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# RAMSAR INFORMATION SHEET

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## FOR WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

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**Site reference number** 7UK  
**1 Compilation date** October 2001  
**2 Country** UK (Scotland)  
**3 Name of wetland** Firth of Forth  
**4 Site centre location:** Latitude: 56 01 00 N Longitude: 02 53 00 W  
**5 Altitude (m)** **Min:** **Max:** **Mean**  
**6 Area (ha)** 6313.72

### 7 Overview

The Firth of Forth is a large coastal area comprising a complex of estuaries, mudflats, rocky shorelines, beaches and saltmarshes. It stretches from Alloa Inches in the River Forth out to Fife Ness and Dunbar in the east. It is considered to act as a single ecological unit. Several large urban areas, including Edinburgh, are adjacent to the site and these include several areas of heavy industry. Furthermore the Forth is one of the most important shipping areas in Scotland. The site is important for a large number of wintering waders and wildfowl, many in nationally and internationally important numbers.

**8 Wetland type** Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
D	Rocky shores	9.5
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	11
G	Tidal flats	74
H	Salt marshes	4.5
J	Coastal brackish / saline lagoons	1

**9 Ramsar Criteria** 5, 6  
**10 Map of the site** √  
**11 Compiler** **Joint Nature Conservation Committee**  
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### 12 Justification of criteria

Ramsar criterion 5

Internationally important waterfowl assemblage (greater than 20,000 birds)

Ramsar criterion 6

Over winter the site regularly supports internationally important populations of: Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, Knot *Calidris canutus*, Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*, Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

### 13 General location

The site is on the east coast of Scotland

**Administrative Region:** Lothian, Fife, Central

## 14 Physical Features

Soil & Geology	mud, sand, shingle
Geomorphology and Landscape	coastal, estuary, intertidal rock, intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), lagoon, open coast (including bay)
Nutrient status	
pH	no information
Salinity	brackish / mixosaline, saline / euhaline
Soil	no information
Water permanence	
Summary of main climatic features	Rainy, temperate climate with a mild winter and periodic frost. Mean minimum temperature approximately 5.9°C. Mean maximum temperature approximately 13.6°C. Mean annual precipitation approximately 732.6mm, with a winter maximum.

## 15 Hydrological values

Shoreline stabilisation and dissipation of erosive forces

## 16 Ecological features

The site is mostly invertebrate rich intertidal mud and sandflats. Fairly extensive areas of saltmarsh exist primarily on the south coast while at Alloa Inches there is a small Phragmites reedbed.

## 17 Noteworthy flora

## 18 Noteworthy fauna

### Birds

#### Species occurring at levels of international importance (as identified at designation):

##### Over winter the area regularly supports:

Bar-tailed Godwit, <i>Limosa lapponica</i> (Western Palearctic (wintering))	1974 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Goldeneye, <i>Bucephala clangula</i> (North-western/Central Europe)	3004 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Knot, <i>Calidris canutus</i> (North-eastern Canada/Greenland/Iceland/North-western Europe)	9258 individuals, representing an average of 3% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Pink-footed Goose, <i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> (Eastern Greenland/Iceland/UK)	10852 individuals, representing an average of 6% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Redshank, <i>Tringa totanus</i> (Eastern Atlantic (wintering))	4341 individuals, representing an average of 3% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Sandwich Tern, <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> (Western Europe/Western Africa)	1617 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Shelduck, <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> (North-western Europe)	4509 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Slavonian Grebe, <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	84 individuals, representing an average of 2% of

(North-western Europe)	the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Turnstone, <i>Arenaria interpres</i> (Western Palearctic (wintering))	860 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the population (1993/94 - 1997/98)

**Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:**

**Over winter the area regularly supports:**

Common Scoter, <i>Melanitta nigra</i> (Western Siberia/Western & Northern Europe/North-western Africa)	2880 individuals, representing an average of 10.5% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> (North-western Europe)	682 individuals, representing an average of 5.2% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Curlew, <i>Numenius arquata</i> (Europe (breeding))	1928 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Dunlin, <i>Calidris alpina alpina</i> (Northern Siberia/Europe/Western Africa)	9514 individuals, representing an average of 1.8% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Eider, <i>Somateria mollissima</i> (Britain/Ireland)	9400 individuals, representing an average of 12.1% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Golden Plover, <i>Pluvialis apricaria</i> (North-western Europe (breeding))	2949 individuals, representing an average of 1.2% of the GB population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Great Crested Grebe, <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> (North-western Europe (wintering))	646 individuals, representing an average of 6.6% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Grey Plover, <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> (Eastern Atlantic (wintering))	724 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Long-tailed duck, <i>Clangula hyemalis</i> (Iceland/Greenland)	1045 individuals, representing an average of 4.4% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Oystercatcher, <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i> (Europe & Northern/Western Africa)	7846 individuals, representing an average of 2.2% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Red-breasted Merganser, <i>Mergus serrator</i> (North-western/Central Europe)	670 individuals, representing an average of 6.7% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Red-throated Diver, <i>Gavia stellata</i> (North-western Europe (wintering))	90 individuals, representing an average of 1.9% of the GB population (1993/94 - 1997/98)
Ringed Plover, <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> (Europe/Northern Africa (wintering))	328 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Scaup, <i>Aythya marila</i> (Northern/Western Europe)	381 individuals, representing an average of 3.5% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)
Velvet Scoter, <i>Melanitta fusca</i>	635 individuals, representing an average of 21.2% of the GB population (1992/93 - 1996/97)

