# NPWS

# Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC
# (site code: 001932)

## Conservation objectives supporting document - coastal habitats

## Version 1 - supplement 1

**April 2026**

**IMPORTANT:** This supplement, published in 2026, includes details relating to the EU habitats **2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes") and 2190 Humid dune slacks** 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, 2017). Any references to this/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Conservation Objectives (SSCO), or SSCO supporting documents, including the mapping, are to be considered **superseded** by these updates.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

1. Introduction ..... 1
2. Coastal habitats ..... 1
2.1 2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)* ..... 1
2.1.1 Site description of habitat ..... 1
2.1.2. Overall objective ..... 1
2.1.3. Area ..... 1
2.1.4. Range ..... 1
2.1.5 Structure and Functions ..... 2
2.2 2190 Humid dune slacks ..... 3
2.2.1 Site description of habitat ..... 3
2.2.2 Overall objective ..... 3
2.2.3 Area ..... 3
2.2.4 Range ..... 3
2.2.5 Structure and Functions ..... 3
3. References ..... 5
Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)* in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (001932) ..... 6
Appendix 2 – Distribution map of Humid dune slacks in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (001932) ..... 7

Citation: NPWS (2026) Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (site code 001932) Conservation objectives supporting document - Coastal habitats V1 - supplement 1. Conservation Objectives Supporting Document Series. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Dublin, Ireland.

# 1. Introduction

2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ("grey dunes") and 2190 Humid dune slacks were added as a Qualifying Interests to Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (site code 001932) 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.

# 2. Coastal habitats

## 2.1 2130 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)*

### 2.1.1 Site description of habitat

The Dooaghtry coastal complex is situated at the western limit of the SAC. Dooaghtry comprises two distinct sand dune systems separated by a rock massif. The northern system consists of a long sandy bay stretching from a clay and rock headland at Kinadoohy in the north to a rock headland at Allaran Point in the south. Mobile dunes adjoin the headland at Kinadoohy and extend southwards, fronting a wide area of eroding fixed dunes which grades into Machair on a gently sloping hill behind. The site forms part of the Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (SAC 001932).

### 2.1.2. Overall objective

The overall objective for *'Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)*'* in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (SAC 001932) 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 of 2130 at Dooaghtry is calculated at 105.70ha, based on the area recorded by Delaney *et al*. (2013). Although some recovery since a previous survey (Ryle *et al.* 2009) was noted in the south of the site, a blow-out in the northern part of the site was observed to have expanded into the *2130 Fixed dunes (grey dunes), resulting in a loss of 4.09ha. This blowout and the resulting habitat loss were primarily associated with human activities rather than being due to natural processes.

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

### 2.1.4. Range

Habitat distribution

The range of dunes comprises two sand dune systems which are separated by a large rock outcrop. The larger of the two systems is found to the north of the outcrop and stretches from a small headland at Kinnadoohy to another headland at Dooaghtry.

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 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)* are assessed on the basis of:

**Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply**

Target: Natural circulation of sediment and organic matter, absence of 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.

**Bare sand**

Target: Bare sand is present but does not exceed 10% of fixed dune habitat, subject to natural processes.

**Vegetation structure: sward height**

Target: Sward height is varied across the habitat. Between 30 and 70% of stops have an average height between 2-10cm. The remaining stops have taller sward, except for tracks, disturbed ground and by bare sand areas.

**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 eight of the positive species occur with a frequency of more than 20% of stops and every stop contains at least four positive indicator species.

**Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species**

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

**Vegetation composition: scrub/trees other than Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)**

Target: Trees and scrub do not occur at a frequency of more than 60% of stops and combined cover across the habitat is 5%.

**Vegetation composition: trees/saplings from adjacent plantations**

Target: Present in or close to (*i.e.* within 20m) no more than 20% of stops.

**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 in poor condition due to the dunes having a consistently short sward. This is a sign that overgrazing has diminished the structural diversity of the habitat (Delaney *et al*., 2013). Other impacts included horse riding, walking, off road driving, campfires, dumping, and marram planting (positive impact) and erosion. Marram planting has taken place at the edges of the large blowout area between the 2130 Fixed dunes habitat.

## 2.2 2190 Humid dune slacks

### 2.2.1 Site description of habitat

Scattered throughout the Dooaghtry complex are damp hollows (dune slacks). The typical wet dune slack species occur here including Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris)* and Pointed Spear-moss (*Calliergonella cuspidata) (*Ryle *et al*., 2009).

### 2.2.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for *'Humid dune slacks'* in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (site code: (SAC 001932) is to '*maintain 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 total area of 2190 Humid dune slacks in SAC 1932 is calculated at 2ha. The area is mainly accounted for by large slack in the northern section of the site. This slack is unusual because a small stream runs through it; therefore, the slack is fed both by groundwater and surface water (Delaney *et al.,* 2013). No loss due to human activities has been recorded in this habitat at this site.

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

### 2.2.4 Range

Habitat distribution

There is a large slack in the northern section of the site, along with three smaller slacks distributed through the dunes (Delaney *et al*., 2013).

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 Humid dune slacks 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.

**Physical structure: hydrological and flooding regime**

Target: Hydrological regime supports typical seasonal fluctuations.

**Bare ground**

Target: Bare ground should be present but should not exceed 5% of dune slack habitat, with the exception of pioneer slacks which can have up to 20% bare ground.

**Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)**

Target: At least four of the positive species occur with a frequency of more than 40% of stops and another two species occur with a frequency of more than 20% of stops and every stop contains at least three positive species.

