

NPWS

**Clew Bay Complex SAC
(site code: 001482)**

**Conservation objectives supporting document -
coastal habitats**

Version 1 - supplement 1

August 2026

IMPORTANT: This supplement, published in 2026, includes details relating to the EU habitat **21A0 Machairs** which was added as a Qualifying Interest 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, 2011). Any references to this habitat 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Conservation Objectives (SSCO), or SSCO supporting documents, including the mapping, are to be considered **superseded** by these updates.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 21A0 Machairs (* in Ireland)	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.....	1
3. References	3
Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Machairs* in Clew Bay Complex SAC (001482)	4

Citation: NPWS (2026) Clew Bay Complex SAC (site code 001482) 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

21A0 Machairs* were added as a Qualifying Interest to Clew Bay Complex SAC (site code 001482) after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document sets out the SSCO for the newly listed Qualifying Interest for the site and acts as a supplement to the original SSCO Supporting Document.

2. Coastal habitats

2.1 21A0 Machairs (* in Ireland)

2.1.1 Site description of habitat

Rosmurrevagh, situated on the northern shore of Clew Bay, accounts for most of the Machair habitat in Clew Bay. This relatively large machair system occurs in close proximity to an extensive saltmarsh and a golf course. The eastern section contains less disturbed Machair and wetland areas considered important for conservation.

2.1.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for 'Machairs*' in Clew Bay Complex SAC (site code 001482) 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.

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 total area of Machair habitat that has been mapped within the SAC boundary is 32.37ha (Ryle *et al.*, 2009).

No loss of habitat due to human activities has been observed on the site. There is a golf course at Rosmurrevagh, which has been present since before the site was designated.

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

2.1.4 Range

Habitat distribution

The distribution of Machair in Clew Bay is fragmented and closely tied to local geomorphology. An extensive area of Machair habitat occurs adjacent to the shoreline areas at Rosmurrevagh, on the northern shore of Clew Bay.

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 Machairs* are assessed based on:

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 is present but does not exceed 5% of Machair habitat, subject to natural processes.

Flowering and fruiting of any positive indicator species

Target: Present in 40% or more of stops.

Vegetation structure: sward height

Target: Sward height of at least 8cm in July/August.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

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

Vegetation composition: bryophytes

Target: Minimum cover of 1% at every stop.

Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species

Target: No negative indicator species occurs at a frequency of more than 40% 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

Target: No more than 5% cover or under control.

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

Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

The Structure and functions of *21A0 Machairs were found not to be in good condition because of the presence of negative indicator species in some areas. Despite pressure due to grazing, the future prospects were considered good due to the erection of exclusion fencing. The overall condition of the habitat at the site was recorded as Unfavourable (Ryle *et al.*, 2009).

3. References

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Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Machairs* in Clew Bay Complex SAC (001482)

