

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS)

Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7, as amended by Resolution VIII.13 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.

Note 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. Once completed, the RIS (and accompanying map(s)) should be submitted to the Ramsar Secretariat. Compilers are strongly urged to provide an electronic (MS Word) copy of the RIS and, where possible, digital copies of maps.

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|--|--|--|

Designation date

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Site Reference Number

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**2. Date this sheet was completed/updated:**

Designated: 05 August 1998 / update 12 May 2005

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**3. Country:**

UK (Northern Ireland)

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**4. Name of the Ramsar site:**

Belfast Lough

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**5. Map of site included:**Refer to Annex III of the *Explanatory Notes and Guidelines*, for detailed guidance on provision of suitable maps.**a) hard copy** (required for inclusion of site in the Ramsar List): *yes*  -or- *no* **b) digital (electronic) format** (optional): Yes

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**6. Geographical coordinates (latitude/longitude):**

54 38 00 N

05 54 00 W

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**7. General location:**

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

Nearest town/city: Belfast

Belfast Lough is a large intertidal sea lough situated at the mouth of the River Lagan on the east coast of Northern Ireland.

**Administrative region:** Antrim; Down

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**8. Elevation** (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **9. Area** (hectares): 432.14

Min. 0

Max. 10

Mean 0

## 10. Overview:

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

The inner part of the lough comprises areas of intertidal foreshore, comprising of mudflats and lagoons, and land, both land-claimed and being land-claimed, which form important feeding/roosting sites for significant numbers of wintering waders and wildfowl. The outer lough is restricted to mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays and beach-head saltmarsh.

## 11. 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).

**6**

**Secretariat comment: The RIS provides information requiring the application of Criterion 4. This needs to be included in the next update.**

## 12. Justification for the application of each Criterion listed in 11. 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:

##### Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Common redshank , *Tringa totanus totanus*, 1897 individuals, representing an average of 1.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

##### Species/populations identified as internationally important subsequent to designation

##### Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Black-tailed godwit , *Limosa limosa islandica*, 521 individuals, representing an average of 1.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)  
Iceland/W Europe

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](http://www.bto.org/survey/webs/webs-alerts-index.htm).

## 13. 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

## 14. 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                    | igneous, sedimentary, sandstone, slate/shale  |
| Geomorphology and landscape       | intertidal sediments (including sandflat/mudflat), estuary, lagoon, intertidal rock   |
| Nutrient status                   | eutrophic   |
| pH                                | no information  |
| Salinity                          | brackish / mixosaline   |
| Soil                              | no information  |
| Water permanence                  | usually permanent   |
| Summary of main climatic features | Annual averages (Aldergrove, 1971–2000)<br>( <a href="http://www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/aldergrove.html">www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/aldergrove.html</a> )<br>Max. daily temperature: 12.5° C<br>Min. daily temperature: 5.8° C<br>Days of air frost: 39.1<br>Rainfall: 862.4 mm<br>Hrs. of sunshine: 1313.7 |

**General description of the Physical Features:**

Belfast Lough is a large, open sea lough located on the north-eastern coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough includes areas of intertidal foreshore, mainly mudflats and lagoons. In the outer lough the site includes mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays and beach-head saltmarsh.

**15. 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).

Belfast Lough is a large, open sea lough located on the north-eastern coast of Northern Ireland. The inner part of the lough includes areas of intertidal foreshore, mainly mudflats and lagoons. In the outer lough the site includes mainly rocky shores with some small sandy bays and beach-head saltmarsh.

**16. Hydrological values:**

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

No special values known

**17. Wetland types**

Marine/coastal wetland

| Code | Name                              | % Area |
|------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| D    | Rocky shores                      | 34.7   |
| G    | Tidal flats                       | 60.2   |
| J    | Coastal brackish / saline lagoons | 5.1    |

**18. General ecological features:**

Provide further description, as appropriate, of the main habitats, vegetation types, plant and animal communities present in the Ramsar site.

The Ramsar site includes areas of intertidal foreshore, comprising of mudflats and lagoons, and land, both land-claimed and being land-claimed, which form important feeding/roosting sites for significant numbers of wintering waders and wildfowl.

Semi-natural vegetation is confined to a narrow shoreline strip which is fragmented, particularly along the inner reaches of the lough. The sheltered bays and inlets of the south-eastern shore contain pockets of beach-head saltmarsh. Shores with harder rocks support vegetation typical of maritime cliff ledges

giving way to maritime grassland. Notable plant species found include spring squill *Scilla verna* and Ray's knotgrass *Polygonum oxyspermum*.

### 19. 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.*

None reported

### 20. 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 currently occurring at levels of national importance:

##### Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Great cormorant , <i>Phalacrocorax carbo carbo</i> ,<br>NW Europe                                | 279 individuals, representing an average of 5.5% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)  |
| Common eider , <i>Somateria mollissima mollissima</i> , NW Europe                                | 867 individuals, representing an average of 43.3% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3) |
| Eurasian oystercatcher , <i>Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus</i> , Europe & NW Africa -wintering | 4648 individuals, representing an average of 9.2% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3) |
| Ruff , <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> , Europe/W Africa   | 3 individuals, representing an average of 15% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)     |

##### Species with peak counts in winter:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Red-throated diver , <i>Gavia stellata</i> , NW Europe                            | 27 individuals, representing an average of 2.7% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)    |
| Great crested grebe , <i>Podiceps cristatus cristatus</i> , NW Europe             | 1550 individuals, representing an average of 44.2% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3) |
| Common shelduck , <i>Tadorna tadorna</i> , NW Europe                              | 251 individuals, representing an average of 3.5% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)   |
| Greater scaup , <i>Aythya marila marila</i> , W Europe                            | 340 individuals, representing an average of 11.3% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)  |
| Common goldeneye , <i>Bucephala clangula clangula</i> , NW & C Europe             | 184 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)   |
| Red-breasted merganser , <i>Mergus serrator</i> , NW & C Europe                   | 155 individuals, representing an average of 7.7% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)   |
| Ringed plover , <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i> , Europe/Northwest Africa             | 133 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)     |
| Red knot , <i>Calidris canutus islandica</i> , W & Southern Africa<br>(wintering) | 386 individuals, representing an average of 1% of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)     |

Ruddy turnstone , *Arenaria interpres interpres*,  
NE Canada, Greenland/W Europe & NW Africa

385 individuals, representing an average of 1.7%  
of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean  
1998/9-2002/3)

Mew gull , *Larus canus canus*, Europe to N  
Africa

1167 individuals, representing an average of 1.7%  
of the all-Ireland population (5 year peak mean  
1998/9-2002/3)

**Species Information**

None reported

**21. Social and 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.

- Aesthetic
- Environmental education/ interpretation
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Tourism
- Transportation/navigation

**22. Land tenure/ownership:**

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

**23. Current land (including water) use:**

| Activity                    | On-site | Off-site |
|-----------------------------|---------|----------|
| Nature conservation         | +       | +        |
| Tourism                     | +       | +        |
| Recreation                  | +       | +        |
| Current scientific research | +       |          |
| Fishing: commercial         | +       |          |
| Gathering of shellfish      | +       |          |
| Bait collection             | +       |          |
| Industrial water supply     | +       |          |
| Industry                    |         | +        |
| Sewage treatment/disposal   | +       |          |
| Harbour/port                |         | +        |
| Transport route             |         | +        |
| Urban development           |         | +        |
| Non-urbanised settlements   |         | +        |

**24. Factors 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? |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--|---------|----------|---------------|
| No factors reported     | NA                 |  |         |          |               |
|                         |                    |  |         |          |               |

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

**25. 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) | +       |          |
| Special Protection Area (SPA)                         | +       |          |
| Management agreement                                  | +       |          |
| Site management statement/plan implemented            | +       |          |

**26. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:**

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

No information available

**27. Current scientific research and facilities:**

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

**Fauna.**

Numbers of migratory birds and wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Irish Wetland Birds Survey (I-WEBS) organised by the IWC Birdwatch Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Ireland) and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

**28. Current conservation education:**

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

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds presence on the site is centred around a brackish lagoon with well developed educational facilities including observation hides and a large observation room and a warden for the site.

**29. Current recreation and tourism:**

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

None reported

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**30. 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

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**31. 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

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**32. Bibliographical references:**

Scientific/technical references only. If biogeographic regionalisation scheme applied (see 13 above), list full reference citation for the scheme.

**Site-relevant references**

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.)

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Cranswick, PA, Waters, RJ, Musgrove, AJ & Pollitt, MS (1997) *The Wetland Bird Survey 1995–96: wildfowl and wader counts*. British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds & Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Slimbridge

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

Musgrove, AJ, Langston, RHW, Baker, H & Ward, RM (eds.) (2003) *Estuarine waterbirds at low tide. The WeBS Low Tide Counts 1992–93 to 1998–99*. WSG/BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC, Thetford (International Wader Studies, No. 16)

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](http://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.)  
[www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/UKSPA/default.htm)

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 Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland), 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

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