



Site Name: Blackwater Bank SAC

Site Code: 002953

Blackwater Bank SAC consists of a series of sandbanks running roughly parallel to the coastline of Co. Wexford. The total area of this site is approximately 12,407 ha. This designation includes the Lucifer Bank, Blackwater Bank and Moneyweights Bank. These features are at the southern end of a series of offshore sandbanks that run along the eastern seaboard of Ireland as far north as Co. Dublin.

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):

[1110] Sandbanks [1351] Harbour Porpoise (<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>)

The sandbanks in this site form a series of banks from Cahore Point, in the north, extending almost as far southwards as Rosslare, Co. Wexford. These features range from 2-4 km from the shoreline. Offshore sandbanks are generally formed from varying sediment fractions that range from cobbles to fine sand. The sediment surface is often rippled, through the action of currents and storms, and builds up into sand waves that may measure more than 1 m in height and several metres in width.

Some of the banks shoal during low tide but are generally between 4-8 m below the sea surface at low tide. These banks are characterised predominantly by fine sand to medium sand with smaller percentages of very fine sand. Previous surveys indicated an area of high hydrodynamic activity with strong, tidally induced current speeds operating. Such currents do not allow for the settling out of finer particles of organic and inorganic matter. This type of current regime also tends to make the sediments quite mobile, with material being transported over some distance during strong phases of the tidal cycle. Such areas are characterised by low species densities. Low species numbers and densities in such habitat are probably due to the inhospitable nature of the environment, i.e. mobile sands, which demand specialised lifestyles for animals to either cope with, or escape from, sand abrasion.

The species recorded from the area are typical of sandy coastal habitats. A total of 35 species, from four phyla were collected. The most abundant species were crustaceans (*Bathyporeia elegans*, *Pontocrates altamarinus*, *Portumnus latipes* and *Urothoe elegans*), segmented worms (*Spio armata*, *Scolelepis squamata*, *Nephtys longosetosa*, *Nephtys cirrosa*, *Magelona mirabilis*, *Spiophanes bombyx*, *Magelona johnstoni*, *Gastrosaccus spinifer* and *Levinsenia gracilis*) and the mollusc *Parvicardium minimum*. Analysis of the species has split the various faunal communities into two distinct assemblages: the

'infralittoral mobile clean sand with sparse fauna' and '*Bathyporeia* spp. in infralittoral sand'.

The site is of conservation importance for its submerged sandbanks, a habitat that is listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive.