

Sunart Special Area of Conservation



SAC Management Scheme

V.6(February 2005)

Preface

The management scheme for Sunart Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been compiled to deliver the objectives of the EC Habitats Directive 1992, whilst taking into account the needs of the local communities and landowners. It has been prepared by a management forum comprising an elected councillor, officials, landowners and local interest groups. It is the key conservation management advice applicable to this site.

The scheme represents an agreement between those statutory agencies that will implement this scheme, which is designed to deliver the conservation objectives identified for this Special Area of Conservation, and the local communities that have a vested interest in the site. Whilst not a statutory instrument in itself, it should assist the agencies in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities as set out in the Habitats Regulations. It also recognises the existence of other management strategies for the area and, whilst these are not part of the conservation management scheme for the site, some of their statements have been incorporated into this scheme where appropriate.

This scheme also sets out a mechanism for monitoring and review, which will enable the lead agency to track progress and to convene an implementation forum to further develop initiatives identified in this document and how it relates to other interrelated strategies in this area.

This European designation for Sunart represents both an accolade and a responsibility. The communities of this area and the public authorities serving it recognise both these aspects. They will work together to ensure that the nature conservation interest here is sustained for future generations and managed as far as possible in harmony with the local economic interests of the area.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Habitats Directive

The Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna Directive (European Council Directive 92/43/EEC), known as ‘The Habitats Directive’, has led to the designation of a Europe wide series of sites, known as the ‘Natura 2000 network’. Sunart Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is part of this network, which aims to conserve European biodiversity (its wealth of wildlife), by maintaining or restoring natural habitats and species of wildlife which are rare, endangered or vulnerable in a the European Community.

In common with other SACs the local population of the Sunart area is reliant on natural resources for its livelihood and the Habitats Directive recognises the need to take into account the economic, cultural, social, and recreational needs of local communities.

Further information on the legislative background of the Habitats Directive can be found in Appendix I.

Sunart SAC has been identified under the Habitats Directive for;

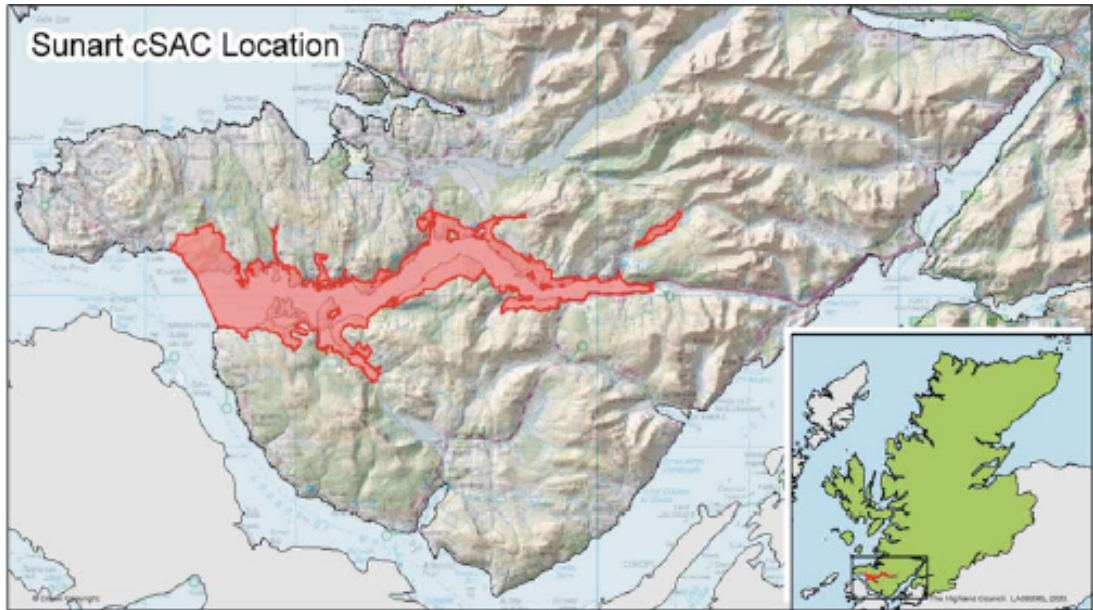
- 1) Old Sessile Oak woods with Holly and Hard Fern.
- 2) Ash and Hazel forests of slopes, screes and ravines.
- 3) European dry heaths.
- 4) Northern Atlantic wet heaths
- 5) Reefs in the intertidal and subtidal.
- 6) Otter

Together the above represent the features of interest for the site. Full definitions of these habitats and species can be found in Appendix II.

