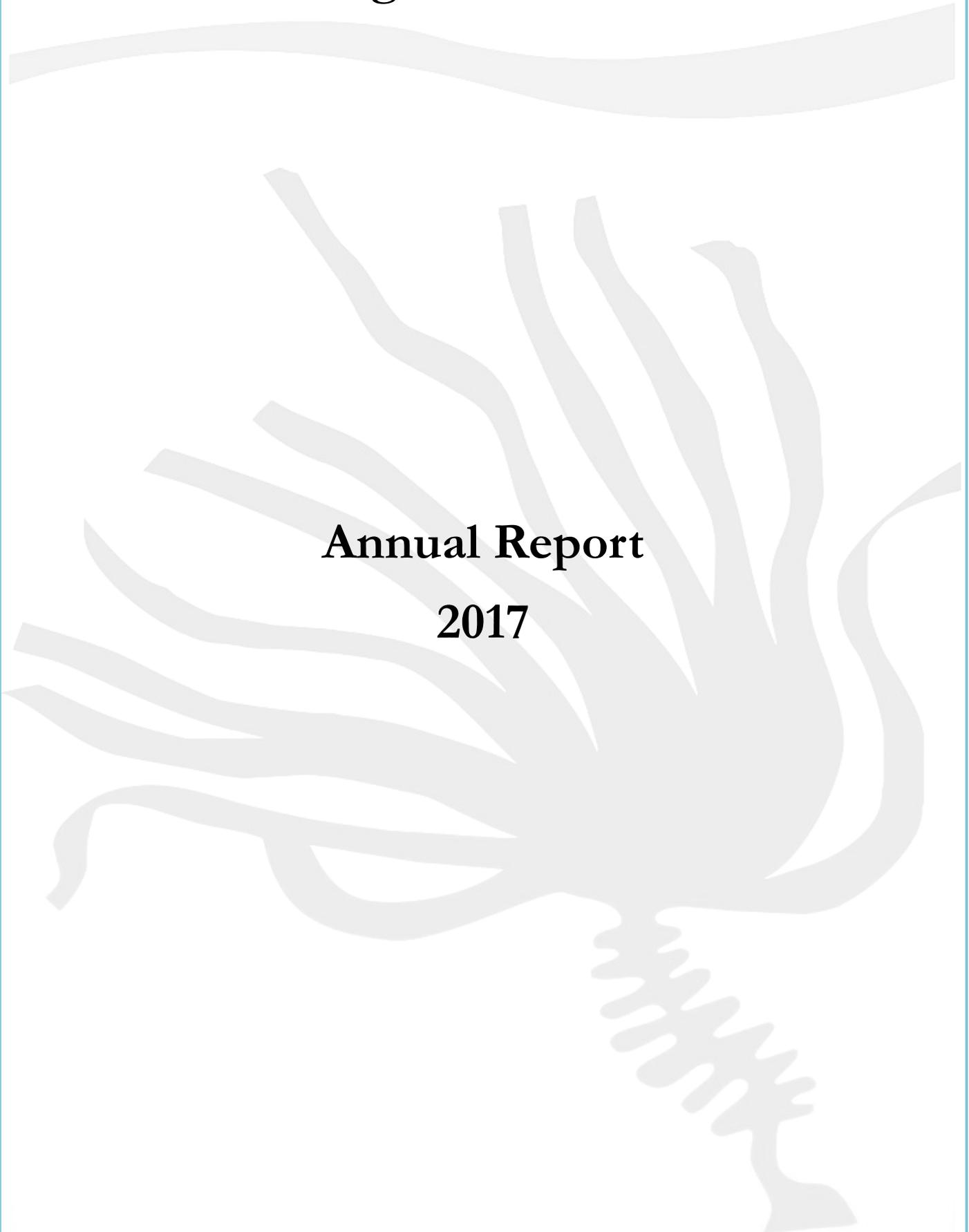


Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Scheme

**Annual Report
2017**





Compiled by Heather Davison
Flamborough Head European Marine Site Project Officer
January 2018

Introduction

This report forms part of the Flamborough Head European Marine Site (EMS) Management Scheme's annual review and details the progress of the Management Scheme's work throughout 2017. The UK voted to leave the European Union in 2016. Whilst there is still uncertainty about what this decision may mean for nature conservation in England, it is still 'business as usual' until legislative changes are made. As such, the projects detailed in this report help to ensure that our internationally-important site continues to be managed in an appropriate and effective manner.

The updates provided by Relevant Authorities and Key Partners during the annual review of the 2016-2021 Management Plan have informed this report, alongside summaries of actions progressed by the Project Officer on behalf of the Management Scheme.

A full seabird colony count, which was undertaken this year by the RSPB in partnership with Natural England, indicates that the Flamborough Head EMS is now home to the UK's largest mainland seabird colony. During 2017, the Management Scheme has continued to work towards reducing the impacts of recreational activities on this important colony and improving awareness of the site as a whole. Likewise, a report has been drafted on the success of local efforts to reduce seabird bycatch in Filey Bay, and a plan for responding to environmental incidents which could negatively impact wildlife within the site is in development.

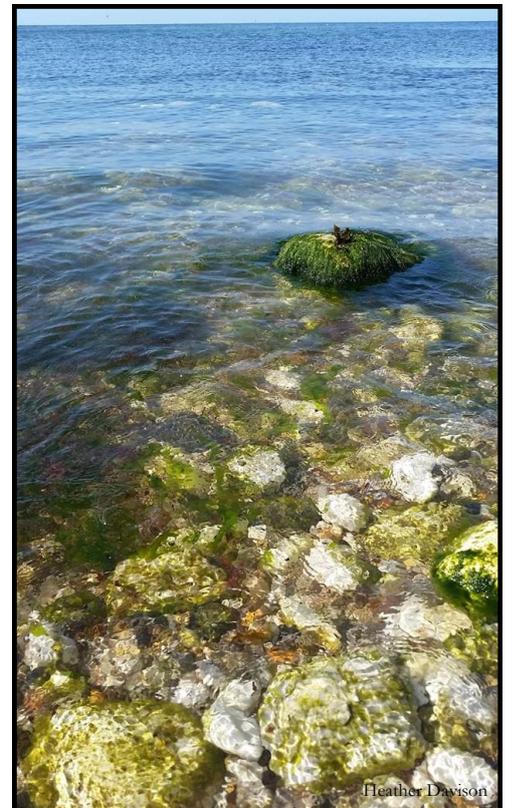
Condition Assessments and Conservation Advice

This work supports Aims 1 and 2 of the Management Scheme

Natural England, as the statutory nature conservation body, measures the condition of the site's designated features at regular intervals. Although no specific condition assessments have been undertaken during 2017, a full seabird colony count was completed (see Seabird Monitoring Programme, page 2). This count, along with other information, will help to determine the overall health of the colony and inform future management decisions.

Conservation Advice packages offer site managers and other interested parties guidance about what activities could negatively affect the conservation features of the protected area, along with general information about management. Following consultation with the Project Officer, Relevant Authorities and Key Stakeholders, a revised Regulation 35 Conservation Advice package for the Flamborough Head Special Area of Conservation (SAC) was published for public comment in October. A Conservation Advice package for the Flamborough Head proposed Special Protection Area (pSPA) is available on request but will not be published until the pSPA is fully designated.

A formal package of advice for the SAC is expected to be published in early 2018. The current draft can be accessed on the Gov.uk [website](#).



Incoming tide at North Landing

Full designation of the pSPA (which includes three additional named seabird species, 2km of inshore waters and the cliffs north of Filey Brigg) is expected during 2018. Despite these further delays in designation, it remains a material consideration in planning terms and the Management Scheme has fully incorporated the new areas into the work of the partnership.

Relevant Authority Updates

This work supports Aims 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7 of the Management Scheme

The projects in this section are being undertaken by Relevant Authorities as individual organisations, rather than on behalf of the Management Scheme partnership.

Bridlington Harbour Commissioners and East Riding of Yorkshire Council are continuing to progress proposals for a new marina and facilities for the commercial fishing fleet in Bridlington. A final decision on the feasibility of this project is expected in spring 2018. The Harbour Commissioners are also hoping to improve the existing utilities infrastructure along the South Pier in 2018, subject to funding.

Scarborough Borough Council are responsible for flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) activities within their jurisdiction. Recently, the council completed an assessment to better understand the environmental impacts and opportunities associated with FCERM work. The results of this assessment can be used by other local authorities and statutory bodies to inform Strategic Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Assessments, where these may be required for coastal plans and strategies. By improving our understanding of the local environment at a baseline level, we can be better equipped to respond to environmental challenges and opportunities presented by FCERM projects.



Razorbill chick at Briel Nook

Seabird Monitoring Programme

This work supports Aims 1, 2 and 5 of the Management Scheme

In partnership with Natural England, the RSPB completed a full count of the pSPA seabird colony during summer 2017. The first full colony count to be undertaken since 2000, a team of six experts took 253 hours to count almost 300,000 seabirds. Significant changes have been recorded in the seabird population since the last colony count:

- The total number of breeding individuals is now thought to be 298,542. With non-breeding birds and chicks, this figure could rise to 412,997 during the height of the breeding season.
- Since 2000, gannet numbers have increased by 425% to 13,392 pairs.
- Guillemot and razorbill populations have also increased significantly, with 121,754 and 40,506 breeding individuals counted respectively.
- In a pre-season rafting count, puffin numbers were estimated to be around 2,879 individuals.
- Despite recent losses recorded in the kittiwake population, it is thought that numbers have increased slightly to 51,535 pairs.
- Fulmar and herring gull populations have decreased, however, to around 1,257 pairs of fulmar and 466 pairs of herring gull.
- There are small pockets of breeding shags and cormorants within the colony; these populations are thought to be stable at around 25 pairs of each species.

This data indicates that the Flamborough and Filey Coast pSPA is home to the UK's largest mainland seabird colony, which further highlights the need to appropriately manage and protect the site.

Annual seabird productivity monitoring, undertaken by RSPB staff and volunteers, indicated that the productivity of guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes was slightly below the site average this year. Kittiwakes, particularly, were affected by poor weather during June, when many young chicks were more vulnerable to adverse conditions, yet productivity was still slightly higher than 2016. In certain plots, guillemots and razorbills continued to be affected by carrion crow predation, though this clearly is not having an impact on the population as a whole. Gannets, on the other hand, recorded a higher productivity than average, reflecting the strength of the growing population.

Full colony counts will now be completed every five years, providing a detailed overview of the size and composition of our internationally-important seabird colony on a regular basis. In the interim, the continuation of annual productivity monitoring and counts of smaller sections of the seabird colony (known as plot counts), will provide reliable indicators of colony health.

The RSPB also deployed GPS tags to better understand where kittiwakes forage during the breeding season. The results of this study, which was supported by Natural England and Orsted (previously Dong Energy), are currently being analysed.

Recreational Disturbance - Voluntary Agreement Developments

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

In recent years, the use of UAVs has become popular for both recreational and commercial pursuits. Drones can offer the user a unique perspective and are often fitted with cameras and other equipment which can produce useful information about an area. Indeed, following strict regulations, the RSPB and Natural England trialled the use of drones on site to undertake specific sections of the seabird colony counts. However, without those strict regulations in place, the irresponsible use of drones (whether for commercial or recreational purposes) can disturb the breeding seabird colony.

The Civil Aviation Authority regulates the use of drones and expects all users to comply with certain rules to ensure the public remains safe and there is no risk to other air traffic; more stringent regulations apply to commercial operators. Similarly, the land owner must give permission for drones to be used on property which is not owned by the drone pilot. In certain protected areas, Natural England permission may also be required for any drone flight, in order to protect sensitive wildlife.

The use of drones is a relatively novel activity, therefore not all of these regulations are well-advertised or acknowledged either within the recreational community or by commercial businesses. The Management Scheme is working to ensure that all regulations relating to drone use are properly reflected in partner Authorities' internal guidance and, in turn, all commercial contractors obtain the appropriate permissions before flights are undertaken.

A partnership of air traffic regulators and businesses has developed a 'Drone Safe' website and airspace mapping mobile app, in an effort to raise awareness of the potential risk to air traffic from drones. The Management Scheme, in partnership with Natural England, is working with the app developers to include protected areas designated for sensitive wildlife on this airspace map. When a protected area is selected, text will be displayed which informs the user of the potential risks to the site (i.e. disturbance) and any site-specific regulations. Once developed, this app and the associated 'Drone Safe' website can then be advertised to drone pilots around the EMS. It is hoped that this will help to raise awareness of the possible risks to sensitive wildlife and reduce incidents of disturbance.

All other existing voluntary codes of conduct are reviewed on an annual basis; no changes have been made to the Bempton Cliffs angling code of conduct nor the agreement with the Humberside Search and Rescue helicopter. A review of the personal watercraft voluntary code of conduct is expected in spring 2018, when the Management Scheme hopes to engage a wider audience in this project.

Recreational Disturbance - Monitoring Project

This work supports Aims 2 and 3 of the Management Scheme

The Management Scheme is currently working with a PhD student who is comparing the management practices and governance of two marine protected areas: Flamborough Head EMS and a second coastal site in Bulgaria. Alongside conducting interviews with site managers and stakeholders, the student has also carried out some intensive activity monitoring throughout the summer months. This data will be analysed, along with all other recreational activity data collected since 2013, before a report is presented to the Relevant Authorities' Group in spring 2018.

During the summer season, two volunteers also undertook intensive monitoring of activities around the EMS. This year, Filey Brigg was used as one of the four survey points, after a decision was made to cease monitoring at South Landing due to particularly low numbers of activities recorded there. In total, over 16 days of monitoring, 98 activities were recorded with 28 of these deemed to cause at least some level of disturbance to the seabird colony. The number of activities recorded during intensive monitoring this year were almost 75% less than recorded in 2016. This may have been a direct result of inclement weather experienced during the school summer holidays which resulted in fewer visitors to the coast, coupled with a reduction in the number of surveys completed. Table 1 (below) illustrates the level of disturbance recorded for each activity observed on site. No significant recreational disturbance events were recorded during these intensive surveys.

Table 1: 2017 Summer Survey Disturbance Reports

Activity	No. of Reports	High-Moderate Disturbance	Slight-No Disturbance	Disturbance Level Not Recorded
Motorised Boats	20	80%	20%	0
Canoes & Kayaks	2	50%	50%	0
Low-Flying Aircraft (including drones)	3	66%	33%	0
School / Walking Group	3	0	100%	0

Table 1 indicates that, during the intensive monitoring surveys, disturbance events were attributed to motorised boat use more than any other activity. As the EMS sits between the two busy harbours of Scarborough and Bridlington, and is an active fishing area, it is not wholly unexpected that there would be frequent boat use within the site. Whilst conclusions cannot be drawn on single-year datasets, especially with the limited amount of data collected during 2017, this data will help to inform future management decisions on site.

In addition to intensive summer surveys, the Project Officer received 61 ad-hoc recreational activity monitoring reports; a slight increase on the number of reports received in 2016. Table 2 details the levels of disturbance recorded for each activity observed using the ad-hoc reporting method. Similar to the intensive survey results, motorised boat use was the most frequent activity recorded, however personal watercraft reports were almost double the 2016 records. Unfortunately, a level of disturbance was not recorded for a large proportion of these reports.

Due to the significant increase in records of personal watercraft use this year (the vast majority of which were recorded during April, May and June), the Management Scheme will look to re-engage with the user group in spring 2018.

Table 2: 2016 Recreational Activity Ad-Hoc Disturbance Reports

Activity	No. of Reports	High-Moderate Disturbance	Slight-No Disturbance	Disturbance Level Not Recorded
Personal Watercraft	22	27%	5%	68%
Motorised Boats	27	63%	11%	26%
Canoes & Kayaks	7	57%	28%	15%
Low-Flying Aircraft	3	33%	0	66%
Angling (Cliff or Shore)	2	50%	0	50%

Fisheries

This work supports Aims 2, 4 and 7 of the Management Scheme

This year, four shellfish stock assessments were carried out within the No Take Zone and wider SAC; adverse weather and logistical issues hampered efforts to carry out further surveys. Nevertheless, this information will be used by the Management Scheme and the North Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NEIFCA) to better understand whether the No Take Zone is having any effect on the populations of shellfish in the area. The images below show a particularly large female lobster which was caught outside of the No Take Zone, underneath Bempton Cliffs.



Standard size lobster (92mm) caught under Bempton Cliffs in July



Significantly larger lobster (139mm), pictured in the same bucket, caught under Bempton Cliffs in July

The salmon and sea trout gillnet fishery within Filey Bay has been operating for over 100 years. Unfortunately, around ten years ago, it became clear that large numbers of guillemots and razorbills were being fatally caught in these fishing nets during the summer months. In response, the Environment Agency, working in partnership with Natural England and the RSPB, implemented a byelaw and a code of conduct which enforced measures to reduce seabird bycatch. At the same time, the RSPB worked with individual fishers to trial innovative seabird deterrent techniques at the nets and an independent consultant monitored compliance with the byelaw from 2009 - 2015.

