

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: 30 March 1998

3. Country:

UK (Scotland)

4. Name of the Ramsar site:

Ythan Estuary and Meikle Loch

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

This RIS is for: Updated information on an existing 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):

57 20 30 N 01 57 30 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.

Nearest town/city: Aberdeen

20 km north of Aberdeen on the north-east coast of Scotland

Administrative region: Aberdeenshire

10. Elevation (average and/or max. & min.) (metres): **11. Area** (hectares): 314.17

Min.	-1
Max.	44
Mean	6

12. General overview of the site:

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

This site comprises the long, narrow estuary of the River Ythan and the eutrophic Meikle Loch. Extensive mudflats in the upper reaches of the estuary are replaced by coarser gravels with mussel beds closer to the sea. The margins of the estuary are varied, with areas of saltmarsh, reedbeds and poor-fen. Meikle Loch is an important roost site for geese which feed on surrounding farmland in winter. It is a eutrophic loch supporting limited aquatic vegetation. It is joined by a burn to the smaller Little Loch.

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).

5, 6

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 5

Assemblages of international importance:

Species with peak counts in winter:

9271 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1998/99-2002/2003)

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

Qualifying Species/populations (as identified at designation):

Species regularly supported during the breeding season:

Sandwich tern , *Sterna* 524 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 4.9% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)
(Thalasseus) sandvicensis sandvicensis, W
 Europe

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Pink-footed goose , *Anser brachyrhynchus*, 1145 individuals, representing an average of 0.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)
 Greenland, Iceland/UK

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.

Details of bird species occurring at levels of National importance are given in Section 22

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	shingle, sand, mud, nutrient-rich
Geomorphology and landscape	lowland, coastal, estuary
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	acidic
Salinity	fresh
Soil	mainly mineral
Water permanence	usually permanent
Summary of main climatic features	Annual averages (Craibstone, 1971–2000) (www.metoffice.com/climate/uk/averages/19712000/sites/craibstone.html) Max. daily temperature: 11.2° C Min. daily temperature: 4.6° C Days of air frost: 53.6 Rainfall: 816.3 mm Hrs. of sunshine: 1409.0

General description of the Physical Features:

The site comprises the long, narrow estuary of the River Ythan and Meikle Loch. At its mouth, the river splits an extensive area of sand dunes with the Forveran Links on the west bank and the Sands of Forvie dune system on the east bank. Extensive mudflats in the upper reaches of the estuary are replaced by coarser gravels with mussel *Mytilus edulis* beds closer to the sea. The margins of the estuary are varied, with areas of saltmarsh, reedbed and poor-fen. Meikle Loch is a eutrophic loch supporting limited aquatic vegetation.

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).

The Ythan Catchment covers about 685 km² and contains gently undulating terrain. Elevations within the catchment range from sea level to 300m. The river reaches the estuary at the town of Ellon.

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18. Hydrological values:

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

No special values known

19. Wetland types:

Inland wetland, Marine/coastal wetland

Code	Name	% Area
F	Estuarine waters	52.9
O	Freshwater lakes: permanent	22.9
Other	Other	10.5
H	Salt marshes	6.7
E	Sand / shingle shores (including dune systems)	6.4
U	Peatlands (including peat bogs swamps, fens)	0.6

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 Ythan estuary has a varied substrate, including clay, sands and gravels, with a highly mobile river channel. As well as extensive areas of bare mud, there are small areas of saltmarsh, with a representative northern saltmarsh flora. Small areas of club-rush swamp are associated with the saltmarsh. In the upper parts of the estuary, there is a reedbed. Near the mouth of the estuary there are also shifting sand dunes, with areas of bare shingle (part of the Sands of Forvie). To the west of the estuary there is a large area of improved grassland.

Meikle Loch is a small eutrophic loch with little aquatic vegetation.

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.*

None reported

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 currently occurring at levels of national importance:****Species regularly supported during the breeding season:**

Common tern , *Sterna hirundo hirundo*, N & E Europe 265 pairs, representing an average of 2.6% of the GB population (Count as at early 1990s)

Little tern , *Sterna albifrons albifrons*, W Europe 58 apparently occupied nests, representing an average of 2.9% of the GB population (Seabird 2000 Census)

Species with peak counts in spring/autumn:

Common eider , *Somateria mollissima mollissima*, NW Europe 2309 individuals, representing an average of 3.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3 - spring peak)

Species with peak counts in winter:

Common redshank , *Tringa totanus totanus*, 1388 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1998/9-2002/3)

Species Information**Assemblage.**

The site has an interesting estuarine invertebrate fauna which includes the uncommon worm *Lumbriculus variegatus*, the very local mollusc *Hydrobia ventrosa* and the very rare marine midge *Halocladus braunsi*.

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.

- Aesthetic
- Archaeological/historical site
- Environmental education/ interpretation
- Fisheries production
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Scientific research
- Sport fishing
- Sport hunting
- Tourism

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
National/Crown Estate	+	+
Private	+	+
Public/communal		+

25. Current land (including water) use:

Activity	On-site	Off-site
Nature conservation	+	+
Recreation	+	+
Current scientific research	+	
Fishing: commercial		+
Fishing: recreational/sport	+	
Shifting arable agriculture		+
Rough or shifting grazing		+
Hunting: recreational/sport	+	

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?
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

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)	+	+
Special Protection Area (SPA)	+	
Management agreement	+	+
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	+	

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.

Fauna.

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

There is a university research facility at Culterty.

SNH monitors the eiders, terns, wader and wildfowl at the site. Geese numbers are also monitored.

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.

There is a visitor centre in the adjacent part of the NNR with a comprehensive environmental education programme targeting all ages - from early stages to adults, and specialist to general interest groups.

31. Current recreation and tourism:

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

Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.

Walking, Bird watching (hide provided), Angling, Wildfowling. Watersports.

32. Jurisdiction:

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

Scottish Executive, Environment and Rural Affairs Department

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.

Scottish Natural Heritage, 2 Anderson Place, Edinburgh, EH6 5NP

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

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