

Vidlin Voe, Shetland Otter Survey



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CONTROL SHEET

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EnviroCentre Limited Office Locations:

Glasgow

Edinburgh

Inverness

Banchory

Registered Office: Craighall Business Park 8 Eagle Street Glasgow G4 9XA
Tel 0141 341 5040 info@envirocentre.co.uk www.envirocentre.co.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EnviroCentre Limited was commissioned by Scottish Sea Farms to conduct an otter survey at a site referred to as Vidlin Voe, in Shetland. The project aims to see the replacement of the existing wooden and steel pier with another fixed pier structure, with a different layout to allow better access at all states of the tide.

Records of otter present in the locale over the past 15 years were returned from the desk study. A potential 'low' status holt feature was identified 140 south west of the site and potential 'low' status couch feature 150m north of the site. Multiple spraints and feeding remains were identified along the coastline during the survey.

[Redacted]

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Terms of Reference

EnviroCentre Limited was commissioned by Scottish Sea Farms to conduct an otter (*Lutra lutra*) survey at a site referred to as Vidlin Voe, in Shetland.

The 'site' is defined as the area demarcated by the red line boundary as shown in Appendix A. The 'survey area' constitutes the area of the 'site' plus appropriate buffers as detailed in Section 2.2.

The results and recommendations in this document relate to the site boundary as provided by the client at the time of the survey.

1.2 Scope of Report

The aim of the study was to assess the site to identify any ecological constraints pertaining to otter. The main objectives were as follows:

- Search for and identify any evidence or field signs of otter in the survey area;
- Identify and assess any suitable habitat or features for otter in the survey area;
- Identify any potential impacts to otter as a result of the proposed works;
- Make recommendations regarding any further survey and licensing requirements for otter; and
- Identify appropriate mitigation actions to be implemented during works to avoid any negative impacts to otter.

1.3 Site Description

The Vidlin Voe Scottish Sea Farms site is located in the North East of Shetland, at HU 48072 66528, at an elevation of 1m above sea level. The site comprises two buildings (working premises and equipment storage), hardstanding parking and storage areas and three piers (two permanent wooden structures (one in disrepair) and one floating metal pontoon).

The land surrounding the site comprises sheep grazed grassland. The shoreline along the North Sea is more steeply sloping north of the site and more gently sloping south of the site.

1.4 Project Description

The project aims to see the replacement of the existing wooden and steel pier with another fixed pier structure, with a different layout to allow better access at all states of the tide.

1.5 Relevant Legislation and Policy

Otter are European Protected Species (EPS) and are protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (the "Habitat Regulations") as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly:

- capture, injure or kill such an animal;
- harass an animal or group of animals;
- disturb an animal while it is occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection;
- disturb an animal while it is rearing or otherwise caring for its young;
- obstruct access to a breeding site or resting place, or otherwise deny an animal use of a breeding site or resting place;
- disturb an animal in a manner or in circumstances likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the species;
- disturb an animal in a manner or in circumstances likely to impair its ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or rear or otherwise care for its young;
- disturb an animal while it is migrating or hibernating; and
- possess, control, transport, sell or exchange specimens of any animal listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive. This applies to living or dead specimens and to their derivatives.

It is an offence of strict liability to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal. These sites and places are protected even when the otter isn't present.

A licence may be issued to permit the otherwise unlawful activities listed above if these three tests are satisfied:

- There must be a licensable purpose which includes 'preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment;'
- There is 'no satisfactory alternative'; and
- The derogation (i.e. any permission/licence granted) is 'not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range'.

1.6 Report Usage

The information and recommendations contained within this report have been prepared in the specific context stated above and should not be utilised in any other context without prior written permission from EnviroCentre Limited.

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2 METHODS

2.1 Desk Study

In order to anticipate the potential ecological sensitivities at the site, a desk study was conducted in advance of the field survey, in November 2022. The following sources were checked:

- NatureScot Sitelink website¹ for statutory designated sites, pertaining to otter up to 5km from the site;
- Shetland Islands Biodiversity Action Plan² for non-statutory designated sites pertaining to otter, up to 2km from the site;
- Shetland Biological Records Centre (SBRC) for otter records within a 2km of the site – records created within the last 15 years are reported; and
- Aerial imagery from Google Earth³.

2.2 Field Survey

All field survey work was undertaken by experienced and competent ecologists [Redacted] and [Redacted] who are members of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). The survey was undertaken on 22nd November 2022, when conditions were dry with rain showers, overcast with wind gusts and temperature of 7°C.

