

# National Parks and Wildlife Service

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## *Conservation Objectives Series*

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### Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC 000109



An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta,  
Gnóthaí Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta

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Department of Arts, Heritage,  
Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs



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## Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

### Notes/Guidelines:

1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.
2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.
3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.
4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.
5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

## Qualifying Interests

*\* indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive*

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000109	Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC
1230	Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts
4030	European dry heaths

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**Please note that this SAC overlaps with Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA (004156). See map 2. The conservation objectives for this site should be used in conjunction with those for the overlapping site as appropriate.**

## Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: [www.npws.ie/Publications](http://www.npws.ie/Publications)

### NPWS Documents

<b>Year :</b>	2011
<b>Title :</b>	National survey and assessment of the conservation status of Irish sea cliffs
<b>Author :</b>	Barron, S.J.; Delaney, A.; Perrin, P.M.; Martin, J.; O'Neill, F.
<b>Series :</b>	Irish Wildlife Manual No. 53
<b>Year :</b>	2012
<b>Title :</b>	Ireland Red List no. 8: Bryophytes
<b>Author :</b>	Lockhart, N.; Hodgetts, N.; Holyoak, D.
<b>Series :</b>	Ireland Red List series, NPWS
<b>Year :</b>	2013
<b>Title :</b>	The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland. Volume 2. Habitats assessments
<b>Author :</b>	NPWS
<b>Series :</b>	Conservation assessments
<b>Year :</b>	2014
<b>Title :</b>	Guidelines for a national survey and conservation assessment of upland vegetation and habitats in Ireland, Version 2.0
<b>Author :</b>	Perrin, P.M.; Barron, S.J.; Roche, J.R.; O'Hanrahan, B.
<b>Series :</b>	Irish Wildlife Manual No. 79
<b>Year :</b>	2016
<b>Title :</b>	Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC (site code: 109) Conservation objectives supporting document- coastal habitats V1
<b>Author :</b>	NPWS
<b>Series :</b>	Conservation objectives supporting document

### Other References

<b>Year :</b>	1988
<b>Title :</b>	The Irish red data book 1. Vascular plants
<b>Author :</b>	Curtis, T.G.F.; McGough, H.N.
<b>Series :</b>	Wildlife Service, Dublin
<b>Year :</b>	2005
<b>Title :</b>	National inventory of sea cliffs and coastal heaths
<b>Author :</b>	Browne, A.
<b>Series :</b>	Unpublished Report to NPWS

## Spatial data sources

**Year :** 2011  
**Title :** National survey and assessment of the conservation status of Irish sea cliffs  
**GIS Operations :** Clipped to SAC boundary  
**Used For :** 1230 (map 3)

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## Conservation Objectives for : Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC [000109]

### 1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

**To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts in Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:**

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Habitat length	Kilometres	Area stable, subject to natural processes, including erosion. For the sub-site mapped (Three Castle Head to Mizen Head), total length of cliff sections: 18.15km. See map 3	Based on data from the Irish Sea Cliff Survey (ISCS) (Barron et al., 2011). Cliffs are linear features and are therefore measured in kilometres. The sub-site Three Castle Head to Mizen Head (site ID: 02013) was identified using a combination of aerial photos and the DCENR helicopter viewer. The length of cliff was measured (in sections) to give a total estimated area of 18.15km within the SAC. The length of cliff is likely to be underestimated. See the Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC conservation objectives supporting document for coastal habitats
Habitat distribution	Occurrence	No decline, subject to natural processes. See map 3	Sea cliffs are known to occur along the coastline from Three Castle Head to Mizen Head. Only hard cliffs have been noted in this SAC and it is thought that all of the cliffs are of the hard type (Browne, 2005; Barron et al., 2011). See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details
Physical structure: functionality and hydrological regime	Occurrence of artificial barriers	No alteration to natural functioning of geomorphological and hydrological processes, including groundwater quality, due to artificial structures	Based on data from Barron et al. (2011). Maintaining natural geomorphological processes, including natural erosion, is important for the health of vegetated sea cliffs. Hydrological processes maintain flushes that can be associated with sea cliffs. Hydrological features such as gullies, streams and cascades were identified by the ISCS as occurring at Three Castle Head to Mizen Head. See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details
Vegetation structure: zonation	Occurrence	Maintain range of sea cliff habitat zonations including transitional zones, subject to natural processes, including erosion and succession	Based on data from Barron et al. (2011). Dry heath occurs adjacent to sea cliff vegetation at Three Castle Head to Mizen Head. See the coastal habitats supporting document and the conservation objective for European dry heaths (4030) for further details
Vegetation structure: vegetation height	Centimetres	Maintain structural variation within sward	Based on data from Barron et al. (2011). See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details
Vegetation composition: typical species and sub-communities	Percentage cover at a representative number of monitoring stops	Maintain range of sub-communities with typical species listed in the Irish Sea Cliff Survey (Barron et al., 2011)	See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details
Vegetation composition: negative indicator species	Percentage	Negative indicator species (including non-native species) to represent less than 5% cover	Based on data from Barron et al. (2011). See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details
Vegetation composition: bracken and woody species	Percentage	Cover of bracken ( <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> ) on grassland and/or heath less than 10%. Cover of woody species on grassland and/or heath less than 20%	Based on data from Barron et al. (2011). The main vegetation at the cliff top at Three Castles to Mizen Head SAC is a peaty heath where grazing restricts the cover of woody species. Gorse-dominated heath and rough grassland also occurs within the SAC. See the coastal habitats supporting document for further details

