CARN-GLENSHANE PASS SAC
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CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Document Details

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V1.0	June 2013	Internal working document	PC
V2.0	2015	Complete review	RMK
V2.0	01.04.2015	Effective date of Version 2	PC
V2.1	11.10.2017	Removed wording '*excluding recently burnt areas*' from bare peat target in all relevant Annex tables	PMC

1. INTRODUCTION

EU Member States have a clear responsibility under the Habitats and Birds Directives[1] to ensure that all habitats and species of Community Interest are maintained or restored to Favourable Conservation Status (FCS). Natura 2000 sites have a crucial role to play in achieving this overall objective since they are the most important core sites for these species and habitats. Each site must therefore be managed in a way that ensures it contributes as effectively as possible to helping the species and habitats for which it has been designated reach a favourable conservation status within the EU.

To ensure that each Natura 2000 site contributes fully to reaching this overall target of FCS, it is important to set clear conservation objectives for each individual site. These should define the desired state, within that particular site, of each of the species and habitat types for which the site was designated.

Once a site has been included in the Natura 2000 network, Member States are required to implement, on each site, the necessary conservation measures which correspond to the ecological requirements of the protected habitat types and species of Community Interest present, according to Article 6.1 of the Habitats Directive. They must also prevent any damaging activities that could significantly disturb those species and habitats (Article 6.2) and to protect the site from new potentially damaging plans and projects likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site (Article 6.3, 6.4).

Conservation measures can include both site-specific measures (i.e. management actions and/or management restrictions) and horizontal measures that apply to many Natura 2000 sites over a larger area (e.g. measures to reduce nitrate pollution or to regulate hunting or resource use).

In Northern Ireland, Natura 2000 sites are usually underpinned by the designation of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) under the Environment (NI) Order 2002 (as amended).

[1] 92/43/EEC and 2009/147/EC (codified version of Directive79/409/EEC as amended)

2. ROLE OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

Conservation Objectives have a role in

- Conservation Planning and Management – guide management of sites, to maintain or restore the habitats and species in favourable condition

- Assessing Plans and Projects, as required under Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive - Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) are required to assess proposed plans and projects in light of the site's conservation objectives.

- Monitoring and Reporting – Provide the basis for assessing the condition of a feature, the factors that affect it and the actions required.

3. DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS

Favourable Conservation Status is defined in Articles 1(e) and 1(i) of the Habitats Directive:

The conservation status of a natural habitat is the sum of the influences acting on it and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural distribution, structure and functions as well as the long term survival of its typical species. The conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as favourable when:

- Its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and
- The specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- The conservation status of its typical species is favourable as defined in Article 1(i).

For species, favourable conservation status is defined in Article 1(i) as when:

- population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and;
- the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and;
- there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its population on a long term basis.

3.1 DEFINITION OF FAVOURABLE CONDITION

Favourable Condition is defined as "**the target condition for an interest feature in terms of the abundance, distribution and/or quality of that feature within the site**".

The standards for favourable condition (Common Standards) have been developed by JNCC and are applied throughout the UK. Achieving Favourable Condition on individual sites will make an important contribution to achieving Favourable Conservation Status across the Natura 2000 network.

4. SITE INFORMATION

COUNTY: LONDONDERRY

GRID REFERENCE: IH788075

AREA: 1938.78 ha

5. SUMMARY SITE DESCRIPTION

Carn/Glenshane Pass extends over the uplands to the north-east of the Sperrin Mountains, between Maghera and Dungiven. It falls into Coleraine and Limavady Borough Councils and Magherafelt District Council. With an area of largely intact blanket bog, estimated to be just over 1650 ha, it is one of the few remaining examples of good quality blanket bog within this region of Northern Ireland.

The peatland complex is comprised of a series of raised and flushed peat bog units within an all encompassing mantle of blanket peat. The blanket bog is somewhat degraded in places with large blocks eroded, other sections drained and still other areas overgrazed. Nevertheless, the peatland supports good *Sphagnum*-rich blanket bog vegetation with high dwarf-shrub cover. The site also includes a well-patterned hummock, hollow and pool complex. Localised pockets of wet heath occur on the steeper slopes.

Further details of the site are contained in the ASSI Citation and Views About Management statement, which are available on the NIEA website (www.doeni.gov.uk/niea).

