

## Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

### What are SSSIs?

SSSIs (or ASSIs<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland) are the UK's very best wildlife and geological sites. They cover a range of important wildlife habitats and species from wetlands and rivers, to remote Moorland and peat bogs, to flower-rich meadows, to exposed cliffs and shingle beaches.

They are notified and protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in England and Wales, under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 in Scotland and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1984 in Northern Ireland.

Many of these sites are also designated as National Nature reserves, Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas under other pieces of legislation and so may have multiple layers of protection for the conservation interest.

### What are the MOD's obligations in relation to SSSIs?

The MOD has management responsibility for 174 SSSIs and ASSIs. As a Government Department, the MOD has a statutory obligation to maintain and enhance the condition of SSSIs/ASSIs, and to ensure that our activities do not damage the interest features for which the site was notified.

Details of MOD's obligations as a public body are detailed in the Defra publication - [Sites of Special Scientific Interest: Encouraging positive partnerships](#)

### Who is responsible for a MOD SSSI?

The relevant TLB authority for any particular site is responsible for ensuring that the SSSI interests are taken account of in site planning, development and activities.

Responsibility for assessing and monitoring the condition of a SSSI lies with the appropriate statutory conservation agency (Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Council for Wales or Environment and Heritage Service (DoENI)). Details of condition assessments are provided to Defence Infrastructure Organisation (Environmental Advisory services) who maintain the SSSI database for the Department and can provide any necessary information on sites and their features and condition to Establishments.

### What does this mean for me?

Everyone using the defence estate has a duty to protect the conservation interest. Commanding Officers and Heads of Establishment are responsible for ensuring the SSSI/ASSI interest features are taken account of in the planning of activities, and that users of the Estate both contractors and MOD personnel are aware of the sites and their obligations in relation to them.

Commanding officers are also responsible, with their TLB authority for ensuring that any necessary SSSI management and improvement works are undertaken to ensure that MOD's statutory obligations to maintain (or enhance) the SSSIs for which MOD has management responsibility to a "favourable" or "unfavourable recovering" condition<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Area of Special Scientific Interest

<sup>2</sup> Follow link <http://www.english-nature.org.uk/Special/sssi/glossary.cfm> for condition definitions for SSSIs/ASSIs.

## **What is MOD doing to protect its SSSIs?**

DIO Operations Directorate are co-ordinating the MOD SSSI Project and advise on SSSI issues (see below contact).. A programme of works has been identified to ensure that the TLB authorities and Heads of Establishment/Commanding Officers are aware of the improvement and maintenance works required for SSSIs/ASSIs,

The Sustainability and Environmental Appraisal Toolkit (see [MOD Sustainability and Environmental Appraisal Tools Handbook](#)) provides the process for ensuring that SSSI interests are accounted for in the planning and development of new activities and projects. The Designated Sites Practitioner Guide provides details of the processes for dealing with SSSI assents, and licences (see below).

## **Where can I find more information on SSSIs?**

JSP 362 Chapter 5 – the Defence Lands Handbook contains all MOD policy for designated sites and protected species:

[JSP 362 - Defence Lands Handbook](#)

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DIO/OurPublications/EstateAndSustainableDevelopment/Jsp362DefenceLandsHandbook.htm>

The MOD's Designated Sites Practitioner Guide

[http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/87171C16-2AF5-41EF-9204-06EB1BA3CC82/0/pg\\_0610.pdf](http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/87171C16-2AF5-41EF-9204-06EB1BA3CC82/0/pg_0610.pdf)

DE Ops Environmental Support Team maintain the designated sites database and provide information on SSSIs and their current condition, and also advice and guidance regarding MOD activities and impacts on SSSIs. They can also advise on the required assenting process for activities which may damage SSSI interest features.

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Summaries of the latest condition status of the MOD's SSSIs are published annually in the Annual Stewardship Report ([The Stewardship Report on the Defence Estate](#) [needs internet link](#))

and in the MOD Sustainable Development Report ([DS&C - Sustainable Development document library](#) [needs internet link](#))

Statutory Conservation Body websites

Natural England - <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/>

Scottish Natural Heritage - <http://www.snh.org.uk/>

Countryside Council for Wales - <http://www.ccw.gov.uk/>

Environment and Heritage Service (DoENI) - <http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/>