

NPWS

**Slaney River Valley SAC
(site code: 000781)**

**Conservation objectives supporting document -
coastal habitats**

Version 1

August 2026

IMPORTANT: This supporting document, published in 2026, includes details relating to the EU habitats **1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)** and **1410 Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*)** 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). 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Conservation Objectives (SSCO), or SSCO supporting documents, including the mapping, are to be considered **superseded** by these updates.

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1. Introduction

1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) and 1410 Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) were added as Qualifying Interests to Slaney River Valley SAC (site code: 000781) after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document sets out the SSCO(s) for the newly listed Qualifying Interests for the site.

2. Coastal habitats

2.1 1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)

2.1.1 Site description of habitat

The Slaney River Valley SAC supports a series of small to medium-sized saltmarsh systems distributed throughout the lower estuary, including Castlebridge, Ferrycarrig, Rosslare, and additional fragments within the wider estuary. Atlantic salt meadows (1330) is often interspersed with extensive swamp communities characterised by Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), which dominate in many areas (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

2.1.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for '*Atlantic salt meadows (Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae)*' in Slaney River Valley SAC (site code: 000781) 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. This conservation objective applies to the total extent of this habitat within the SAC, including but not limited to the mapped areas of this habitat.

The baseline survey for this habitat is McCorry and Ryle (2009).

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 1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) habitat is 9.99ha.

Loss of habitat has been noted in surveys at Rosslare and this was associated with human activities (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

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

2.1.4 Range

Habitat distribution

Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) 1330 habitat extends from Castlebridge and Ferrycarrig in the north to Slaney valley estuary and Rosslare in the south of the site (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

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 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) are assessed on the basis of:

Physical structure: hydrology

Target: Natural hydrology and processes of erosion and succession intact, no disturbance to creek and pan structure, as compared to baseline data.

Disturbed ground

Target: Less than 5% disturbed ground at 75% of stops or more.

Signs of negative activities e.g. infilling, reclamation, turf-cutting, pollution

Target: None recorded.

Vegetation structure: zonation

Target: Adequate number of zones present, depending on geographical type of saltmarsh.

Vegetation structure: spatial transitions

Target: No loss of natural transitions relative to baseline.

Vegetation structure: plant height

Target: Standard deviation of median plant height in monitoring stops is greater than 5cm.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

Target: Minimum of 12 typical species recorded across all plots.

Vegetation composition: negative indicator species

Target: Percentage *Spartina* spp. cover, or other negative species, within 5m radius of stop less than/equal to SMP baseline at 75% of stops or more.

Vegetation composition: negative indicator species: presence of *Spartina* spp. within vicinity of habitat

Target: Not present where not recorded by baseline.

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 not in good condition in the Slaney River Valley SAC when it was assessed by Brophy *et al.* (2019). In Castlebridge, the Structure and functions have been affected by undergrazing which is reducing the species richness. In Ferrycarrig, the species richness targets were not met for this habitat type, due to small amounts of this habitat present, and the presence of Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). In Rosslare, the spread of Common Cordgrass (*Spartina anglica*) and dumping of construction waste had impacted the habitat. The only section with good Structure and functions was at Slaney Valley Estuary. The Future prospects for habitat 1330 were not good based on the evidence available from surveys at Slaney River Valley SAC and the overall conservation status is Unfavourable (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

2.2 1410 Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*)

2.2.1 Site description of habitat

Slaney River Valley SAC supports a series of small to medium-sized saltmarsh distributed throughout the lower estuary, including at Castlebridge, Ferrycarrig, Rosslare, and additional fragments within the wider estuary. Collectively, these sites comprise a mosaic of Mediterranean salt meadows (1410) often interspersed with extensive swamp communities, particularly Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) and Sea Club-rush (*Bolboschoenus maritimus*), which dominate in many areas (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

2.2.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for '*Mediterranean salt meadows (Juncetalia maritimi)*' in Slaney River Valley SAC (site code: 000781) 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. This conservation objective applies to the total extent of this habitat within the SAC, including but not limited to the mapped areas of this habitat.

The baseline survey for this habitat is McCorry and Ryle (2009).

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 1410 Mediterranean Salt Meadows habitat is 6.78ha.

Loss of habitat has been noted in surveys at Castlebridge and this was associated with spread of non-native species (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

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

2.2.4 Range

Habitat distribution

Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) 1410 habitat occurs generally across the estuary, particularly at Castlebridge and Ferrycarrig in the north of the site (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

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 Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) are assessed on the basis of:

Physical structure: hydrology

Target: Natural hydrology and processes of erosion and succession intact, no disturbance to creek and pan structure, as compared to baseline data.

Vegetation structure: spatial transitions

Target: No loss of natural transitions relative to baseline.

Disturbed ground

Target: Not present where not recorded by baseline.

Signs of negative activities e.g. infilling, reclamation, turf-cutting, pollution

Target: None recorded.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

Target: At least six species recorded in the habitat and at least two species occur at a frequency of at least 25% of plots (excluding *Juncus maritimus*).