5.1 BOUNDARY RATIONALE

The boundary of Carn/Glenshane Pass has been drawn to include all areas of high quality blanket bog and associated semi-natural habitats, including cutover bog, wet and dry heath, acid flushes, flushed and wet grassland and dry grassland, particularly along the streams that run through the area. It should be noted that although much of the peatland within the SAC has been modified to varying degrees, the semi-natural blanket bog vegetation remains in comparatively good condition.

The boundary around the entire SAC is defined as the edge of the high quality semi-natural blanket bog vegetation and associated habitats. However, there are no clearly defined boundaries distinguishing high quality blanket bog vegetation from degraded and semi-improved habitats. Instead there is a gradual transition from good quality blanket bog vegetation to degraded and highly impacted peatland communities on the lower slopes. Therefore it is sometimes quite difficult to find an appropriate physical boundary to mark the periphery of the interest features. Separation between areas included within the SAC boundary and those more degraded areas which are excluded depends upon the judgement of the surveyor. This separation was based on a variety of factors, such as *Sphagnum* moss cover, bare peat, grass:dwarf-shrub ratio, frequency of dung and poaching, burning and drainage.

The boundary of Carn/Glenshane Pass follows a series of ditches, banks, tracks, streams and fences which delineates the quality blanket bog and excludes severely degraded peatland vegetation and semi-improved lands. Although many of the boundaries are stock-proof fences, there are also numerous boundaries, that although clearly apparent on the ground are not completely stock proof. Note, in several instances, quite large expanses of fairly degraded wet and flushed grassland and degraded peatland has been included within the SAC boundary because there was absolutely no physical boundary with which to exclude them.

In the centre of the peatland complex an area of blanket peat has been planted with Sitka Spruce and is excluded from the SAC. This forestry plantation, estimated to cover an area of 88 ha, is excluded from the SAC using a series of fences and the Inver Burn. Note, it has been policy in Northern Ireland to exclude afforested blanket bog from all upland blanket bog ASSI/SACs.

6. SAC SELECTION FEATURES

Feature type	Feature	Global Status	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	**Blanket Bog**	**B**	**1651.4 ha**
Habitat	Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*	D	38.6 ha

Table 1. List of SAC selection features. Those with global status A-C will be referred to in ANNEX I.

The global status is an expert judgement of the overall value of the site for the conservation of the relevant Annex I habitat. Sites have been graded A, B or C - in the UK these gradings have been interpreted as follows:

A - Sites holding outstanding examples of the habitat in a European context.

B - Sites holding excellent stands of the habitat, significantly above the threshold for SSSI/ASSI notification but of somewhat lower value than grade A sites.

C - Examples of the habitat which are of at least national interest (i.e. usually above the thresholdfor SSSI/ASSI notification on terrestrial sites) but not significantly above this. These habitats are not the primary reason for SACs being selected.

D - Habitat present but not of sufficient extent or quality to merit listing as SAC feature.

There is therefore a distinction between the principal features for which sites have been selected (those graded A or B) and those which are only of secondary interest (those graded C). This is a useful distinction but it is important to note that all three grades are qualifying SAC interest features.

Click here to go to the Natura 2000 Standard Data Form for Carn-Glenshane Pass SAC.

6.1 ASSI SELECTION FEATURES

Carn-Glenshane Pass ASSI

Feature Type	Feature	Size/ extent/ population
Habitat	Blanket Bog	1651.4 ha

Table 2. List of ASSI features.

7. CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

The *Conservation Objective* for this site is:

To maintain (or restore where appropriate) the Blanket Bog to favourable condition.

For each SAC feature, there are a number of component objectives which are outlined in the table below. These include a series of attributes, measures and targets which form the basis of *Condition Assessment*. The results of this will determine whether the feature is in favourable condition or not. The feature attributes and measures are found in the attached annex.

8. SAC SELECTION FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

SAC Feature	Global Status	Component Objective
Blanket Bog	B	Maintain the extent of intact blanket bog and actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation.
		Maintain and enhance the quality of the blanket bog community types including the presence of notable species.
		Seek to expand the extent of actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation into degraded (non-active) areas of cutover bog.
		Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats associated with the blanket bog, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the blanket bog.
		Maintain the hydrology of the intact blanket bog peat mass.
		Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the SAC where there may be the potential for blanket bog rehabilitation.

9. ASSI FEATURE OBJECTIVE REQUIREMENTS

ASSI Feature	Component Objective
Blanket Bog	Maintain the extent of intact blanket bog and actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation.
	Maintain and enhance the quality of the blanket bog community types including the presence of notable species.
	Seek to expand the extent of actively regenerating blanket bog vegetation into degraded (non-active) areas of cutover bog.
	Maintain the diversity and quality of other habitats associated with the blanket bog, especially where these exhibit natural transition to the blanket bog.
	Maintain the hydrology of the intact blanket bog peat mass.
	Seek nature conservation management over suitable areas immediately outside the SAC where there may be the potential for blanket bog rehabilitation.

10. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Ownership

Carn-Glenshane Pass is a large site which is privately owned with over 30 individuals owning various sections of the bog. An additional 59 individuals have turbary rights to cut peat for fuel within some of the management units.

The complex ownership pattern within the bog makes a unified approach to site management more difficult.

Although the SAC is in multi-ownership, very little fencing had been carried out within the SAC boundary at the time of ASSI declaration. Therefore much of the land has been grazed in common. However, at the time of ASSI declaration in March 2000, there was evidence that new fencing was being erected across vast

expanses of the open blanket bog. The entire area of the Carn-Glenshane Pass SAC lies within the Sperrins Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and it is assumed that additional fencing is taking place over the site as a consequence of ESA grants to individual landowners. This may have have implications for future grazing regimes and this is clearly the main management consideration for the blanket bog vegetation

Adjoining Land Use

The main adjoining land-use outside the ASSI is semi-improved sheep pasture, degraded blanket bog and wet grasslands. These areas are more intensively grazed by sheep and have severely degraded peatland complexes as a consequence of drainage and mechanised peat extraction.

11. MAIN THREATS, PRESSURES AND ACTIVITIES WITH IMPACTS ON THE SITE

Both on-site and off-site activities can potentially affect SAC/ASSI features. The list below is not exhaustive, but deals with the most likely factors that are either affecting Carn-Glenshane Pass, or could affect it in the future. Although Blanket Bog is the qualifying SAC feature, factors affecting ASSI features are also considered.

NOTE - Carrying out any of the Notifiable Operations listed in the ASSI schedule could affect the site.

Peat Cutting.

There has been extensive hand peat cutting for many years around the periphery of the Carn-Glenshane SAC which has encroached significantly into the intact surface of the blanket bog. However, many of the old hand cuttings now support actively regenerating bog vegetation. In recent times mechanised peat cutting has taken place in some areas and has encroached onto the intact surface of the blanket bog. There is still some localised mechanical peat extraction taking place within the SAC boundary.

ACTION: No peat cutting within the SAC.

Burning

Burning of the vegetation is evident in places right across the site, although whether this is an agricultural management practice, or an incidental effect of turf cutting is often unknown. However, at Crockor, to the south of the site, there appears to be some form of burning trials being carried out within the site. Excessive burning will tend to reduce the cover of *Sphagnum* mosses and ericaceous species, increasing the proportion of *Molinia caerulea* and *Trichophorum cespitosum*. In addition, structural diversity of the vegetation can be reduced. Landowners who have entered into an ESA agreement with DARD must not burn the vegetation without prior authorisation from the Department. Burning of peatland should only be carried out under controlled conditions.

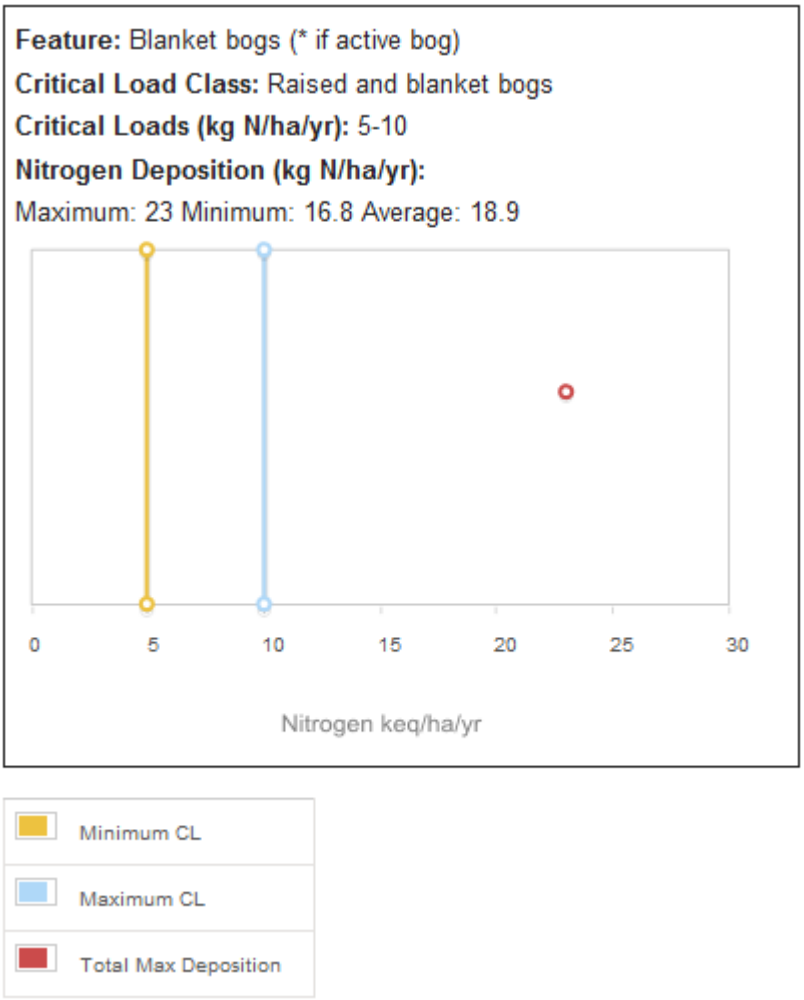
Blanket bog and wet heath should not be burnt and dry heath should not be burnt more than once every 12-20 years, and not at all in areas where the gradient is > 25^{o} as this may result in erosion.
ACTION : No burning within the SAC

Drainage
Many of the deeper blanket bog units throughout the SAC have been extensively drained or 'Moor-gripped'. This was a practice carried out under grant aid in the 1980s to try and improve the grazing potential of the dwarf-shrub vegetation. The shallow, often parallel drains may be widely spaced at 50 – 100 m, or close together at approximately 15 m intervals. Although there is some drying evident along each side of the drains, there is little evidence to suggest that grazing potential has been significantly enhanced. In fact many of the narrow drains have filled with water or collapsed. However, many do continue to carry water off the peat mass at an accelerated rate.

In addition, there are a series of drains associated with many of the peat cuttings around the periphery of the site. All of these drains show up on the aerial photograph and are clearly apparent on the ground. Any major drains that are currently carrying water away from the peat mass should be identified and blocked. Note that drainage works outside of the site's boundaries could potentially impact upon the bog's hydrology.
ACTION: Block active drains where appropriate.

Grazing
Stocking levels seem to be at a reasonable level whilst grazing pressure appears to be quite variable over much of the blanket bog with large areas retaining a good cover of dwarf-shrub species. However, other areas have suffered severe damage from poaching and overgrazing as the sheep tend to congregate and stay in these areas. This localised overgrazing, which leaves large areas of blanket bog ungrazed, could be prevented by appropriate shepherding.
ACTION: Where they are present, fences around the periphery of the SAC should be maintained to prevent sheep from outside the area straying into the site. Localised overgrazing should be addressed by setting appropriate grazing levels for each grazing unit and through the introduction of shepherding.

Nitrogen Deposition
Excess nitrogen deposition can favour the growth of competitive plants and lead to changes in ecosystem structure or function and to a reduction in biodiversity. National scale studies show the potential adverse effects of excess nitrogen on natural and semi-natural habitats to be widespread across the UK. Lower and upper critical loads have been calculated for Carn-Glenshane Pass SAC.



(Source: Air Pollution Information System (APIS) website- www.apis.ac.uk)

ACTION: Seek to maintain or where necessary, restore concentrations and deposition of air pollutants to at or below the site-relevant critical load.

Fly-tipping

There are some very localised incidences of fly-tipping around the periphery of the site and associated with past peat cutting.

ACTION: Remove all evidence of past fly-tipping. If localised fly-tipping does occur, it should be removed as soon as possible to help prevent any further incidences of dumping.