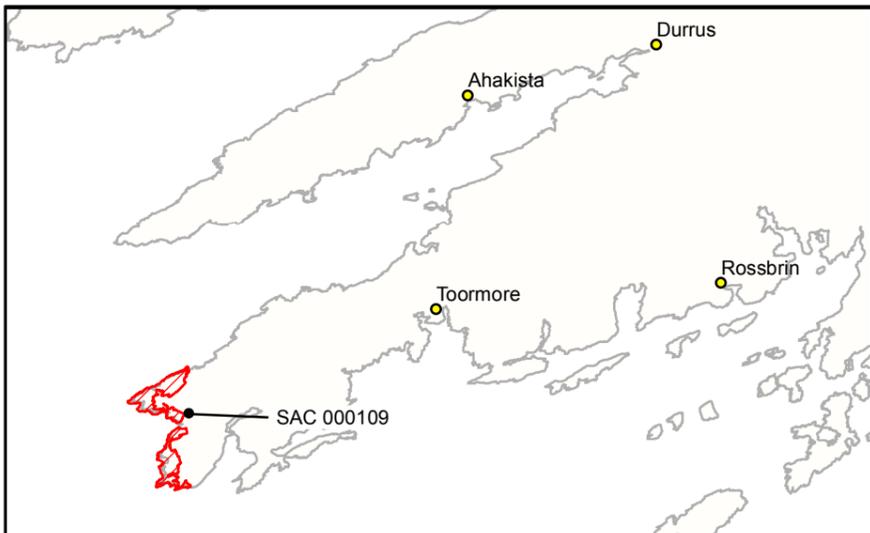
## Conservation Objectives for : Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC [000109]

### 4030 European dry heaths

**To maintain the favourable conservation condition of European dry heaths in Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:**

