological/religious significance and current socio-economic values.

Archaeological/historical site
 Environmental education/ interpretation
 Livestock grazing
 Non-consumptive recreation
 Religious
 Scientific research
 Sport fishing
 Tourism
 Traditional cultural
 Transportation/navigation

b) Is the site considered of international importance for holding, in addition to relevant ecological values, examples of significant cultural values, whether material or non-material, linked to its origin, conservation and/or ecological functioning? No

If Yes, describe this importance under one or more of the following categories:

- i) sites which provide a model of wetland wise use, demonstrating the application of traditional knowledge and methods of management and use that maintain the ecological character of the wetland:
- ii) sites which have exceptional cultural traditions or records of former civilizations that have influenced the ecological character of the wetland:
- iii) sites where the ecological character of the wetland depends on the interaction with local communities or indigenous peoples:
- iv) sites where relevant non-material values such as sacred sites are present and their existence is strongly linked with the maintenance of the ecological character of the wetland:

24. Land tenure/ownership:

Ownership category	On-site	Off-site
Non-governmental organisation (NGO)	+	+
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	+
National/Crown Estate	+	+
Private	+	+
Public/communal	+	+

25. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Tourism	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Current scientific research	+	
Fishing: commercial		+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	+
Gathering of shellfish	+	
Bait collection	+	
Shifting arable agriculture		+
Grazing (unspecified)	+	+
Rough or shifting grazing		+
Permanent pastoral agriculture		+
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+
Harbour/port	+	+
Transport route		+
Urban development		+
Non-urbanised settlements		+

26. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site’s ecological character, including changes in land (including water) use and development projects:

Explanation of reporting category:

1. *Those factors that are still operating, but it is unclear if they are under control, as there is a lag in showing the management or regulatory regime to be successful.*
2. *Those factors that are not currently being managed, or where the regulatory regime appears to have been ineffective so far.*

NA = Not Applicable because no factors have been reported.

Adverse Factor Category	Reporting Category	Description of the problem (Newly reported Factors only)	On-Site	Off-Site	Major Impact?

For category 2 factors only.
What measures have been taken / are planned / regulatory processes invoked, to mitigate the effect of these factors?

Is the site subject to adverse ecological change? NO

27. Conservation measures taken:

List national category and legal status of protected areas, including boundary relationships with the Ramsar site; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it is being implemented.

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
Site/ Area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI/ASSI)	+	+
National Nature Reserve (NNR)		+
Land owned by a non-governmental organisation for nature conservation	+	+
Management agreement	+	+
Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB)	+	+
IUCN (1994) category IV	+	

b) Describe any other current management practices:

The management of Ramsar sites in the UK is determined by either a formal management plan or through other management planning processes, and is overseen by the relevant statutory conservation agency. Details of the precise management practises are given in these documents.

28. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

e.g. management plan in preparation; official proposal as a legally protected area, etc.

No information available

29. Current scientific research and facilities:

e.g. details of current research projects, including biodiversity monitoring; existence of a field research station, etc.

EHS staff monitor the site on a regular basis and conduct bird counts through the winter and spring seasons.

30. Current communications, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities related to or benefiting the site:

e.g. visitor centre, observation hides and nature trails, information booklets, facilities for school visits, etc.

None reported

31. Current recreation and tourism:

State if the wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type(s) and their frequency/intensity.

Most of the sandy bays attract tourists (sometimes in large numbers) for day trips and seaside holidays during spring and summer – numbers across entire site are likely to exceed 500,000, based on day trips per year. Main activities are based around recreation on beaches within the site. In some places these activities are organised and advertised. At the northern end of the site, a coastal path has been developed to manage numbers and access. Tourist visits peak during summer months, but the site is used year-round for recreation.

32. Jurisdiction:

Include territorial, e.g. state/region, and functional/sectoral, e.g. Dept. of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment, etc.

Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), Environment and Heritage Service,
Commonwealth House, Castle Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 1GU

33. Management authority:

Provide the name and address of the local office(s) of the agency(ies) or organisation(s) directly responsible for managing the wetland. Wherever possible provide also the title and/or name of the person or persons in this office with responsibility for the wetland.

Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), Environment and Heritage Service,
Commonwealth House, Castle Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT1 1GU

34. Bibliographical references:

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 15 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

Site-relevant references

ASSI Survey – Habitat Survey Team, Environment and Heritage Service

Barne, JH, Robson, CF, Kaznowska, SS, Doody, JP, Davidson, NC & Buck, AL (eds.) (1997) *Coasts and seas of the United Kingdom. Region 17. Northern Ireland*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough. (Coastal Directories Series.)

Cooper, EA, Crawford, I, Malloch, AJC & Rodwell, JS (1992) *Coastal vegetation survey of Northern Ireland*. (Contractor: University of Lancaster, Unit of Vegetation Science). Unpublished report to Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), Belfast

Crowe, O (2005) *Ireland's wetlands and their waterbirds: status and distribution*. BirdWatch Ireland, Newcastle, Co. Wicklow

Curtis, TGF & McGough, HN (1988) *The Irish Red Data Book. 1 Vascular plants*. Stationery Office, Dublin

Musgrove, AJ, Pollitt, MS, Hall, C, Hearn, RD, Holloway, SJ, Marshall, PE, Robinson, JA & Cranswick, PA (2001) *The Wetland Bird Survey 1999–2000: wildfowl and wader counts*. British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge.
www.wwt.org.uk/publications/default.asp?PubID=14

Stroud, DA, Chambers, D, Cook, S, Buxton, N, Fraser, B, Clement, P, Lewis, P, McLean, I, Baker, H & Whitehead, S (eds.) (2001) *The UK SPA network: its scope and content*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough (3 vols.)
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Way, LS, Grice, P, MacKay, A, Galbraith, CA, Stroud, DA & Pienkowski, MW (1993) *Ireland's Internationally Important Bird Sites: a review of sites for the EC Special Protection Area network*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough for to Department of the Environment (NI), Belfast, and Irish Wildlife Service, Dublin

Weighell, AJ, Donnelly, AP & Calder, K (eds.) (2000) *Directory of the Celtic coasts and seas*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough

Wilkinson, M, Fuller, IWA, Telfer, TC, Moore, CG & Kingston, PF (1988) *Northern Ireland Littoral Survey: A conservation-orientated survey of the intertidal seashore of Northern Ireland*. Institute of Offshore Engineering, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh

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