

COUNTY: HAMPSHIRE **SITE NAME:** ELING AND BURY MARSHES SSSI

Local Planning Authorities: Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 355120

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 196 **1:25,000:** SU 31

Hectares/Acres: 110.3/272.58

Date Notified (1949 Act): 1979

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (1981 Act): 26 June 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

The Site of Special Scientific Interest embraces two dissimilar saltmarshes and their intervening intertidal mudflats at the head of Southampton Water. Eling Great Marsh is a 13 (ha.)/32 (ac.) grazed saltmarsh with a close sward of Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima* with creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and red fescue *Festuca rubra* sub-dominant. The marsh margins have in places been colonised by cord-grass *Spartina anglica*. That the present sward is derived by grazing from a more varied, mixed saltmarsh plant community is suggested by the occurrence, apparently in relict populations, of such characteristic saltmarsh plants as thrift *Armeria maritima*, sea purslane *Halimione portulacoides* and sea aster *Aster tripolium*. Eling Great Marsh is the only *Puccinellia* saltmarsh on the central south coast.

Bury Marsh is an ungrazed *Puccinellia* marsh which in consequence supports a more mixed saltmarsh community, with *Halimione* dominating drainage channel edges and extensive *Spartina* invasion. It is probably the only remaining locality for the American smooth cord-grass *Spartina alterniflora* in Britain apart from deliberate plantings. This population covers an extensive area and is genetically important as one of the parent species of the successful *Spartina* hybrids (and subsequently the fertile *Spartina anglica*) which colonised large areas of intertidal land in the late 19th and 20th centuries. At high water mark of spring tides there is an abrupt transition to oak/hazel woodland of apparently ancient origin.

The Southampton Water estuary is nationally important for its wader populations. The saltmarshes and associated mudflats of the SSSI are considered to be vital feeding and roosting areas for the autumn and winter populations of waders, ducks and grey herons *Ardea cinerea*.

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended.