

Appendix 15.2.1

SLVIA National Seascape Character Types

APPENDIX 15.2.1 National Seascape Character Types

Five national seascape character types are found within the study area (SNH Commissioned Report no 103). These are:

Type 1: Remote High Cliffs

Location

- Atlantic coasts of Orkney
- North Caithness

Physical characteristics

- High cliffs, often over 200m tall, with occasional small sandy or stony bays at their base, contained by rocky headlands. Stacks, caves and collapsed cliffs are often features of this coastline. There is a strong contrast of line and form arising between the sheer verticality of cliffs and wide horizontal expanse of the sea.
- This type usually has a high moorland, or occasionally, mountainous, hinterland where semi-natural heathland is the dominant landcover. Settlement is generally absent although occasional small villages can be found tucked in bays and inlets or extensive crofting on tops within Highland areas. Light houses can be prominent features on headlands. This type has a remote, wild character due to the absence of roads and settlement.
- Where roads exist they are aligned parallel to the coast, for example, the North Sutherland coast. Access and views to the coast from the hinterland are restricted due to the cliffs. Wide elevated views are directed along the coast and out to open sea, although views of other islands are possible from parts of Orkney. Views of rigs or boats can be a focus within the maritime component of this type. The Northern quality of light often gives intense clarity in views.

Experiential qualities

- Atlantic coasts of Orkney and Sutherland and parts of Shetland coast have a particularly exposed character and are physically remote from settlement. The coast is difficult to access and the water's edge is often blocked by impassable steep cliffs. These are exhilarating and awe-inspiring coastlines due to the great height of cliffs giving elevated and distant views and being particularly dramatic when the sea is turbulent.
- The noise of sea birds nesting on cliffs and waves add to the attraction and excitement of this seascape type.

Type 2: Mainland rocky coastline with open sea views

Location

- East Sutherland

Physical characteristics

- Long straight stretches of coastline with cliffs rising to some 30 metres height and often with a raised beach edge. There are few significant headlands although geological differences create variety with softer sandstone forming an indented coast with bays and inlets, arches and caves; harder volcanic rocks producing a more resistant coastline of promontories, low

cliffs and rocky shoreline. Notable blow holes on the north east coast. Productive arable farming occurs up to the cliff edge and tree cover is minimal.

- Compact fishing villages are found located at the base of cliffs in small bays while castles and cliff top forts occur on dramatic headland locations...and are highlighted against the simple sea backdrop. These settlements and built features appear to be spaced at even intervals and thus provide a visual rhythm of foci along the coast. Views over the North Sea are generally wide and open, although parts of the Caithness coast have views of Hoy over the Pentland Firth. Shipping is a common feature seen out to sea. Some isolated industry occurs along this coast.

Experiential qualities

- Exposed coastline with open views. Strong historical associations of castles and cliff top fort and cultural interest of fishing villages. These coastlines are of geological and ecological interest and support nesting birds. While these are exposed seascapes, their agricultural hinterland, the presence of settlement and nearby roads and also views of shipping and occasional industry, limits the sense of wildness likely to be experienced.

Type 3: Mainland deposition coastline with open views

Location

- Parts of the East Caithness and Sutherland Coast

Physical characteristics

- Low sections of coast comprising long, sweeping curved sandy beaches, often backed by dunes and forming a soft linear edge to the sea. This type tends to have a simple horizontal visual composition of sky, sea and land. Grassland and gorse occurs behind dunes and this is backed in turn by flat, mixed or arable farmland.
- Views are long and expansive along beaches and uninterrupted, although low level, views occur over the North Sea. Ships are commonly seen at sea.

Experiential qualities

- This type is located within a relatively well-populated area and beaches are an important recreational resource. The straightness of the coast and open views of the sea give a degree of exposure. The northern coastal light can often accentuate particular textures, shapes and colours. This type has a dynamic character – both physically and experientially – visible in the migration of sand and the constantly changing character of the sea and passing weather systems.

Type 7: Kyles and sea lochs

Location

- North Sutherland Coast

Physical characteristics

- This type occurs on the deeply indented coastline of North Sutherland, forming a transition between the open sea and the glens and straths which extend from an interior landscape of large scale mountains and moorland. The sea lochs tend to form a narrow inlet of water, strongly enclosed by steep high hills. Kyles tend to be broader, surrounded by a low and gently sloped landform. The kyles are quite densely populated along their shores with small settlements concentrated at bridging points at the inlet mouth and forming a key focus in

the landscape/seascape. Access routes are aligned around the shoreline or over the kyles via causeways. This landscape tends to penetrate into areas of moorland slopes and hills and its open central water space offers views of mountains.

- Funnelled views along the kyle or sea loch to open sea are also a feature although, islands can sometimes restrict views. Fish farms have significant impacts within this type forming foci within coastal waters.

Experiential qualities

- The containment of kyles and sea lochs limits experience of the open sea, with views focussing on land either side and an often mountainous interior. The settled character of this type together with this containment give a calm, secure feel. Strong visual rhythm of kyles, sea lochs and settlements at bridging points experienced when travelling sequentially through this type.

Type 12: Deposition Coasts of Islands

Location

- Low lying coasts of the Orkney Islands.

Physical Characteristics

- Long sandy beaches backed by dunes and low lying machair or pastures and with crofting or farms set back from coast. An open, low lying, largely treeless and windswept landscape with views of the Atlantic Ocean or North Sea, although dunes can often screen views of open sea and coast inland. Sparsely settled, low key land management and lack of coastal development.

Experiential Qualities

- Often wild, remote 'edge of ocean' feel. Big breakers and low lying exposure of island landscapes with few sightings of land in large scale sea views. Combination of mountains with coast provides particularly high scenic quality and drama.