Changes to surrounding land use

Any changes in local land-use e.g. drainage, road improvements, afforestation, agricultural intensification and development, may be detrimental to the SAC.

Action: Reduce the risk of surrounding agricultural intensification by encouraging the adjacent owner/occupiers to enter into agri-environment schemes. Use Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs), through the planning process, to minimise any development risks adjacent to the SAC.

Climate Change
Northern Ireland faces changes to its climate over the next century. Indications are that we will face hotter, drier summers, warmer winters and more frequent extreme weather events.
ACTION: When developing SAC management plans, the likely future impacts of climate change should be considered and appropriate changes made.

12. MONITORING

Monitoring of SACs takes place on using two monitoring techniques.

Site Integrity Monitoring (SIM) is carried out to ensure compliance with the ASSI/ SAC Schedule. The most likely processes of change will either be picked up by SIM (e.g. dumping, burning, turf cutting, grazing etc.) or will be comparatively slow (e.g. gradual degradation of the bog and associated habitats through desiccation).

These longer-term changes will be picked up by monitoring of the feature via **Site Condition Assessment** - this is carried out on a rolling basis to pick up subtle changes in the condition of the feature.

The method for Site Condition Assessment was agreed by the relevant JNCC-led Lead Co-ordination Network although the methodology has been modified to reflect individual site attributes in Northern Ireland.

12.1 MONITORING SUMMARY

1. *Monitor the integrity of the site (SIM or Compliance Monitoring)*
Complete boundary survey to ensure that the fencing, where present is still intact. Ensure that there has been no peat cutting, moor-gripping, dumping or inappropriate burning carried out within the SAC boundary. Evaluating stocking densities would also be desirable. This SIM should be carried out once a year.

2. Monitor the condition of the site (Condition Assessment)
Monitor the key attributes for the blanket bog. This will detect if the blanket bog is in favourable condition or not. See Annex I.

The favourable condition table provided in Annex 1 is intended to supplement the conservation objectives only in relation to management of established and ongoing activities and future reporting requirements on monitoring condition of the site and its features. It does not by itself provide a comprehensive basis on which to assess plans and projects, but it does provide a basis to inform the scope and nature of any Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) that may be needed. It should be noted that completion of a HRA is a separate activity to

condition monitoring, requiring consideration of issues specific to individual plans or projects.

13. REFERENCES

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ANNEX 1

Feature 1 (SAC) - Active blanket bog (Status B)

(* = primary attribute. One failure among primary attributes = unfavourable condition)

Attributes	Targets	Method of Assessment	Comments
* Area of blanket bog and upland raised mire (ha)	Maintain the extent of the intact bog surface at 1651.4 ha.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots and across the blanket bog using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	The blanket bog communities include M17 – *Scirpus cespitosus Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire, M18 – *Sphagnum papillosum* raised and blanket mire and M19 *Calluna vulgaris - Eriophorum vaginatum* blanket mire.
* Area of mosaic communities and associated habitats	Maintain associated mosaic communities and habitats (wet heath, dry heath, upland fen, etc)	Visual estimate across the SAC using a combination of aerial photographs, SIM and Condition Assessment structured walk.	Repeat monitoring using condition assessment, SIM, and aerial photographs should indicate whether mosaics and associated habitats have changed or been lost.
* Pool/hummock system extent and complexity	The extent and complexity of pool and hummock systems at least maintained. Differentiation of *Sphagnum* species should be recorded with *S. cuspidatum* or *S.*	The extent of pool and hummock systems should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and	The extent of pool and hummock systems should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment.

	auriculatum in the pools and *S. papillosum* and *S. capillifolium* forming the lawns and hummocks.	SIM.	
Dwarf-shrub Height (cm)	Average ericoid height should be 15-30cm.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	On some areas of blanket bog, the dwarf-shrub height will largely reflect recent management patterns. However, on largely undisturbed sites with minimal or no grazing, dwarf shrubs should display no apparent growth forms with a fairly uniform height between 15-30cm.
* Bare Peat, or ground covered by algal mats (%)	Bare peat etc should occupy less than 2% of the intact blanket bog surface overall.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Bare peat, or bare ground carpeted by *Polytrichum* spp., *Campylopus* spp. crust forming lichens or algal mats can occur as a consequence of peat cutting or excessive burning and/or grazing. Bare ground here represents bare peat etc. within the blanket bog vegetation rather than naturally eroded surfaces where bare ground forms a natural part of the erosion feature.
* *Sphagnum* cover/ abundance (% cover and frequency) Active Peat Formation (DAFOR)	*Sphagnum* moss species should have a minimum cover of 25% over at least 66% of the intact blanket bog surface. Thick, hummock forming species of sphagnum should be at least occasional. Species present should include a mixture of both thin species: - *S. capillifolium* and *S. tenellum* and the thick hummock	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	A constant *Sphagnum* moss cover is indicative of active peat formation and is dependent on the maintenance of a high water table. *Sphagnum* moss is therefore used to measure the hydrological integrity of the blanket bog surface.

	forming species*: - S. papillosum* and *S. magellanicum* at least occasional over the surface.		
* Ericaceous Cover (%)	Ericoid cover frequent over the surface of the intact blanket bog. Dwarf-shrub cover greater than 33%. Less than 33% is only acceptable in wetter areas where *Narthecium ossifragum* or *Sphagnum* spp. are abundant and forming lawns.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Ericoid (dwarf-shrub species) include *Calluna vulgaris*, *Erica tetralix*, *E. cinerea*, *Myrica gale*, *Vaccinium myrtillis and Empetrum nigrum*.
* Ericoid diversity (DAFOR)	At least two species of dwarf-shrub should be widespread and frequent. Where three or more species are present, but only one frequent and widespread, the abundance of the less abundant species may be combined and treated as if they are a single species.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	A mono-dominant sward of *Calluna vulgaris* may suggest that the surface of the intact bog is drying out – i.e. the water table is too low beneath the surface of the bog.
* Scrub/tree encroachment on any active peat surface (DAFOR)	Scrub/tree encroachment should be no more than rare on the intact bog surface, or in the actively regenerating cutover areas.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Scrub encroachment should be checked using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Invasive exotic species such as *Rhododendron ponticum* should be removed immediately.
* Erosion Features associated with human impacts (% and DAFOR)	No gully erosion or bare peat associated with more concentrated human impacts (eg drainage, peat extraction,	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The extent of man induced erosion should be monitored using a combination of aerial photographs and Condition Assessment. Erosion is a natural feature of blanket bog, particularly marginal fretting

	ATV tracks or recreational activities). Man induced/enhanced erosion should occupy less than 2% of the total area of blanket bog other than very localised instances.		on breaks of slope. However, where natural erosion is exacerbated by human activity, the bog will not be in favourable condition, except where such erosion is very limited in nature.
* Graminoid Cover (%)	Total cover of graminoids should not exceed 50%, unless dominated by *Molinia caerulea* forming even swards over waterlogged areas with *Sphagnum* moss cover greater than 25%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	Include true grasses, sedges, and rushes in this assessment. *Eriophorum vaginatum*, *Trichophorum cespitosum*, *Deschampsia flexuosa*, *Juncus squarrosus* or other graminoids (except *Molinia* in some instances) should not dominate over other species.
* Management – Peat extraction	No evidence of unconsented active peat extraction.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	In some instances areas of cut peat can re-vegetate with good blanket bog vegetation which meets the attributes for favourable condition.
* Management - Grazing (%)	Signs of moderate or heavy grazing by cattle or sheep should occupy less than 5% of the blanket bog vegetation within any grazing unit.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	The frequency of droppings, the extent of poaching and the presence of grazing induced *Calluna vulgaris* growth forms indicate moderate and heavy grazing where any one of the above is recorded as more than occasional.
Molinia caerulea Cover (%)	Where *Molinia caerulea* cover is greater than 50%, it should form an even (not tussocky) sward in waterlogged conditions with *Sphagnum* moss cover greater than 25%.	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	*Molinia caerulea* only occurs as a natural component of the bog vegetation in the extreme west of Northern Ireland where the climate is generally warmer and wetter i.e. more oceanic.
Presence of rare or scarce species specific to the site.	*Sphagnum imbricatum* and *Sphagnum fuscum*, where they have been recorded, should	Visual estimate in 2x2 m plots.	

	remain at least present along the length of each of the w-walks. If these species are not recorded on any one visit, it does not automatically make the SAC unfavourable.		

Frequency -
1-20% = Rare
21-40% = Occasional
41- 60% = Frequent
> 60% = Constant