

SITE SYNOPSIS

SITE NAME: BLACKSOD BAY/BROAD HAVEN SPA

SITE CODE: 004037

Situated in the extreme north-west of Co. Mayo, this site comprises the sheltered open waters of the northern part of Blacksod Bay and its various bays and inlets, such as Trawmore Bay, Feorinyeeo Bay, Saleen Harbour, Elly Bay, Elly Harbour and others at Aghleam, Belmullet, Bunawillin, Emlybeg and Gweesalia, as well as the inner part of Broad Haven, including the bays and inlets of Sruwaddacon Bay, Moyrahan Bay, Traw-Kirtaun, Blind Harbour and Tullaghan Bay. At low tide extensive areas of intertidal sand and mudflats are exposed. These support a well-developed macro-invertebrate fauna. Talitrid amphipods occur in decomposing seaweed on the strand line, whilst polychaete worms (*Arenicola marina*), bivalves (*Cerastoderma edule*) and crustaceans, such as *Urothoe brevicornis*, *Ampelisca brevicornis* and *Bathyporeia pilosa*, are common in the middle shore. Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) occurs at several localities. Salt marshes, which are often on a peat substrate, fringe parts of the site and provide useful roosts for the wintering waterfowl. Also included within the site are two small lakes on the Mullet Peninsula, Cross Lough and Leam Lough, and some areas of machair at Fahy, Doolough, Dooyork and Srah.

The site is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the E.U. Birds Directive, of special conservation interest for the following species: Red-throated Diver, Great Northern Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Light-bellied Brent Goose, Common Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Ringed Plover, Sanderling, breeding Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*), Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew and Sandwich Tern. As required under Article 4 of the Birds Directive, particular attention shall be paid to the protection of the wetlands used by regularly occurring migratory birds, which are included within Blacksod Bay/Broad Haven SPA.

The site supports an excellent diversity of wintering waterfowl species and is one of the most important wetland complexes in the west. It has internationally important populations of Great Northern Diver (308) and Light-bellied Brent Goose (279) – figures are two year mean peaks for the period 2015/16 to 2016/17 and five year mean peaks for the period 1999/2000 to 2003/04 respectively. The site supports nationally important populations of Red-throated Diver (156), Slavonian Grebe (48), Common Scoter (3,772), Red-breasted Merganser (138) – figures are two year mean peaks for the period 2015/16 to 2016/17. The site also supports nationally important populations of Ringed Plover (590), Sanderling (171), Dunlin (1,255), Bar-tailed Godwit (664) and Curlew (567) – figures are five year mean peaks for the period 1999/2000 to 2003/04. Other species which occur include Shelduck (30), Mallard (84), Oystercatcher (471), Golden Plover (947), Grey Plover (50), Knot (160), Redshank (161), Turnstone (62), Black-headed Gull (220) and Common Gull (355).

A number of wader species breed within the areas of machair in the SPA, including a nationally important population of Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*) – 24 pairs (3 survey

mean, 1985-2009). Inishderry Island has a nationally important breeding colony of Sandwich Tern, with 114 pairs present in 1994 and 81 pairs in 1995. The terns at this site are considered to be the same population that nested at Carrowmore Lake in the past. It also has nesting Common Tern and Arctic Tern (total for the two species of 42 pairs in 1995), and a colony of Black-headed Gull (100 individuals in 1995). Little Tern has also bred in small numbers in the past (6 pairs in 1984).

Blacksod Bay/Broad Haven SPA is of high ornithological importance for its excellent diversity of wintering waterbirds, including internationally important populations of Great Northern Diver and Light-bellied Brent Goose, and nationally important populations of nine other species. Of particular note is the usage of the site by over 20% of the all-Ireland populations of Great Northern Diver and Common Scoter. It is also a nationally important breeding site for Sandwich Tern and Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*). It is of note that eight of the species that occur regularly are listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive, i.e. Great Northern Diver, Red-throated Diver, Golden Plover, Dunlin (subsp. *schinzii*), Bar-tailed Godwit, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern and Arctic Tern. Blacksod Bay and Broad Haven is a Ramsar Convention site.