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Habitat area	Hectares	Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes	European dry heath has not been mapped in detail for Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC and thus the total area of the qualifying habitat is unknown. It is the dominant habitat within the SAC however, and occurs on shallow peats in association with rocky outcrops, with small lakes and marshy/boggy areas occurring where depressions occur (NPWS internal files)
Habitat distribution	Occurrence	No decline, subject to natural processes	See note on area above
Ecosystem function: soil nutrients	Soil pH and appropriate nutrient levels at a representative number of monitoring stops	Maintain soil nutrient status within natural range	Relevant nutrients and their natural ranges are yet to be defined. However, nitrogen deposition is noted as being relevant to this habitat (NPWS, 2013)
Community diversity	Abundance of variety of vegetation communities	Maintain variety of vegetation communities, subject to natural processes	The diversity of dry heath communities within this SAC is unknown. Further information on vegetation communities associated with this habitat is presented in Perrin et al. (2014)
Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes	Number of species at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Number of bryophyte or non-crustose lichen species present at each monitoring stop is at least three, excluding <i>Campylopus</i> and <i>Polytrichum</i> mosses	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). Dry heath is not necessarily rich in lichen and bryophyte species, but a minimum amount should still be present
Vegetation composition: number of positive indicator species	Number of species at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Number of positive indicator species present at each monitoring stop is at least two	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014), where the list of positive indicator species for this habitat, which is composed of dwarf shrubs, is also presented. Bell heather ( <i>Erica cinerea</i> ), ling ( <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> ) and Western gorse ( <i>Ulex gallii</i> ) are listed as present in the heath in this SAC (NPWS internal files)
Vegetation composition: cover of positive indicator species	Percentage cover at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Cover of positive indicator species at least 50% for siliceous dry heath and 50-75% for calcareous dry heath	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014), where the list of positive indicator species for this habitat, which is composed of dwarf shrubs, is also presented
Vegetation composition: dwarf shrub composition	Percentage cover at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Proportion of dwarf shrub cover composed collectively of bog-myrtle ( <i>Myrica gale</i> ), creeping willow ( <i>Salix repens</i> ) and western gorse ( <i>Ulex gallii</i> ) is less than 50%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). Bog-myrtle is indicative of flushed conditions and is more characteristic of wet heaths and blanket bogs. Creeping willow is more characteristic of dune heaths. Western gorse is a component of dry heath, but high proportions of it may indicate a history of undesirable levels of grazing
Vegetation composition: negative indicator species	Percentage cover at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Total cover of negative indicator species less than 1%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014), where the list of negative indicator species for this habitat is also presented
Vegetation composition: non-native species	Percentage cover at, and in local vicinity of, a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Cover of non-native species less than 1%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). A low target is set as non-native species can spread rapidly and are most easily dealt with when still at lower abundances
Vegetation composition: native trees and shrubs	Percentage cover in local vicinity of a representative number of monitoring stops	Cover of scattered native trees and shrubs less than 20%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). High cover of native trees and shrubs would indicate that the habitat may be succeeding towards scrub or woodland due to lack of grazing
Vegetation composition: bracken	Percentage cover in local vicinity of a representative number of monitoring stops	Cover of bracken ( <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> ) less than 10%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). High cover of bracken would indicate that the habitat may be succeeding towards a dense bracken community

Vegetation composition: soft rush	Percentage cover in local vicinity of a representative number of monitoring stops	Cover of soft rush ( <i>Juncus effusus</i> ) less than 10%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). High cover of soft rush would suggest undesirable hydrological conditions. Note however, that poor flushes dominated by soft rush can naturally occur in mosaic with this habitat. Discrete areas of this separate habitat should not be considered here
Vegetation structure: senescent ling	Percentage cover at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Senescent proportion of ling ( <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> ) cover less than 50%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). Senescence is part of the natural cycle of ling, but a dominance of ling in the senescent phase would indicate a lack of management (appropriate grazing or burning) to promote ling regeneration
Vegetation structure: signs of browsing	Percentage of shoots browsed at a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Less than 33% collectively of the last complete growing season's shoots of ericoids showing signs of browsing	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014)
Vegetation structure: burning	Occurrence in local vicinity of a representative number of monitoring stops	No signs of burning in sensitive areas	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014), where the list of sensitive areas is also presented. Fires can be part of the natural cycle of dry heath and may also be used as a valuable management tool to promote a diversity of growth phases in ling ( <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> ). However, currently most hill fires in Ireland are intentionally started to encourage grass growth for livestock. Fires which are too intense, too frequent, too extensive or which occur in sensitive areas are damaging to the habitat
Vegetation structure: growth phases of ling	Percentage cover in local vicinity of a representative number of monitoring stops	Outside sensitive areas, all growth phases of ling ( <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> ) should occur throughout, with at least 10% of cover in the mature phase	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014), where the list of sensitive areas is also presented. The growth phases of ling are pioneer (<10cm high), building (10-30cm high) and mature (<30cm high). As burning is undesirable in sensitive areas, it is not reasonable to require the stated diversity of growth phases within these areas
Physical structure: disturbed bare ground	Percentage cover at, and in local vicinity of, a representative number of 2m x 2m monitoring stops	Cover of disturbed bare ground less than 10%	Attribute and target based on Perrin et al. (2014). Disturbance can include hoof marks, wallows, human foot prints and vehicle and machinery tracks. Excessive disturbance can result in loss of characteristic species and presage erosion for heaths and peatlands
Indicators of local distinctiveness	Occurrence and population size	No decline in distribution or population sizes of rare, threatened or scarce species associated with the habitat	This includes species listed in the Flora (Protection) Order, 2015 (FPO) and/or the red data lists (Curtis and McGough, 1988; Lockhart et al., 2012). Spotted rock-rose ( <i>Tuberaria guttata</i> ) and pale dog-violet ( <i>Viola lactea</i> ), species listed in Curtis and McGough (1988), have been recorded in this habitat in the SAC (NPWS internal files). The latter species is also legally protected under the FPO



**Legend**

Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC 000109

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Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

**MAP 1:**  
**THREE CASTLE HEAD TO MIZEN HEAD SAC CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**  
**SAC DESIGNATION**

Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document.

