



Site Name: Carnsore Point SAC

Site Code: 002269

This site is situated in the south-east of Co. Wexford and comprises the area of sea and underlying bedrock and sediments off Carnsore Point. The coastal boundary follows the high water mark from just north of Greenore Point to Tacumshin Lake; the seaward boundary follows a line just to the west of Black Rock, south of the Barrels Rocks, east of the Bailies and as far north as South Long light. The bedrock of the site is of granite, felsite and other intrusive rocks rich in silica. The site is exposed to the prevailing wind and swells from the west. Tidal streams tend to be moderate but are strong in some areas. Offshore, Barrels Rocks are extremely exposed to the full force of Atlantic swells.

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):

[1140] Tidal Mudflats and Sandflats
[1170] Reefs
[1351] Harbour Porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)

Most of Carnsore Point SAC comprises rocky reefs that are strewn with boulders, cobbles and patches of sand, both on the shore and underwater. These intertidal and subtidal reef communities are typical of areas that are very exposed to moderately exposed to wave action. There are also areas of intertidal mud and sandflats in the site.

The reef habitat at the site can be categorised into three community types: sheltered to moderately exposed intertidal reef community complex, exposed subtidal reef dominated by a faunal community complex, and *Laminaria* dominated community complex.

The intertidal reef to the east of Carnsore Point is moderately exposed to wave action. It has an extensive area of granite with the limpet *Patella vulgata*, the topshell *Osilinu* (= *Monodonta*) *lineatus*, and abundant juvenile barnacles in the upper shore. The mid shore has a poorly defined band of the brown alga *Fucus vesiculosus*, followed by luxuriant Knotted Wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*), with the epiphyte *Polysiphonia lanosa*. The low shore is characterised by *Fucus serratus*, with occasional *Laminaria digitata* and the green algae *Cladophora rupestris*. These communities are typical for this type of shore.

There is a good example of a subtidal reef community very exposed to wave action in shallow water at Barrels Rocks. This is characterized by abundant *Mytilus edulis*, with the brown alga *Alaria esculenta*, an understory of pink coralline algal crusts and *Corallina officinalis* with the hydroid *Tubularia* sp. on steep surfaces. Also in shallow water, but in areas with a little less exposure to wave action, a species rich (81-110 species) kelp park of *Laminaria hyperborea* is found, with an understory of hydroids, sponges, and bryozoans. At two sites this community is unusual. At south-east of Splagh rock the understory is very similar to the sea squirt community of *Stolonica socialis* and *Polyclinum aurantium*, whereas north-east of Terchen the bivalve *Musculus discors* carpets much of the area, along with a variety of sponges, hydroids, sea squirts and bryozoans.

In deeper water at depths of 11-30 m there are excellent examples of the sea squirt community dominated by *Polyclinum aurantium*, with the bryozoan *Flustra foliacea*. *Stolonica socialis* may also be present in this community. There is an unusual variation of this community where the dominant sea squirt is *Polycarpa scuba* (= *rustica*) and the bryozoan *Flustra foliacea* is absent, and at another site *Distomus variolosus* is the most abundant sea squirt. At 23 m, low lying rock surrounded by coarse sand is covered by the bivalve *Musculus discors*, which is considered to be an uncommon community.

A number of species with a limited distribution in Ireland occur at two or more sites within the area. These are the sponge *Tethyspira spinosa*, the anemone *Cataphellia brodricii* and the sea squirts *Distomus variolosus*, *Stolonica socialis*, *Archdistoma aggregatum* and *Polycarpa scuba*. The sea squirt *Sidnyum elegans* and the recently described bryozoan *Schizomavella sarniensis* each occur at a single site. *Tethyspira spinosa* is only known from the Saltees, Hook Head and Roaringwater Bay in Ireland. *Cataphellia brodricii* occurs in this community and in shallow water both around the Saltee Islands and other areas in the south-east. *Stolonica socialis* in Ireland is only known from the south-east and north-west coasts and in Britain in the south, south-west, and English Channel. *Sidnyum elegans* has not previously been recorded in Ireland and to date all records are from the south-east and it has a limited distribution in Britain. *Archdistoma aggregatum* is known from a few sites in south-west Britain, Northern Ireland, the Saltee Islands, Carnsore Point area and south of the River Shannon Estuary. *Polycarpa scuba* (= *rustica*) is only known from the Irish Sea, English Channel and Brittany.

The littoral sediment communities of Carnsore Point are represented by a moderately exposed shore at Carne Beach, composed of intertidal sand community complex characterised by the oligochaete *Tubificoides benedii*, and the bivalves *Macoma balthica* and *Scrobicularia plana*, the amphipod *Coruphium volutator* and polychaetes such as *Pygospio elegans*, *Eteone* sp., *Nephtys hombergii* and *Hediste diversicolor*.

The site is of considerable conservation significance for the presence of intertidal mud and sandflats, as well as reefs, all habitats that are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.