1.2 Location of Sunart Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Sunart SAC, located in Lochaber, West Scotland, is made up in part from the northern bounds of Morvern, and the southern half of Ardnamurchan with the landward boundary line following a complex route reflecting the natural heritage interests of the underpinning Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The SAC also incorporates the whole of Loch Sunart, including Loch Teacuis, west to a straight line between Auliston point and MacLean’s nose. This SAC is complex as it incorporates interests in upland, woodland, intertidal and subtidal areas. It also needs to consider a particular species, the European otter, which moves between the terrestrial and marine environment.

This poses particular challenges when considering how the site is to be managed due to the many activities that need consideration. A wide range of interested parties need to be involved in the process including non statutory users of the site, those living within the site, landowners and competent and relevant authorities charged to manage the site. The competent authorities are those individuals or bodies that exercise legislative powers. Relevant authorities are public bodies that have a function or duty in relation to a marine area and in particular a site designated under the Habitats Directive. Further details of the areas of responsibility for each relevant and competent authority can be found in Appendix III.



Location of Sunart SAC



Sunart SAC boundary, infrastructure and settlements

1.3 Key Elements of establishing management measures for an SAC

The Habitats Directive was brought into effect in domestic legislation through the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, referred to as the ‘Habitats Regulations’. These regulations are supported in Scotland with advice contained in Scottish Office Circular 6/1995 and updated June 2000 (see Appendix I for further details). They are five main points that are required to be considered when establishing management measures for an SAC. These are:

- The site’s specified habitats and species of interest should be maintained or restored at a favourable condition and steps should be taken, where required, to avoid any disturbance or deterioration to them.
- The relevant authorities should assess activities, plans, or projects in or around the site that may have a significant effect on the site.
- A monitoring programme should be established to assess the state of the site and the effectiveness of the management measures.
- The competent and relevant authorities may work together within a management group or forum to develop a management scheme.
- The management scheme should be incorporated into the statutory framework such as local and regional plans.

1.4 The Management Forum

The Habitats Directive suggests that the relevant and competent authorities work together, ideally within a management group, to develop a single conservation management scheme for the site. It is considered essential however, that any such management group should also involve representatives from the local communities, and other relevant interested parties. The Sunart regulatory authorities also considered that it was important that local opinion be gathered concerning their interests and any issues they may have upon Sunart SAC being proposed in the first instance. This was to ensure that as broad and balanced a spectrum of interests would be involved and that a reasonable consensus would be achieved.

The full list of members of the Sunart SAC Management Forum can be found at Appendix IV.

1.5 Aims of the Management Scheme

The main aim of the management scheme is to act as a framework to assist the relevant and competent authorities in their understanding of their responsibilities in the current and ongoing management of Sunart SAC with respect to the requirements of the Habitats Regulations.

In addition, this management scheme should also:

- Protect the features of interest for which the site was chosen.
- Recognise other independent management strategies representing other interests in the area whilst upholding the conservation objectives for the site. For details of inter-related management strategies see Appendix V.
- Minimise disruption to local interests in the area, whilst not compromising the conservation interests of the site.
- Raise awareness, promote responsible behaviour and encourage local participation in safeguarding the conservation interests of the area.
- Set a framework to ensure any future development is consistent with the conservation objectives for the site.

All interested parties were invited to attend an awareness raising day soon after the site was proposed to Europe as Sunart SAC. This gave people an opportunity to discuss all issues pertaining to the site in its new designation. This new SAC superseded the old Sunart Woodlands SAC and included the addition of wet and dry heath habitats to the terrestrial component of the site and Loch Sunart and Loch Teacuis, because of their reef interests.

Sunart SAC is complex as it incorporates both a marine and a terrestrial component. The terrestrial component of the SAC is also underpinned by Sunart SSSI, notified under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

As a result of this meeting a series of topic groups were formed to discuss specific issues that would be further developed at a local level before being incorporated into a working draft of the management scheme.



A meeting to gather local opinion on activities in the site

A third local consultation exercise was undertaken with a list of activities - incorporating the activities identified under the SSSI designation and other activities for the marine component, which may have an impact on the site. The interest features were set out on a map and were presented to the public in each of the five communities surrounding the SAC. Points raised in these meetings, along with issues raised at meetings of the regulatory authorities, were incorporated into a working draft of the management scheme. A management forum was assembled at this point to finalise the scheme for the site.