NPWS

West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC
(site code: 000197)

Conservation objectives supporting document - coastal habitats

Version 1 - supplement 1

May 2026

IMPORTANT: This supplement, published in 2026, includes details relating to the EU habitats **1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines and 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes** which were added as Qualifying Interests for the site after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document should be read in conjunction with the Version 2 Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2026), and with the Conservation objectives supporting document - Coastal habitats Version 1 (NPWS, 2015). Any references to these habitats in previously published Site-specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO), or SSCO supporting documents, including the mapping, are to be considered **superseded** by these updates.

Contents

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1. Introduction

1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines and 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes were added as Qualifying Interests to West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC (site code: 000197) after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document sets out the SSCO(s) for the newly listed Qualifying Interest(s) for the site and acts as a supplement to the original SSCO Supporting Document.

Information on the condition of the habitats was primarily derived from surveys of Clooney, Roshin Point, Lettermacaward and Sheskinmore, located close to the town of Ardara in West Donegal.

2. Coastal habitats

2.1 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines

2.1.1 Site description of habitat

West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC is an extensive coastal site, located just north of Ardara, in south-west County Donegal. It contains numerous diverse Annex I sand dune habitats, including 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines. The habitat occurs at Lettermacaward, Roshin Point and Clooney.

At Lettermacaward, typical strandline species include Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*), Frosted Orache (*Atriplex laciniata*), and Sea Sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*), with Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) generally dominant. Sand Couch (*Elytrigia juncea*) was also recorded at this site.

Roshin Point is mainly characterised by Sea Sandwort (*Honckenya peploides*) and Orache species (*Atriplex* species), with scattered occurrences of Sand Couch (*Elytrigia juncea*). A high presence of seaweed was noted, which is important for early strandline habitat development at this site (Ryle *et al*., 2009). The habitat is well developed along the beach in the northern part of Clooney, and Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) have been recorded as nesting there.

2.1.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for '*Annual vegetation of drift lines'* in West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC (site code: 000197) is to '*restore the Favourable conservation condition*'.

This objective is based on an assessment of the recorded condition of the habitat(s) under a range of attributes and targets. The assessment is divided into three main headings: (a) Area (b) Range and (c) Structure and Functions.

2.1.3 Area

Habitat area

Coastal habitats are generally dynamic and increase and decrease in area due to natural processes. These natural changes are not taken into account in conservation status assessments. Changes associated with human activities including destruction and restoration do contribute to the assessment of conservation status.

The area recorded for the 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines habitat is 3.83ha (Ryle *et al*., 2009).

Annual vegetation of drift lines were assessed as being in good condition at Lettermacaward and Roshin Point, but their extent is considered to be limited due to disturbance at Clooney.

Target: Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes, including erosion and succession.

2.1.4 Range

Habitat distribution

The 1210 Annual vegetation of drift lines habitat is unevenly distributed across the site. It is absent from Sheskinmore, but occurs at Clooney, Roshin Point and Lettermacaward. This is likely the natural distribution (Ryle *et al*., 2009, Delaney *et al*., 2013).

Target: No decline in the distribution of this habitat, unless it is the result of natural processes.

2.1.5 Structure and Functions

Structure and Functions for Annual vegetation of drift lines are assessed on the basis of:

Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply

Target: Natural circulation of sediment and organic matter, absence of any physical obstructions or evidence of sediment extraction from the beach and its environs. Physical obstructions that have been in place and are unchanged since prior to 1994 are excluded from this target, unless they have a current adverse impact on sediment circulation.

Disturbance

Target: No more than 20% of the habitat is subject to disturbance *e.g*. trampling, vehicle damage, removal of substrate.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

Target: At least one species occurs with a frequency of at least 40% of stops and another species occurs with a frequency of more than 20% of stops.

Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species

Target: No negative species occurs at a frequency of more than 60% of stops and combined cover of all negative species across the habitat is 5% or less and highest % cover of any negative species within any stop is 25% or less.

Vegetation composition: non-native species

Target: No individual species occurs at a frequency of more than 20% of stops and no evidence that % cover is increasing.