**19 Social and Cultural Values**

Aesthetic  
 Archaeological/historical site  
 Conservation education  
 Current scientific research  
 Non-consumptive recreation  
 Sport fishing  
 Sport hunting  
 Tourism  
 Transportation/navigation

## 20 Land tenure/ownership

Ownership category	On-Site	Off-Site
Non-governmental organisation	+	+
Local authority, municipality etc.	+	+
National/Crown estate	+	+
Private	+	+
Public/communal	+	+

## 21 Current land use

Activity	On-Site	Off-Site	Scale
Nature conservation	+		Large-Scale
Tourism	+	+	Large-Scale
Recreation	+	+	Large-Scale
Research	+		Small-Scale
Commercial forestry		+	Small-Scale
Fishing: recreational/sport	+		Small-Scale
Bait collection	+		Large-Scale
Arable agriculture (unspecified)		+	Large-Scale
Permanent arable agriculture		+	Large-Scale
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	+	Small-Scale
Industry		+	Large-Scale
Sewage treatment/disposal	+	+	Large-Scale
Harbour/port	+	+	Large-Scale
Mining	+		Small-Scale
Transport route	+	+	Large-Scale
Urban development		+	Large-Scale
Non-urbanised settlements		+	Small-Scale
Military activities	+	+	Small-Scale

## 22 Adverse factors affecting the ecological character of the site

Activity	On-Site	Off-Site	Scale
Unspecified development: industry		+	Small-Scale

## 23 Conservation measures taken

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
SSSI	+	
SPA	+	
Land owned by a NGO for nature conservation	+	
Management agreement	+	

## 24 Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented

see below

### **Site vulnerability and management statement**

While the major factor potentially affecting the site is coastal industrial development, such development is subject to detailed planning control, ensuring that the site is not significantly affected. Oil and other industrial developments concentrated along the shore line do pose a threat, however rigorous emergency contingency plans are in place to minimise the impact of any incident. Localised tipping is an ongoing problem but consists mainly of inert building waste and is mostly controlled by the relevant licensing authority. Implementation of the Habitats Regulations will tighten control on these operations. Recreational pressures, including small-scale bait digging, are not currently considered to be a problem, while commercial bait digging is being monitored. The potential for rising sea levels to remove important habitats is recognised, and a number of coastal realignment schemes (planned retreat) are planned for these areas which will go some way to offsetting any habitat loss.

### **25 Current scientific research/survey/monitoring and facilities**

WeBS counts are done between September and April each year.

An annual late summer bird count is also carried out.

Aberlady Bay is often used for under-graduate and post-graduate research projects

### **26 Current conservation education**

Aberlady Bay and Torry Bay Local Nature Reserves and the John Muir Country Park all have full-time rangers/wardens who lead some guided walks and other educational activities.

### **27 Current recreation and tourism**

Many people use the areas adjoining the Firth for recreation. Walking, dog-walking, horse-riding and bathing are all common in many parts of the Forth. There is some evidence to suggest that the distribution of some bird species may be influenced by increased activity on the coast particularly in East Lothian. On the whole these activities are not considered detrimental to the site and visitor access is managed to minimise any negative effects. This includes specific locations and periods when public access may be restricted (eg the tern colony at Aberlady Bay).

The sea is also used for activities such as wind-surfing, canoeing and yachting. There is no evidence to suggest any of these are detrimental.

### **28 Functional jurisdiction**

Scottish Office, Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department

### **29 Management authority**

Scottish Natural Heritage

Forth and Borders Area Office

Laundry House

Dalkeith Country Park

Dalkeith

Midlothian

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### **30 Bibliography**

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Reference should also be made to Country Agencies Management Plans for sites that are within National Nature Reserves.

## Specific References