SITE SYNOPSIS

Site Name: Kingstown Bay SAC

Site Code: 002265

Kingstown Bay is a small, narrow bay situated approximately 7 km north-west of Clifden and south of Streamstown Bay, Co. Galway. It is an unusually shallow bay that is about 3 km long and 500 m wide at the mouth. The north-westerly aspect of the bay and the offshore islands of Omey, Inishturk and Turbot at the mouth afford shelter from Atlantic swells. Conditions become even more sheltered towards the head of the bay where the sediment is muddy. Currents within the bay can be moderately strong.

The site is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for the following habitats and/or species listed on Annex I / II of the E.U. Habitats Directive (* = priority; numbers in brackets are Natura 2000 codes):

[1160] Large Shallow Inlets and Bays

The bay is of conservation importance because there are excellent populations of the free-living, red coralline algae (maerl-forming species) *Lithophyllum dentatum*, *L. fasciculatum* and *Lithothamnion corallioides* (which may be locally known as 'coral'). These occur midway along the bay at 0-2 m in depth. The bed is very dense and is formed by unusually large individuals. It has a very heterogeneous composition in which patches dominated by *L. dentatum* and *L. fasciculatum* alternate with patches dominated by *L. corallioides*. Kingstown Bay has the second largest known population of *L. dentatum* in Ireland and the largest population of *L. fasciculatum*, both species being rare nationally. There are only three known sites where these three species co-occur (the others being Kilkieran slip and Kinvarra Bay, both also in Co. Galway), and this is by far the best example of this association, in terms of plant density and plant size.

Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) occurs in a number of places in the bay and is dense in areas within the maerl bed. The algal community is characterized by several species of filamentous and foliose red algae (e.g. *Antithamnion* spp., *Ceramium* spp., *Polysiphonia* spp. and *Cryptopleura ramosa*), brown algae (e.g. *Mesogloia vermiculata* and *Dictyota dichotoma*) and green algae (e.g. *Derbesia marina* and *Ulva lactuca*). Several epiphytic algae also occur in the area. Of particular interest are *Gelidiella calcicola*, thought to be endemic to maerl, and the common coralline alga, *Corallina officinalis*, which grows in unattached balls at Kingstown Bay. Sheltered rocky shores are dominated by the brown alga *Ascophyllum nodosum.* A subtidal sand community with amphipods and polychaetes has been recorded from the mouth of the bay. The inner reaches of the bay hosts a mud community with *Arenicola marina* and anemones. There are intertidal sediment community complexes present ranging from muddy mixed

sediment in the north-east to sand in the north-west of the bay. Intertidal reefs also occur extensively throughout this site. The faunal community of the bay includes sponges, anemones, crustaceans, bivalve and gastropod molluscs, and fish. The oyster *Ostrea edulis* occurs.

Fragments of broken coralline algae accumulate between rocky outcrops on the shore, forming shallow beaches that are approximately 20-30 m wide. A small grassy island, Hog Island, occurs at the mouth of the bay.

Kingstown Bay is of high conservation importance owing to the presence of an excellent example of a sheltered bay, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. It is particularly important as it hosts very unusual red coralline algae formations.