**Vegetation composition: bryophytes**

Target: Present in more than 20% of stops.

**Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species**

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

**Vegetation composition: trees/scrub**

Target: Present at no more than 40% of stops and combined cover of 5% or less.

**Vegetation composition: forb:grass ratio**

Target: Forb (herbaceous flowering plant) cover over 30% and grass cover below 70%.

**Vegetation composition: cover of *Salix repens***

Target: Less than 40% cover of *Salix repens.*

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

Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

All of the criteria passed the Structure and Functions assessment for 2190 Humid dune slack habitat and the 2190 humid dune slacks were in good condition (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.

Delaney, A., Devaney, F.M., Martin, J.R. and Barron, S.J. (2013) Monitoring survey of Annex I sand dune habitats in Ireland. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 75. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.

Martin, J.R., Daly, O.H. and Devaney F.M. (2017) Survey and assessment of vegetated shingle and associated habitats at 30 coastal sites. Volume 1: Main report. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 98. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dublin.

McCorry, M. and Ryle, T. (2009) Saltmarsh Monitoring Project 2007-2008. Unpublished report to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin.

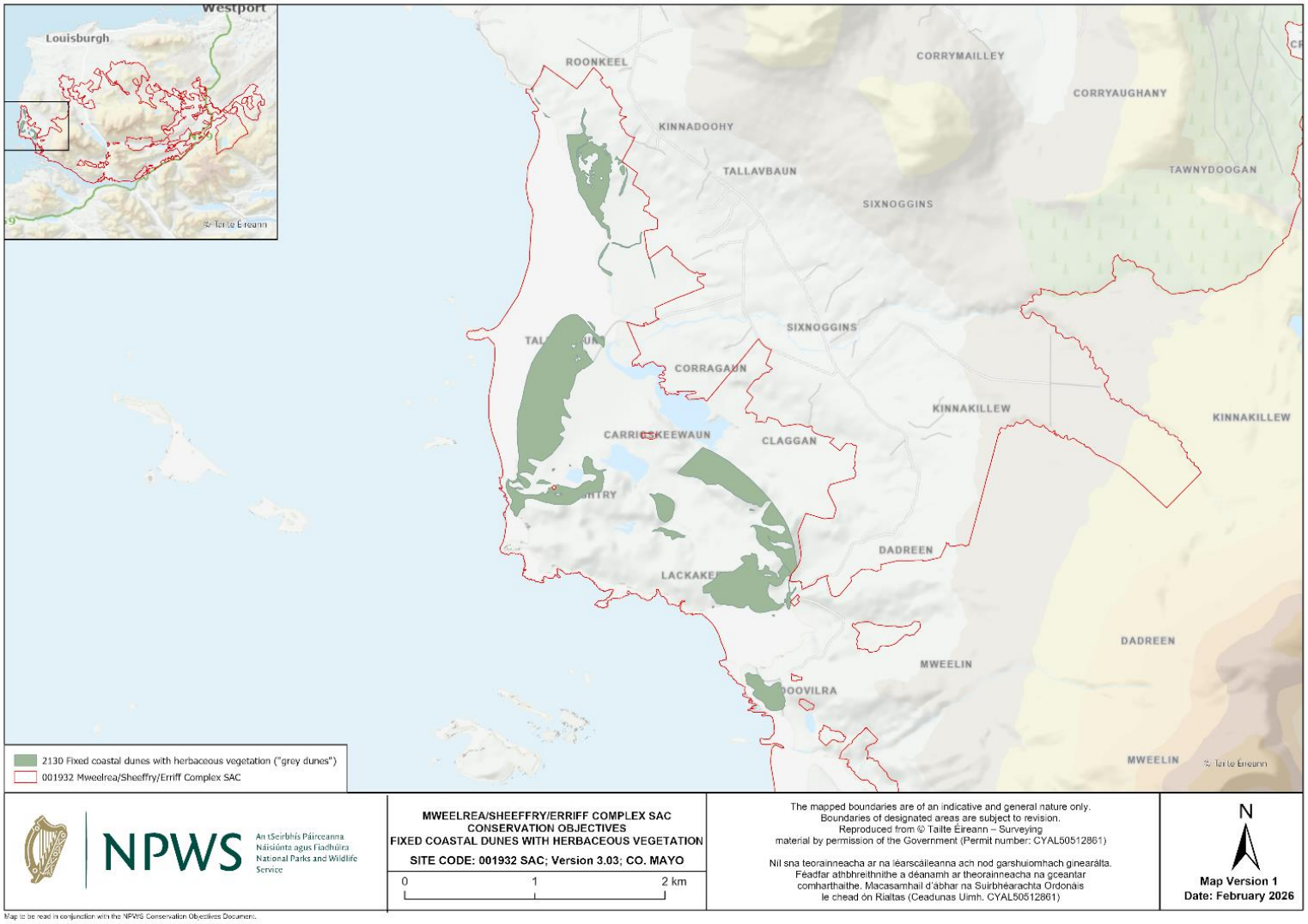
Moore, D. and Wilson, F. (1999) National Shingle Beach Survey of Ireland 1999. Unpublished report to NPWS, Dublin.

NPWS (2017) Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (site code 001932) Conservation objectives supporting document – Coastal habitats V1. Conservation Objectives Supporting Document Series. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Dublin, Ireland.

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 Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes)* in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (001932)**



## Appendix 2 – Distribution map of Humid dune slacks in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC (001932)