On behalf of Natural England, the Project Officer analysed data collected by the consultants over this seven year period, in order to provide an overview of the project and better understand how seabird behaviour affects bycatch levels. A final report is expected in 2018, however preliminary results indicate that overall seabird bycatch reduced by 85% from 2009 and, of those birds that were caught in fishing nets, 60% were released alive in 2015. Analysis has found that management measures, such as maintaining presence at the nets and the prohibition of staking nets overnight, have been important in reducing seabird bycatch, alongside the work of individual fishermen. Research indicates that the behaviour of seabirds, including foraging strategies and breeding cycles, may influence the number of birds in Filey bay and, therefore, the number of birds at risk of interacting with the fishing nets.

Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan

This work supports Aims 2, 3, 5 and 6 of the Management Scheme

In late 2016, the Project Officer was involved in a national emergency response exercise which tested the readiness and effectiveness of various organisations to a significant oil-spill along the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Coast. Following this exercise, and a number of small-scale incidents which have occurred within the EMS over recent years, the Management Scheme is currently developing a local plan for responding to environmental incidents which could affect the internationally-important wildlife in the area. The aim of the plan is not to duplicate any existing emergency response, but to consolidate local knowledge, provide site-specific information on the habitats and species which might be affected by a pollution incident, and bring together organisations which respond to wildlife emergencies.

It is proposed that, in the event of an incident between Scarborough Harbour and Bridlington Harbour, a Wildlife Recovery Management Group would be established which would despatch volunteers to undertake wildlife surveys, record any deceased animals and request the recovery of any live-stranded wildlife. Working with a wide range of organisations, including the RSPCA, RSPB and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the Management Scheme would coordinate this local wildlife response whilst regulatory authorities carry out pollution control and clean-up, where necessary. This is a long-term project, however it is hoped that a draft plan will be tested during a table-top exercise in 2018.



North cliffs of Filey Brigg

Priorities for 2018

Work will continue throughout 2018 to record and monitor recreational activities around the EMS, and determine whether these activities have an impact on the conservation features of the site. This data will be used to inform management decisions, update existing voluntary agreements and introduce new measures where necessary. The Management Scheme will continue to work with Natural England, the Marine Management Organisation, Key Stakeholders and user groups to achieve this.

Development of the Environmental Incident Wildlife Response Plan will continue into 2018; the Project Officer will work closely with statutory agencies, regulatory bodies, local authorities, wildlife charities and others to draft a comprehensive and effective plan. It is hoped that this project will establish a procedure for collecting data and recovering wildlife whilst providing local information and advice during an environmental incident.

Working closely with Natural England, the Management Scheme will support the further development of Regulation 35 Conservation Advice and the final designation of the pSPA. Similarly, the Project Officer will continue to offer support and guidance to all Authorities and will work closely with each organisation to identify any future funding opportunities.

Aims of the Management Scheme

Aim 1: Ensure no management measures or unregulated activities adversely impact the conservation features, through regular condition assessments and implementation of Habitats Directive procedures.

Aim 2: Work to maintain and improve protection of the conservation features through the sharing of appropriate scientific research and site specific information.

Aim 3: In order to support the work of the Management Scheme, raise public awareness about the site's importance and support sustainable recreation and tourism practices.

Aim 4: Monitor both recreational and commercial fishing activities, ensure all relevant permits are observed and support sustainable practices, whilst engaging with the local fishing community to increase environmental awareness.

Aim 5: Ensure that any non-fishing commercial activity within or adjacent to the EMS does not negatively affect the conservation features, and work to reduce the risk of marine pollution to the site.

Aim 6: Appropriately manage the marine environment through the monitoring of consented discharges, achieving water quality standards and ensuring all coastal environmental incidents are dealt with effectively, whilst creating a safe environment for recreational and commercial users.

Aim 7: Ensure that activities of the Management Scheme promote the conservation of seascape and landscape character in a way which is compatible with safe maritime practices and the values of sustainable development.



For further information please contact the Flamborough Project Officer at:

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Additional details on the management of this internationally-important area can also be found in the 2016-2021 Flamborough Head European Marine Site Management Plan which can be downloaded at:

www.flamboroughheadsac.org.uk