

IUCN protected area management categories

Statement of Compliance for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

Introduction to Statements of Compliance

Statements of Compliance are an innovation of the IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom's *Putting Nature on the Map* project. The project has developed guidance on the use of the IUCN definition of a protected area and the assignment of the associated management categories and governance types¹. The guidance suggests that short but authoritative Statements of Compliance are produced for a conservation site or group of sites.

For groups of sites designated for conservation under one overriding piece of legislation or public policy the statements should concentrate on whether the sites meets the IUCN definition of a protected area. For statutory designations the Statements of Compliance should review all relevant legislation, focussing on the priority given to nature conservation in the long-term. For sites not covered by legislation the statements should review the significance for nature conservation of all relevant public policy positions that specifically affect the area.

In addition to reviewing legislation or policy in relation to the IUCN definition of a protected area, individual sites can also review in their Statement of Compliance which IUCN management category and governance type should be assigned to the site. In this case the statements should also provide an overview of current management objectives in particular in relation to prioritising nature conservation and summarize examples of current management practice that demonstrate the priority given to nature conservation and the ambition and vision for nature conservation in the future.

Note Statements of Compliance should be prepared with full reference to the 2008 Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories (see footnote for details)

The Statement of Compliance below has been prepared for a group of sites defined in legislation.

¹ Dudley, N (Editor) (2008) Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. X + 86pp. <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAPS-016.pdf>

AND

IUCN NCUK (2012); *Putting nature on the map - identifying protected areas in the UK: A handbook to help identify protected areas in the UK and assign the IUCN management categories and governance types to them*, IUCN National Committee for the United Kingdom, UK <http://www.iucn-uk.org/projects/protectedareas/tabid/65/default.aspx>

Background

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Scotland, England, Wales, and Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) in Northern Ireland, are statutory designations used throughout the respective countries. They are designated by the relevant statutory nature conservation bodies for the representation and protection of the United Kingdom's natural features – their plants, animals, rocks and landforms. The designating authorities are Scottish Natural Heritage, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and the Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland).

SSSI & ASSI and the IUCN definition of a protected area

The table uses the main key in the *Putting Nature on the Map Handbook* for identifying if a site meets the IUCN definition of a protected area².

Main elements of IUCN definition	Discussion of element in relation to SSSIs
Is the site a clearly defined geographical area?	Yes. Each SSSI/ASSI has a legally notified boundary. In Scotland these are publicly available in the Register of SSSIs. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland every SSSI/ASSI is registered as a local land charge.
Is it recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? NB 'nature' includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values.	Yes. SSSI/ASSI designation is open-ended (i.e. permanent). Individual SSSI are designated for one or more specified natural features – plants, animals, habitats, rocks and landforms. Management and protection must give priority to these notified features but may also support the conservation of other habitats, species, rocks and landforms.
Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present but they do not cause conflict, i.e. nature conservation is the priority	Yes. The priority objective of SSSI/ASSI designation and management is nature conservation, but the designation may also accommodate other land use objectives where they are compatible with the nature conservation objectives.
Does the designation of the site prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?	Yes. The designating authorities have various statutory and other means to prevent or eliminate practices that would obstruct achievement of a site's nature conservation objective(s). They may refuse consent or issue consent subject to safeguarding conditions for proposed operations. Other regulatory authorities may only grant permission for operations likely to damage SSSI/ASSI after statutory consultation with the designating authority and taking account of its advice. Damaging operations may still be permitted for over-riding reasons of national interest.
Does the designation of the site aim to maintain, or ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected?	Yes. The designating authorities aim to maintain or increase the naturalness of the features for which an SSSI was designated. They monitor and report the condition of SSSI/ASSI (common standards monitoring) and take action to bring features in to favourable condition.

² See page 26 of the *Putting Nature on the Map Handbook*

Main elements of IUCN definition	Discussion of element in relation to SSSIs
<p>Is the long-term nature conservation ensured through legal or other effective means? E.g. national or international statutory law/ agreement/convention, traditional rules or NGO policy.</p>	<p>Yes. SSSI/ASSI are established in law (Scotland: Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended); England & Wales: Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); The Nature Conservation and Amenity lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 & The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002).</p> <p>These enactments are periodically reviewed and updated to address emerging issues. The designating authorities may vary, extend and de-notify SSSI/ASSI to reflect ecological changes. To safeguard an SSSI/ASSI they may also exercise powers to enter land for various purposes, erect signs, enter management agreements to support appropriate conservation management of the land, seek land management orders (or equivalent) to compel the appropriate management of the land, establish bye-laws, seek nature conservation orders to strictly prohibit specified activities by any person and, as a last resort compulsorily purchase the land.</p>