

County: Devon

Site Name: Taw-Torridge Estuary

District: North Devon; Torridge

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

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council
North Devon District Council
Torridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 470310 **Area:** 1,336.5 (ha) 3,302.5 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 180 **1:10,000:** SS 42 NE, SS 43 SW, SE, NE and SS 53 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1981 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

The site is in the County Structure Plan Nature Conservation Zone and Mineral Consultation Area. Partly in North Devon and Torridge Coastal Preservation Area.

The site formerly included most of Fremington Quay Cliffs SSSI and part of Greenaways and Freshmarsh SSSI, which are notified separately.

The site boundary has also been amended by deletion and extension.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Taw-Torridge Estuary is of major importance for its overwintering and migratory populations of wading birds. In addition, rare plants grow along its shores.

The Estuary's wide tidal range is reflected by the very large areas of mudflats and sandbanks present. Together with beaches and saltmarshes, the area provides a rich and varied source of food for many birds and other animals.

The site regularly supports nationally important numbers of curlew *Numenius arquata*, golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. Other species of waders such as redshank *Tringa totanus*, dunlin *Calidris alpina* and oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* are also abundant, so that the total number of waders present at any one time can reach over 20,000.

A typical zonation of estuarine plant communities is displayed among the saltmarshes. Glassworts *Salicornia* spp., common saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima* and cord-grass *Spartina* spp. occupy the lower levels; sea aster *Aster tripolium* and annual seablite *Suaeda maritima* characterise the middle marshes while red fescue *Festuca rubra* and sea rush *Juncus maritimus* are found in the uppermost areas. Common reed *Phragmites australis* and sea wormwood *Artemisia maritima* occur in places and the rare rock sea-lavender *Limonium binervosum* and great sea-stock *Matthiola sinuata* are also locally present. Saltpill Duck Pond provides additional variety with its brackish water and islands fringed by willows *Salix* spp.

The Taw and Torridge support typical estuarine species such as mullet *Mugil sp.* and flat fish, also bass *Dicentrarchus labrax* and pollack *Pollachius pollachius* and, on migration, salmon *Salmo salar*, sea trout *S. trutta* and eel *Anguilla anguilla*. Many invertebrates are found in the extensive sandbanks exposed at low tide. Mudflats occur more towards high water mark, and are characterised by peppery furrow-shell *Scorbicularia plana*. Rocky outcrops, seawalls and stones on the banks provide a substrate for algal growth and beds of mussels *Mytilus edulis*.