Vegetation composition: negative indicator species

Target: Percentage *Spartina* spp. cover, or other negative species, within 5m radius of stop less than/equal to baseline at 75% of stops or more.

Vegetation composition: negative indicator species: presence of *Spartina* spp. within vicinity of habitat

Target: Not present where not recorded by baseline.

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

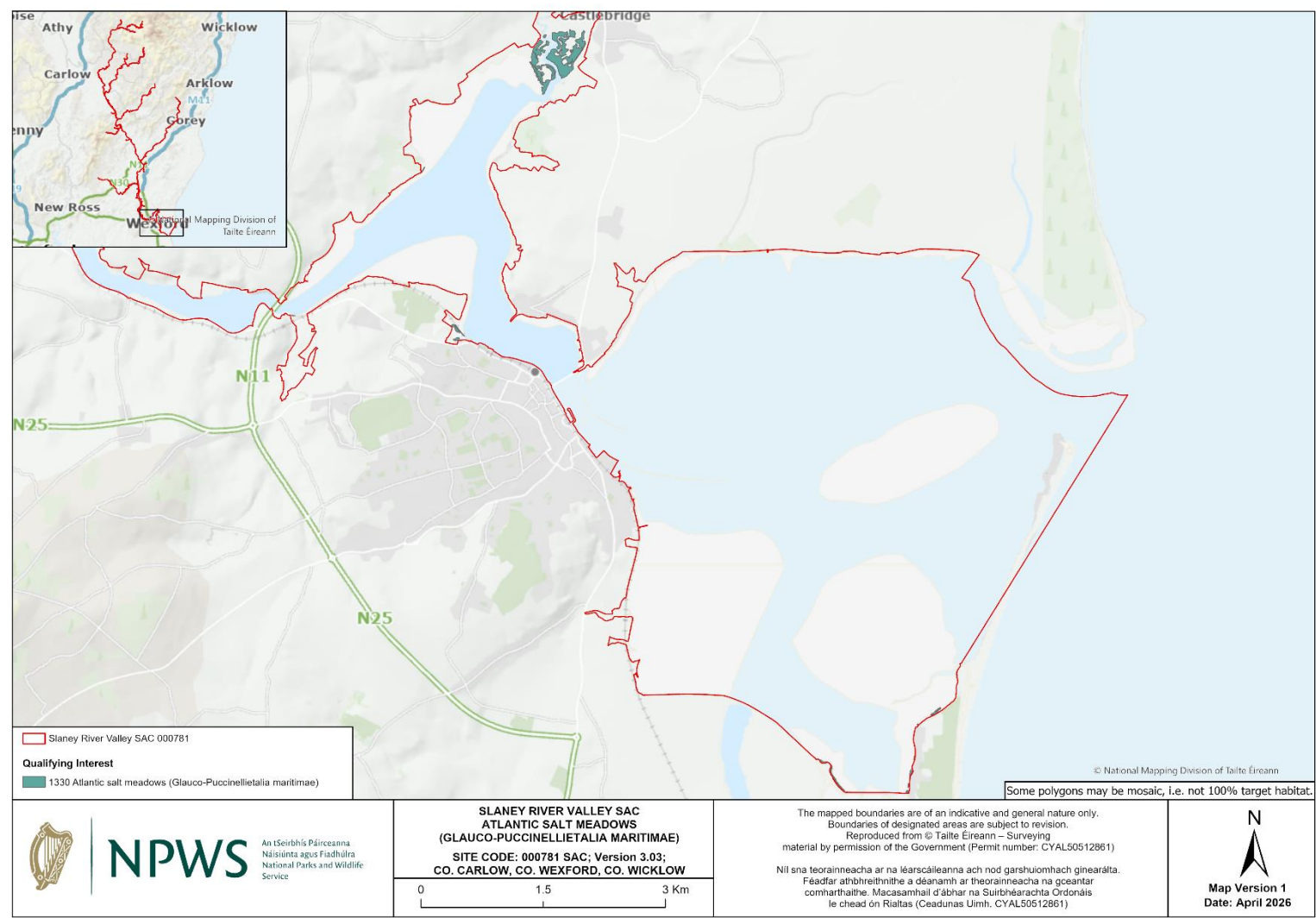
Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

The Structure and functions for 1410 Mediterranean salt meadows were not found to be in good condition in the Slaney River Valley SAC when the habitat was assessed. The habitat at Castlebridge was affected by undergrazing and low species richness. At Ferrycarrig, the habitat was characterised by low species richness, and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*) was recorded. At Rosslare, Structure and functions were affected by poaching by cattle and the lower Slaney estuary contained few salt tolerant (halophyte) species, though this may be the result of limited habitat area. Future prospects for habitat 1410 were also Unfavourable. Based on the evidence available from surveys at Slaney River Valley SAC the Conservation status of 1410 Mediterranean salt meadows is Unfavourable (Brophy *et al.*, 2019).

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Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritima*) in Slaney River Valley SAC (000781)



Appendix 2 – Distribution map of Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) in Slaney River Valley SAC (000781)