The otter survey was conducted in reference to best practice guidelines⁴ and was undertaken by foot and via boat along the shorelines, up and down the coast from the site, with the aim to identify suitable otter habitat and field signs, including:

- Spraints (otter faeces/droppings used as territorial signposts. Often located in prominent positions and can be placed on deliberate piles of soil or sand). Three categories are used for describing otter spraint: Dried fragmented (Df); Dried intact (Di); and Not fully dry (Nd);
- Footprints;
- Feeding remains (can often be a useful indication of otter presence);
- Paths/slides (otter can often leave a distinctive path from and into the watercourse);
- Holts (underground shelter) are generally found:
 - Within trees roots at the edge of the bank of a river;
 - Within hollowed out trees;
 - In naturally formed holes in the river banks that can be easily extended;
 - Or preferably in ready-made holes created by other large mammals such as badger setts, rabbit burrows or outlet pipes; and
- Couches/lay-ups (couches or lay-ups are places for lying up above ground are usually located near a watercourse, between rocks or boulders, under dense vegetation).

¹ NatureScot Sitelink website. Available at: <https://sitelink.nature.scot/map> (Accessed August 2022)

² Shetland Islands Biodiversity Action Plan, Available at: <https://www.shetland.gov.uk/downloads/file/1639/local-nature-conservation-site-supplementary-guidance> (Accessed August 2022)

³ Available at: <https://www.google.com/earth/> (Accessed August 2022)

⁴ Chanin, P. (2003). *Monitoring the Otter Lutra Lutra. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers, Monitoring Series (No. 10)*. Peterborough: EN, CCW, EA, SEPA, SNH & SNIFFER.

In order to assess their importance, the status of otter resting sites was assigned from Low to High according to Table 2-1⁵.

Table 2-1: Status of Otter Resting Sites

Resting Site Status	Definition
Low	Feature with limited evidence of otter activity – low number of spraints, not all age classes present. Insufficient seclusion to be a breeding site or key resting site, unlikely to have links to the key otter requirements. Most likely to provide a temporary ‘stop off’ for otters when moving through their territory. Loss/disturbance of such a feature is unlikely to be significant in terms of the individual or population.
Moderate	Feature containing sprainting with a range of age classes, but not in significant quantities. Availability may be limited by season, tides or flow. Unlikely to be suitable as a breeding/natal site but will be a key resting site and may be linked to other important features within the territory. The impact arising from a loss or disturbance of such a feature will be determined by the availability of more suitable or well used sites within the otter’s territory.
High	Feature has a high level of otter activity, including an abundance of sprainting of all age classes, large spraint mounds, well used grooming hollows, paths and slides. Affords a high degree of cover and is linked to key features such as fresh water and abundance of prey. May be suitable as a breeding area (spraints may be absent from natal holts). The site is usually available at all times of year and at high and low tide/flow. The loss/disturbance of such a feature will often be considered significant in terms of the individual or population.

2.3 Disclaimer

Otter are transient and can move between favoured habitats regularly throughout and between years. This survey provides a snapshot of field signs present in the survey area in November 2022.

2.4 Constraints

2.4.1 Desk Study

Desk studies are limited by the reliability of third party information and the geographical availability of biological and/or ecological records and data. This emphasises the need to collate up-to-date, site-specific data based on field surveys by experienced surveyors. The absence of a species from biological records cannot be taken to represent actual absence. Species distribution patterns should be interpreted with caution as they may reflect survey/reporting effort rather than actual distribution.

2.4.2 Field Survey

Some sections of the coastline were not able to be directly assessed due to the topography (undercut and eroded banks). However, these sections were surveyed at a distance, both on land and via boat, using binoculars. As such, this was unlikely to have affected the survey results.

⁵ Bassett, S., & Wynn, J. (2010). *Otters in Scotland: How Vulnerable Are They to Disturbance?* CIEEM In Practice, (70), 19–22.

3 RESULTS

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

3.3 Other Observations

[Redacted]

⁷ Scottish Natural Heritage: Otter. Available from: <https://www.nature.scot/plants-animals-and-fungi/mammals/land-mammals/otter>
(Accessed 30/11/2022)

4 POTENTIAL IMPACTS, FURTHER SURVEY, LICENSING AND MITIGATION

4.1 Potential Impacts

[Redacted]

4.2 Further Survey and Licensing

[Redacted]

4.3 Mitigation

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

APPENDICES

A SITE LOCATION PLAN



Legend

Site Boundary

Do not scale this map

Client
Scottish Sea Farms

Project
Vidlin Voe, Shetland

Title
Site Location Plan

Status			Final
Drawing No. 677389-GIS003	Revision -	Date 01 Dec 2022	
Drawn JEP	Checked GN	Approved GN	

Scale
1:4,000 @A3

0204080120

Metres

Rev	Date	Amendment	Initials
-	-	-	-



8 Eagle Street, Craighall Business Park, Glasgow, G4 9XA.
T: 0141 341 5040 E: info@envirocentre.co.uk
W: www.envirocentre.co.uk

Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community

B SURVEY RESULTS PLAN

[Redacted]

C PHOTOGRAPHS

[Redacted]

[Redacted]