Indicators of local distinctiveness: site-specific target features (including rare and notable species)

Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

The Structure and Functions were assessed and found to be in good condition at Clooney, Lettermacaward and Roshn Point (Ryle *et al*., 2009).

2.2 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes

2.2.1 Site description of habitat survey

This SAC provides good examples of highly dynamic fore dunes. At Lettermacaward, they occur in a patchy and highly transient manner along the coastline, with the most notable development in the southern section of the beach and around the tip. In these areas, recent sand accumulation has supported the formation of a relatively wide band of embryonic dunes, and there is potential for continued growth, possibly leading to the development of a sandy spit. At Roshin Point, the habitat

is more consistently developed, forming a broader and more continuous band, with a clear transition from mobile sand to embryonic dune. In contrast, embryonic dunes are largely absent at Ballinreavy Strand due to ongoing erosion. It is likely that sediment from this area is being redistributed and contributes to dune formation at more accreting locations such as Trawmore. This highlights the interconnected nature of sediment movement within the SAC (Ryle *et al*., 2009).

2.2.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for '*Embryonic shifting dunes'* in West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC (site code: 000197) is to '*restore the Favourable conservation condition*'.

This objective is based on an assessment of the recorded condition of the habitat(s) under a range of attributes and targets. The assessment is divided into three main headings: (a) Area (b) Range and (c) Structure and Functions.

2.2.3 Area

Habitat area

Coastal habitats are generally dynamic and increase and decrease in area due to natural processes. These natural changes are not taken into account in conservation status assessments. Changes associated with human activities including destruction and restoration do contribute to the assessment of conservation status.

The area recorded for the 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes habitat is 14.79ha.

At Lettermacaward, 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes are fragmented or absent in areas with high foot traffic, indicating loss due to human activity (Ryle *et al*., 2009).

Target: Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes, including erosion and succession.

2.2.4 Range

Habitat distribution

2110 Embyronic shifting dunes have been found at Sheskinmore, Lettermacaward, Clooney and Roshin Point (Ryle *et al*., 2009; Delaney *et al*., 2013). The habitat is highly dynamic and unevenly distributed, reflecting local patterns of erosion and sand accretion.

Target: No decline in the distribution of this habitat, unless it is the result of natural processes.

2.2.5 Structure and Functions

Structure and Functions for Embryonic shifting dunes are assessed on the basis of:

Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply

Target: Natural circulation of sediment and organic matter, absence of any physical obstructions or evidence of sediment extraction from the beach and its environs. Physical obstructions that have been in place and are unchanged since prior to 1994 are excluded from this target, unless they have a current adverse impact on sediment circulation.

Disturbance

Target: No more than 20% of the habitat should be subject to disturbance *e.g*. trampling, vehicle damage, removal of substrate.

Flowering and fruiting of any positive indicator species

Target: Present in 40% or more of stops.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

Target: At least one species occurs with a frequency of more than 40% of stops.

Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species

Target: No negative species occurs at a frequency of more than 60% of stops and combined cover of all negative species across the habitat is 5% or less and highest % cover of any negative species within any stop is 25% or less.

Vegetation composition: non-native species

Target: No non-native species occurs at a frequency of more than 20% of stops and no evidence that % cover is increasing.

Indicators of local distinctiveness: site-specific target features (including rare and notable species)

Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

Structure and Functions of 2110 Embryonic shifting dunes were assessed as being in good condition at Clooney, Lettermacaward, Roshin Point and Sheskinmore (Ryle *et al*., 2009; Delaney *et al*., 2013).

3. References

Brophy, J.T., Perrin, P.M., Penk, M.R., Devaney, F.M. and Leyden, K.J. (2019) Saltmarsh Monitoring Project 2017-2018. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 108. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Ireland.

