

Scottish Water

Vatersay Outfall

Ecological Survey Report

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Summary

An ecological survey was carried out of the area of the proposed repair works to the Vatersay outfall, Isle of Barra. There were no significant numbers of wintering/passage birds using the area, no European Protected Species present and no habitats of conservation importance. There is negligible scope for the works to impact on the nearest designated sites for conservation.

1 Introduction

The Vatersay outfall is located on the east coast of the island of Vatersay, south of the Isle of Barra, and within 350m of the township of Vatersay, grid reference NL 63460 94700. An ecological walkover survey of the area of the Vatersay outfall was requested to facilitate an emergency repair of the fractured pipe below MHWS. The survey aimed to identify any ecological constraints ahead of the proposed works at the Vatersay outfall.

There are no nature conservation designated sites immediately within the vicinity of the proposed pipe repair. The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides classified Special Protection Area is located within 0.7km, and the island of Flodaigh, designated as part of the small seal islands SSSI, is within 3km.

2 Methodology

A walk over survey of the site was undertaken by Alison Tyler, an experienced ecologist, on 28 September 2022. The survey was undertaken between 1100 and 1630 GMT in good weather conditions, either side of mean low water spring tide at 14.34 (0.7m), when the full length of the pipeline and outfall were accessible.

The survey covered the full extent of the pipeline to the outfall in the intertidal area of the beach, and an area up to 300m either side of the outfall was surveyed. All birds and marine mammals within 300m of the outfall were recorded. A search was undertaken for evidence of protected species. The sections of the beach above mean high water were checked for any signs of use by otters, including potential for resting places.

3 Limitations of Survey

The timing of the survey in September meant that a survey of breeding birds was not possible. Wintering and passage birds using the intertidal area and inshore waters were recorded. There is potential for plant species to be under-recorded if they were not flowering at the time of the survey. The seasonal timing of the survey was suitable for otters and seals.

4 Results

Habitat

The intertidal area is characterized by sandy sediment with gravel/pebbles/cobbles distributed. The southern section of the beach where the outfall is located has a wide cobble area at the upper section. The hard surface of the cobbles and the substrata of the existing pipes and concrete outfall were colonised by fucoids (predominantly toothed wrack *Fucus serratus*) and gutweed *Ulva intestinalis* (see photos 2 and 5).

Above the MHWS the habitat is sand dune, dominated by marram *Ammophila arenaria*, with saline grasses.

Birds

The following birds were recorded during the survey: herring gull *Larus argentatus*, oystercatcher *Haematopus ostrlegus*, and ringed plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. The maximum count of waders was oystercatcher 4 and ringed plover 7.

Otters and Seals

No otters were seen during the survey, and there was no evidence of use of the coastal area within 300m of the outfall.

No seals were recorded during the survey.

4 Assessment

Habitats

The intertidal habitat is typical of this area of the Western Isles. It supports species that are common for the area and are not of high conservation importance. Most of the species present on the pipeline are also present on the surrounding shore. The footprint of the works will be a narrow stretch of the intertidal area and full recovery of the fucoids is likely between one to three years.

Birds

The area of intertidal habitat provides foraging ground for coastal birds. However, the numbers of recorded wintering/passage waders and wildfowl are not of high conservation importance. Disturbance as a result of the works will be in a limited area, where there are already human activities and some degree of disturbance. The shore habitat covers a length of 0.7km and the proposed works will be at the southern section of the beach and therefore will leave a significant part of the intertidal feeding area undisturbed. No wintering wildfowl were recorded on the survey, however there is potential for them to be present in the bay. A level of disturbance to birds is already present at the site due to the close proximity of houses, fishing and crofting activities and recreational users. The proposed works are unlikely to significantly affect disturbance levels to wintering waders and wildfowl.

The breeding bird assemblage was not surveyed. There is some potential for ground bird nesting habitat above the tideline, however due to the close proximity of the township of Vatersay there is regular disturbance by recreational users and therefore nesting is unlikely.

Otters and Seals

Otters are a highly mobile species and there is a significant population of otters in the Barra and Vatersay. The coast in the immediate vicinity has potential to be used for foraging by otters, although no significant impact on foraging otters are anticipated as a result of the proposed works. No signs of use by otter were found within 300m of the outfall. The close proximity of the township of Vatersay is likely to dissuade otters from using the area for resting sites or natal holts.

No seals were recorded during the survey. The potential for impact on seals is negligible, given that the area is an unlikely haul out location and the nearest breeding site is more than 3km away.

Designated Sites

There are no nature conservation designated sites immediately within the vicinity of the proposed outfall repair. The West Coast of the Outer Hebrides classified Special Protection Area is located within 0.7km direct, overland, although by sea the closest section is 7.2km away. The island of Flodaigh, designated as part of the Small Seal Islands SSSI, is 3.2km. Both these designated sites are on the west coast of Vatersay. Although the direct distance is relatively close, there is considerable sea distance between the pipeline location and the designated sites, and therefore there is limited scope for the proposed works on the east coast of Vatersay to have an impact on the designated sites. The qualifying interest of the West Coast of the Outer Hebrides is species of waterfowl and seabirds, and works in the intertidal area on the east coast of Vatersay are unlikely to impact on these species.

Appendix Photographs



Photograph 1

Looking north, upper section of beach with pipeline to outfall



Photograph 2

Looking south, lower section of intertidal area with pipeline to outfall



Photograph 3

Intertidal area surrounding outfall



Photograph 4

Lower section of outfall pipe and surrounding intertidal habitat



Photograph 5

Lower section of outfall pipe