**SITE CODE:**  
**SAC 000109; version 3. CO. CORK**

0 0.4 0.8 1.2 1.6 km

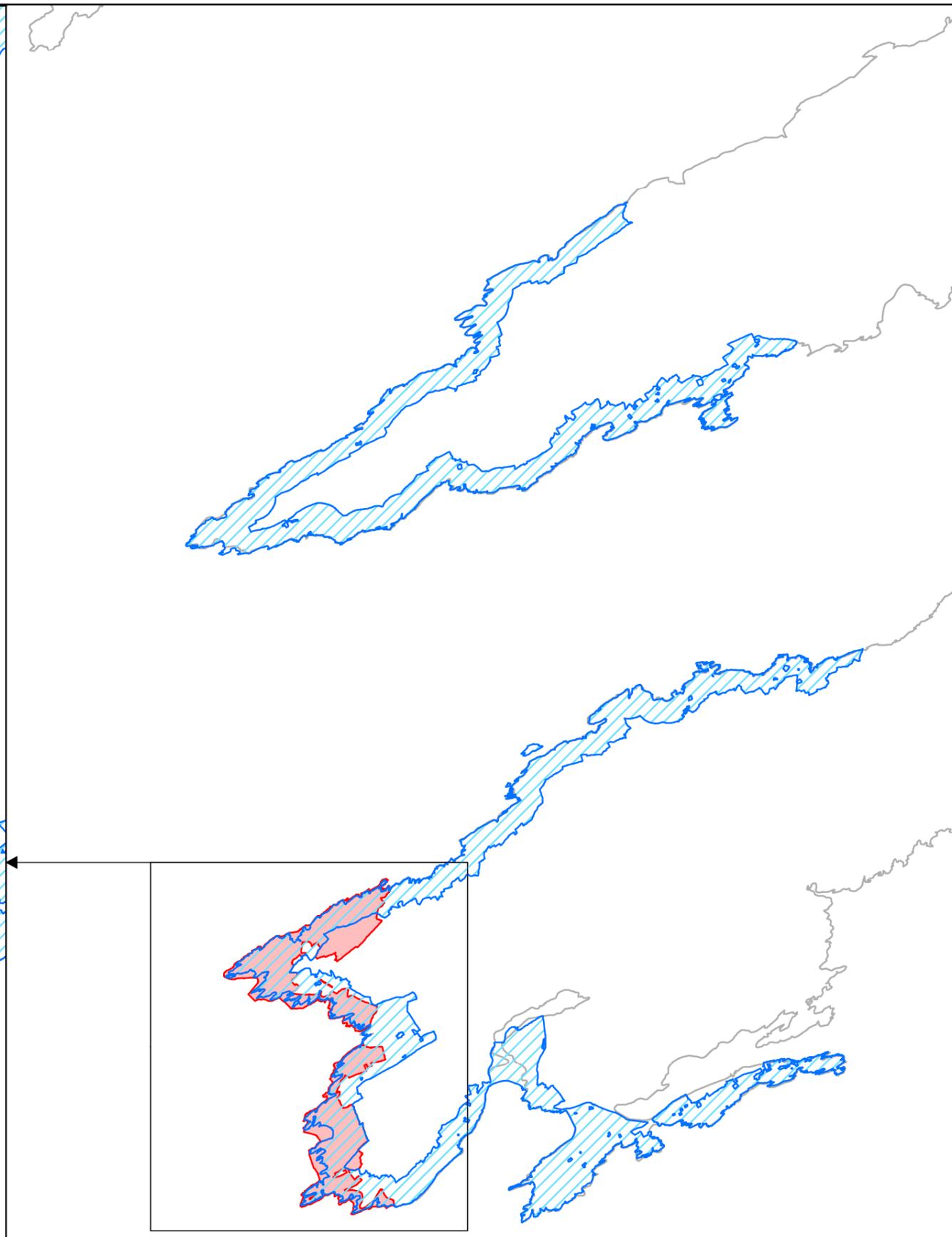
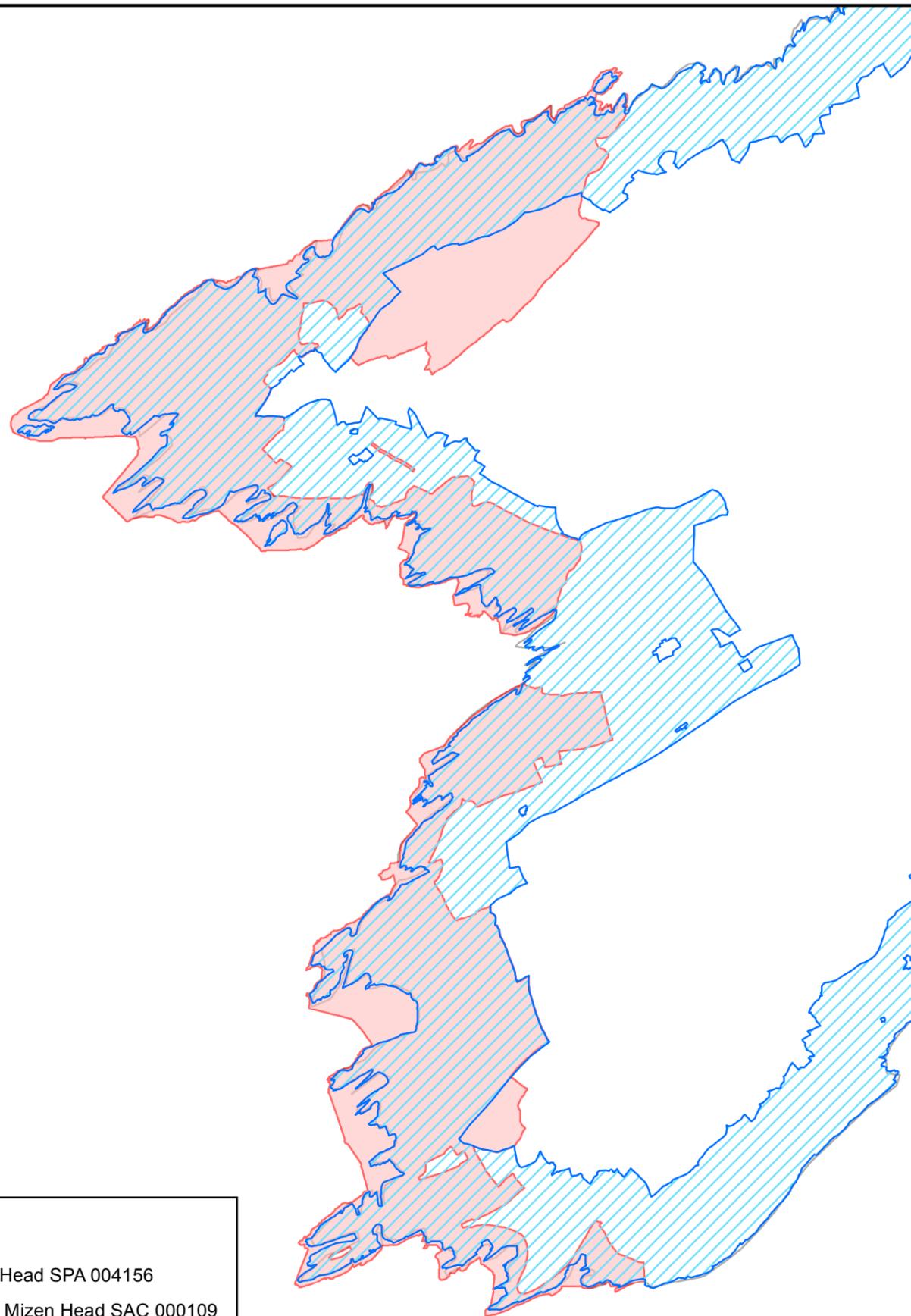
The mapped boundaries are of an indicative and general nature only. Boundaries of designated areas are subject to revision.  
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**Map Version 1**  
**Date: Sept 2016**

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**Legend**

- Sheep's Head to Toe Head SPA 004156
- Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC 000109
- OSi Discovery Series County Boundary



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**MAP 2:**  
**THREE CASTLE HEAD TO MIZEN HEAD SAC**  
**CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES**  
**ADJOINING / ADJACENT AND**  
**OVERLAPPING DESIGNATIONS**  
Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document.

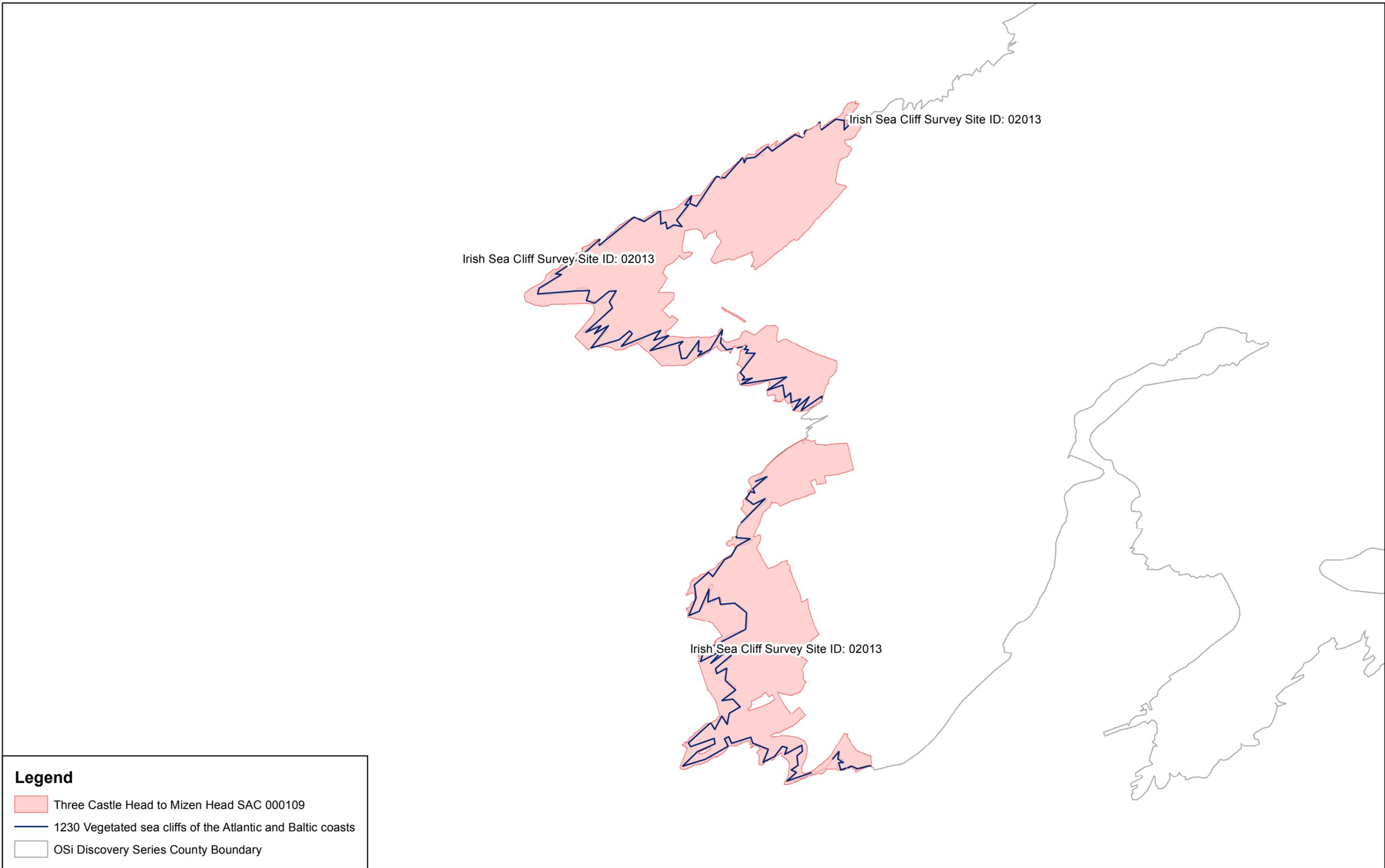
**SITE CODE:**  
**SAC 000109; version 3. SPA 004156; version 3.**  
**CO. CORK**



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**Map Version 1**  
**Date: Sept 2016**



**Legend**

- Three Castle Head to Mizen Head SAC 000109
- 1230 Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts
- OSi Discovery Series County Boundary