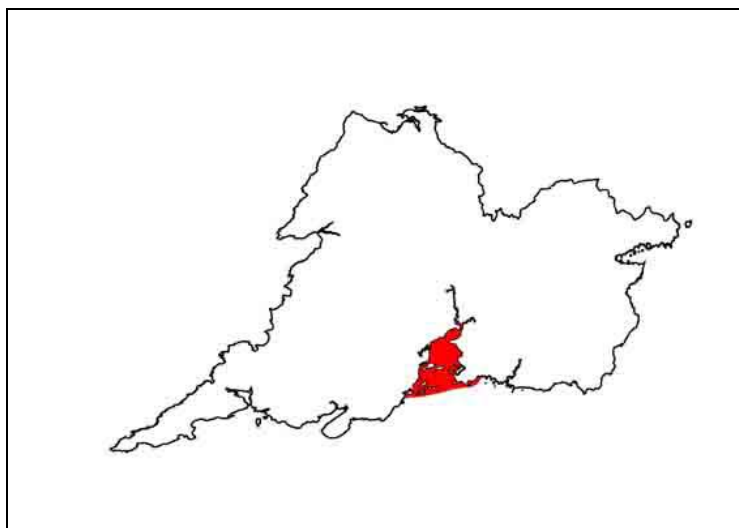


AREA 12: FERGUS ESTUARY



Key Characteristics

- The Fergus Estuary is a designated SPA.
- Influence of the sea is apparent although sea defence banks prevent views to estuary in some areas.
- Impacts upon the estuary due to climatic change, sea level rise, increasing storms etc.
- Open expansive views across the estuary to the river Shannon.
- Estuary side factories are a detractor, e.g. Clarecastle Test Centre.
- Views to Deer Island, Coney Island, Feenish and Deenish Island.

Typical Photograph: The Fergus Estuary and Hinterland



Landscape Character types and habitat types

LCTs	HLTs	HLT codes	HT	HT codes
Flat Estuarine Farmlands and Islands	Estuarine Intertidal	EI	Improved agricultural grassland.	GA1
	Devotional and Ritual	DR	Sea walls	CC1
	Enclosed Land 2	EL2	Estuaries	MW4
	Enclosed Land 4	EL4	Salt marsh	CM
	Designed Landscape	DL	Swamps	FS1
	Recreational	R	Wet grassland	GS4

Seascape Character Area Extent

Fergus estuary and estuarine land extending from Clarecastle in the north, along the estuary on both sides, to Shannon in the east and Killadysert in the west.

Geology and Landform

This low-lying distinctive estuarine landscape is underlain almost exclusively by a combination of limestone series. Limestone derived till deposits are found along the eastern shores of the estuary itself. The other predominant surface geology is composed of estuarine silts and clays. The low lying area is dominated by the Fergus River and its opening into a wide estuary with a number of islands.

Coastal Ecology

This area is designated as an SPA and SAC and therefore is of high ecological importance. The SCA contains extensive areas of intertidal mudflats with fringing reedbeds, swamps, salt marsh and wet marsh habitats.

The Fergus estuary is of international importance for wintering and migrating wildfowl and contains a number of rare botanical species. Land use is largely pasture estuarine farmland.

Historic Seascapes and Human Influence

Settlement is sparse, reflecting the areas past tendency to flood, with some settlement on higher ground. The west bank has mixed curvilinear and straight-bounded fields (EL2), but the east bank has the large straight-sided fields characteristic of land improved by drainage (EL4).

Fish traps and post-and-wattle revetments are found on the flats and creeks – dating from the Bronze Age (2540. ± 20 BP; 797–551 cal. BC; GrN-209074, O’Sullivan 2001, 297) to post-medieval times (155 ± 25 BP, cal. AD 1665–1946; GrN-20141). A dug-out boat has been exposed in a saltmarsh creek near Clenagh (Kelly 1987, medieval or earlier) and many small craft probably lie buried in silted-up creeks.

Rineanna (Rinnanna) has designed landscapes as well as a historic golf course.

Today, Clarecastle is a busy bridging point, heavy traffic and recent development detracts from the historic character of the town. On the eastern boundary, there is increased settlement due to proximity to Shannon airport, and the town. Holy wells, churches (DR) and castles are scattered throughout the islands and help to enhance viewpoints within a broad vista.

Condition and Sensitivity

Overall the quality of the Fergus estuary is good. However, there is evidence of poorly sited small-scale developments. The estuary would be very sensitive to change. Development on the estuary shores would be highly visible due to the low-lying flat and confined nature of the estuary.

The rural and tranquil estuarine landscape of high ecological and landscape value could easily be affected by inappropriate development, pollution or climate change. Designed landscapes, following their demise as parklands of big houses, are preserved where they perform a second function (incorporated in research establishment grounds, for instance)

Forces for Change

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- Potential for modern unsympathetic development that would be highly visible
 - Tidal surges and marine transgression due to climate change and sea level rise
 - Further degradation of hedgerows and choking of drainage ditches
 - Changes in field patterns due to intensification of agriculture, conversely the abandonment of agriculture
 - Road upgrades, natural gas pipeline
 - Pollution of estuarine water due to wastewater from towns, run off from agriculture etc
 - Scour erosion of flats following improved land drainage and urban development upstream
 - Shannon free zone and unsympathetic development highly visible
 - Potential reclamation plans
 - Increased leisure facilities, potential for marinas, more golf courses and hotels.
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Principles for Seascape Management

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- NHA and SAC designated areas should be determining factors in controlling landuse
 - Infrastructure and tourism developments including marinas and hotels along the coastline should consider local landscape character
 - Linear development along the coastline should be avoided and all other development should be screened appropriately
 - Stormwater sewer systems and field drains should use ponds, or semi-natural lagoons, to filter out 'non-point specific pollution' as well as slow down the flood response to rainfall
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