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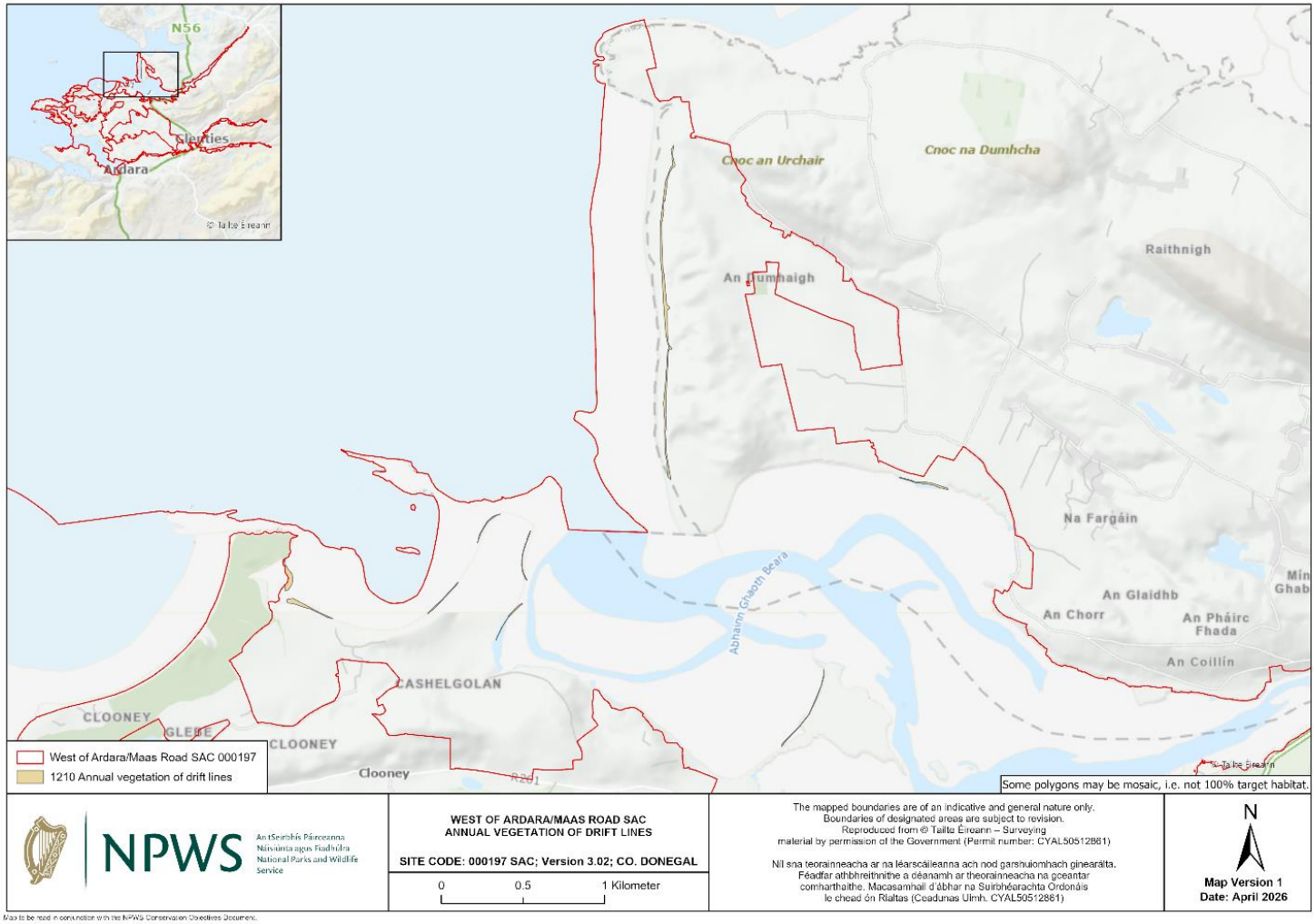
Perrin, P.M., Waldren, S., Penk, M.R. and O'Neill, F.H. (2017) Saltmarsh Function and Human Impacts in Relation to Ecological Status (SAMFHIRES). EPA Research Report, Wexford, Ireland.

Ryle, T., Murray, A., Connolly, K. and Swann, M. (2009) Coastal Monitoring Project 2004-2006. Unpublished report to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin.

Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Annual vegetation of drift lines in West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC (000197)



Appendix 2 – Distribution map of Embryonic shifting dunes in West of Ardara/Maas Road SAC (000197)