



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland  
 Nàdair air fad airson Alba air fad

**STAFFA**  
**Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 1477**

**Address: Cameron House, Albany Street, Oban, Argyll PA34 4AE**

**Tel: 01786 450362**

**Email: [argyll\\_stirling@snh.gov.uk](mailto:argyll_stirling@snh.gov.uk)**

## Purpose



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as an SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this Statement.

This Statement is available in Gaelic on request.

<b>Natural features of Staffa SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>
Maritime cliff	Favourable, maintained (August 2001)
Fulmar ( <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i> ), breeding	Unfavourable, declining (June 2010)
Shag ( <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> ), breeding	Favourable, recovered (June 2010)
Puffin ( <i>Fratercula artica</i> ), breeding	Favourable, maintained (June 2010)

## Description of the site

The island of Staffa is situated approximately 12 km west of the Hebridean Isle of Mull and has been designated as a SSSI for its diverse maritime cliff plant communities and nationally important breeding fulmar, shag and puffin colonies.

The soils that are formed from the basaltic lavas are base-rich and vary over the island as a result of a variety of human and natural factors. These factors include changing patterns of pastoral and arable land use over the centuries and differing degrees of exposure to the wind and salt spray over the island. The variety of soil types are reflected in the variety of plant communities and particularly notable are the maritime heath communities dominated by common heather with kidney vetch, common-bird's-foot trefoil, wild thyme and tormentil as well as the rich maritime cliff grassland dominated by red fescue with yorkshire fog, thrift, sea campion, sea plantain and ribwort plantain.

The basalt columns and coastline of Staffa also provide favourable breeding habitat for a number of seabirds and the island supports nationally important numbers of fulmar, shag and puffin.

Site condition monitoring carried out in 2001 and 2010 found the maritime cliff and puffin (*Fratercula artica*) features of the SSSI to all be in favourable maintained condition. The populations of shag (*Phalacrocorax aristotelis*), were found to have recovered since previous monitoring and were also concluded to be in favourable condition. However, the fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*) feature, monitored in 2010, was concluded to be in unfavourable declining condition due to a reduction in apparently occupied nests. The cause for this decline was not concluded but it was thought that off-site factors such as availability of food, bad weather or pollution may have contributed to the decline.

## **Past and present management**

Staffa was inhabited until 1812 by crofting families, and since then has been used primarily for summer and winter grazing until 1997 when the stock were removed. In the 17th century 16 people (2 families) were reported to have lived there. In the fertile parts of the island they grew arable crops such as barley, oats, flax and potatoes, and the poorer areas were used for grazing their cattle, sheep and goats.

Tourism became a significant land use on the island after 1975 when the owner of the island began ferry trips and built a temporary floating pier and walkway to accommodate tourists onto the island and into Fingal's cave. As a result of the fame Staffa has achieved through Fingal's cave, it also appears in promotional material for international tourism, including pamphlets issued by Visit Scotland. In 1986 the island was acquired by the National Trust for Scotland and a permanent pier and walkway was built to manage the visitor pressure. In 2000 Staffa SSSI was also notified as a National Nature Reserve. At present, virtually no habitat management occurs on the island and the focus is mainly on the management of visitors.

## **Objectives for Management** (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate, to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features.

### **1. Maintain the maritime cliff feature of Staffa SSSI in favourable condition.**

During the most recent site condition monitoring the maritime cliff feature of Staffa SSSI was found to be in favourable condition, however the lack of grazing on the island may be leading to a loss of species diversity and the sward becoming rank. Discussions between SNH and NTS have previously taken place regarding the reintroduction of stock grazing on the island, however due to issues of animal welfare it is unlikely this will occur in the future. Therefore if the condition of the maritime cliff feature is found to be declining during the next round of condition monitoring, further consideration will need to be given to the management of the site.

Visitor numbers and access will also need to be monitored so that trampling damage does not become an issue and lead to the deterioration of the island's plant interests.

### **2. Maintain suitable habitat and conditions for important seabird populations.**

Visitors may have some impact on breeding birds though this is probably not significant as many people stay around the south end of the island near Fingal's cave and thereby relieve the pressure on other parts of the island. However it is important that visitors to the island are made aware of the presence of the nesting seabirds and should be advised to behave appropriately so as to cause minimal disturbance.

During the most recent site condition monitoring the breeding populations of puffin and shag on Staffa SSSI were found to be in favourable condition however the fulmar populations were found to be in unfavourable declining condition. Natural fluctuations in seabird populations do occur, however, in the meantime SNH will continue to monitor the populations of breeding fulmars within the SSSI as part of the site condition monitoring programme and will consider steps that should be taken if the populations decline further.

Date last reviewed: **28 February 2011**