SITE SYNOPSIS

Site Name: Tullaher Lough and Bog SAC

Site Code: 002343

Tullagher Lough and Bog is located 4 km south-east of Doonbeg in the townlands of Carrowmore South, Carrowblough Beg and Tullaher in Co. Clare. This is a diverse site comprising of raised bog (including areas of high bog and cutover bog), wet grassland, improved grassland, scrub woodland, alkaline fen and lake. It is bounded to the east by the Doonbeg to Moyasta road, to the west by a local road, to the north by bog tracks and to the south by a conifer plantation.

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):

[7110] Raised Bog (Active)*
[7120] Degraded Raised Bog
[7140] Transition Mires
[7150] Rhynchosporion Vegetation

Active raised bog comprises areas of high bog that are wet and actively peat-forming, where the percentage cover of bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) is high, and where some or all of the following features occur: hummocks, pools, wet flats, *Sphagnum* lawns, flushes and soaks. Degraded raised bog corresponds to those areas of high bog whose hydrology has been adversely affected by peat cutting, drainage and other land use activities, but which are capable of regeneration. The Rhynchosporion habitat occurs in wet depressions, pool edges and erosion channels where the vegetation includes White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*) and/or Brown Beak-sedge (*R. fusca*), and at least some of the following associated species, Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), sundews (*Drosera* spp.), Deergrass (*Scirpus cespitosus*) and Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*).

The raised bog habitat at this site consists of a small dome of high bog with extensive cutover areas to the west and south. The high bog is flat, with slopes to the south-west associated with marginal drainage. There are wet hollows and a large pool with quaking margins at the centre of the high bog. There are also a number of small flushes. The extensive cutover consists of numerous old peat cuttings with turf banks and hollows. A mineral ridge with improved grassland adjoins the high bog to the north-west and there is semi-improved wet grassland to the north-east.

The high bog has vegetation typical of a raised bog, consisting of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Common Cottongrass (*Eriophorum angustifolum*) and Bog Asphodel, with occasional Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) a species typical of western raised bogs.

Bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.) are abundant, with 95% moss cover. Extensive lawns of *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *S. papillosum* occur, with occasional *S. magellanicum. Sphagnum cuspidatum* and *S. auriculatum* occur in wet hollows. The large pool in the centre of the high bog probably has mineral input as indicated by the presence White Water-lily (*Nymphaea alba*), Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*) and Water Avens (*Geum rivale*). A dense quaking carpet of bog moss (*S. cuspidatum*) occurs at the pool margin. Heather, Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*), Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxyoccos*) and Common Cottongrass are also present. The flushes are dominated by Purple Moor-grass, Heather and Bog -myrtle (*Myrica gale*). The old peat cuttings are dominated by Purple Moor-grass, with Heather on dry turf banks.

The vegetation of the low-lying areas beside the open water bodies of Tullaher Lough is dominated by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). Extensive quaking *Sphagnum* lawns with low hummocks, corresponding to the E.U. Habitats Directive Annex I habitat transition mire, also occur. These are separated from the reedbeds by small-sedge vegetation. To the north of Tullaher Lough there is a small area of birch (*Betula* sp.) wood and scrub. Species-rich hay meadows occur to the south-west of Tullaher Lough and there is improved grassland along the western boundary. The grasslands are not fertilised and are cut in late summer.

Several noteworthy species occur at the site including Pipewort (*Eriocaulon aquaticum*), Six-stamened Waterwort (*Elatine hexandra*), Quillwort (*Isoetes echinospora*) and Brown Beak-sedge.

The site is important for over-wintering Greenland White-fronted Goose, a species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, which regularly use the grasslands to the west of Tullaher Lough – average of 47 birds over the four winters 1994/95 to 1998/99. Small numbers (less than 20) of Whooper Swan also occur.

The great bulk of the site has been heavily exploited in the past by drainage and turf cutting and some areas have been reclaimed. Current land use of the site consists of domestic peat cutting and grazing. Peat cutting is restricted to the cutover areas to the west. There is no active peat cutting at the high bog margins. The area of high bog is small, but is quite intact with no active peat cutting or drainage. The cutover to the east of the high bog has been reclaimed for agriculture and cattle graze on these grasslands and the improved grassland on the mineral ridge to the north. Damaging activities associated with these land uses include drainage and occasional burning. These activities have resulted in habitat loss and damage to the hydrological status of the high bog and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

Tullaher Lough and Bog is a site of considerable conservation significance as it comprises a diverse site with lake, transition mire and raised bog habitats. The site contains one of the few remaining examples of raised bog in Co. Clare and represents the western extreme of the range of raised bogs in Ireland. Raised bog is a rare habitat in the E.U. and one that is becoming increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. Ireland has a high proportion of the total E.U. resource of raised bog (over 60%) and so has a special responsibility for its conservation at an international level.

The presence of a good example of transition mire is also of particular significance. Its value as a wintering ground for Greenland White-fronted Goose is also noteworthy.