

Bathing Water Profile for Dunnet Bay

Dunnet, Scotland

Current water classification <https://www2.sepa.org.uk/BathingWaters/Classifications.aspx>

Description

Dunnet Bay bathing water is situated on the north coast of Scotland between the towns of Castletown, to the south, and Dunnet, to the north. The long sandy bay is approximately 3 km in length and slopes gently towards the water.

During high and low tides the approximate distance to the water's edge can vary from 40–300 metres. For local tide information see: <http://easytide.ukho.gov.uk/EasyTide/>



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Site details

Local authority	Highland Council
Year of designation	1999
Water sampling location	ND 21601 70749

Catchment description

The catchment draining into Dunnet Bay bathing water extends to 47 km². It consists of some low level hills in the west and low-lying plains along the coast.

The main rivers in the bathing water catchment are the Burn of Garth, Stanergill Burn, Burn of Midsand and the Burn of Dunnet which flows into the northern end of the bay.

The area is predominantly rural (96%) with agriculture the major land use. Grassland makes up 74% of the rural area whilst 13% of the rural area is arable. Farming in the area is predominately beef and arable. Approximately 1% of the bathing water catchment is urban. The main population centres in the area are the coastal towns of Castletown and Dunnet. Population density outside these towns is generally low.

There are several protected areas either fully or partially within the bathing water catchment including one Special Protection Area (SPA) and four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

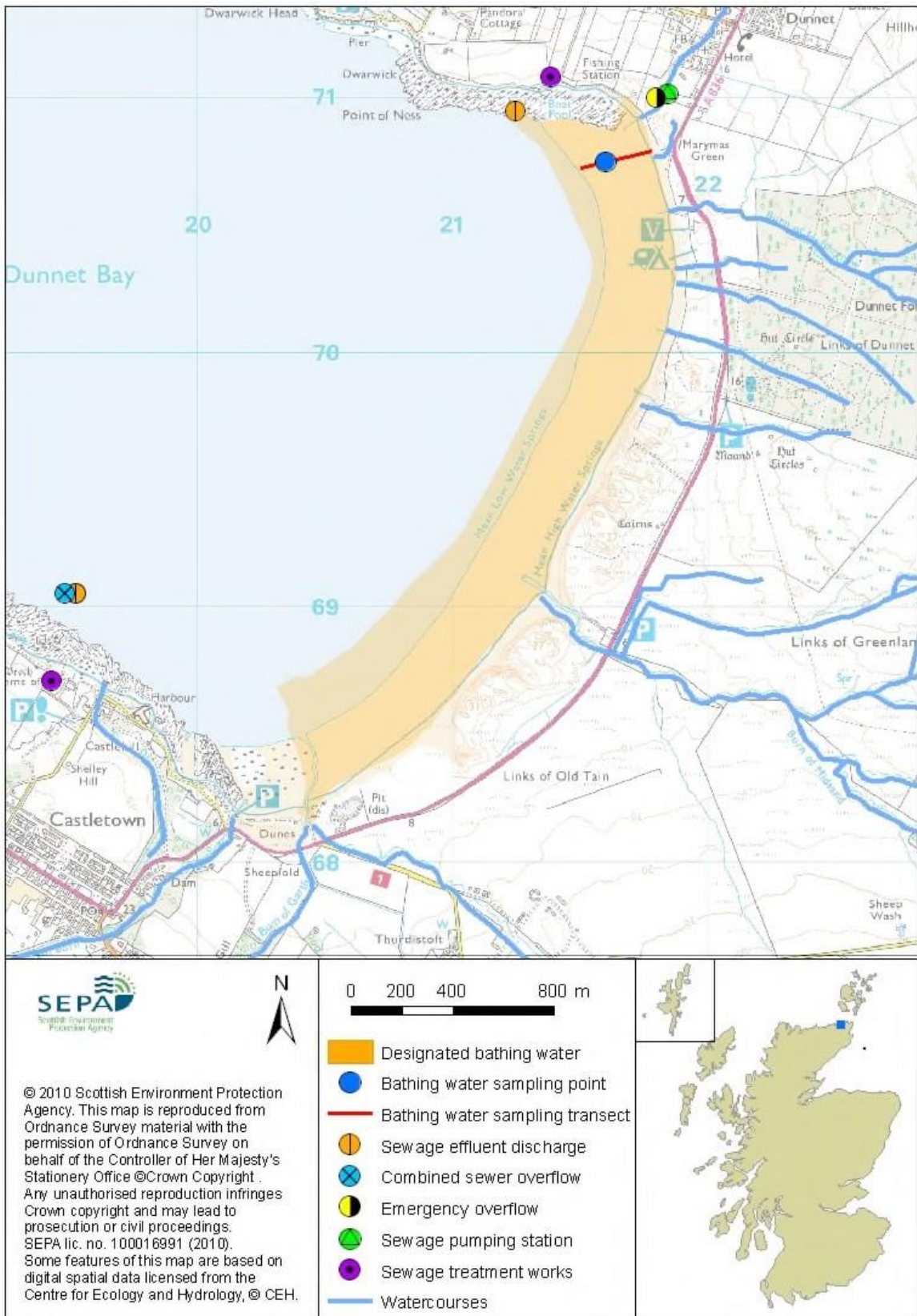
Risks to water quality

The principal risks and source of wet weather driven short term pollution at this bathing water arise from agricultural run-off, combined sewer overflows and treated sewage effluent.

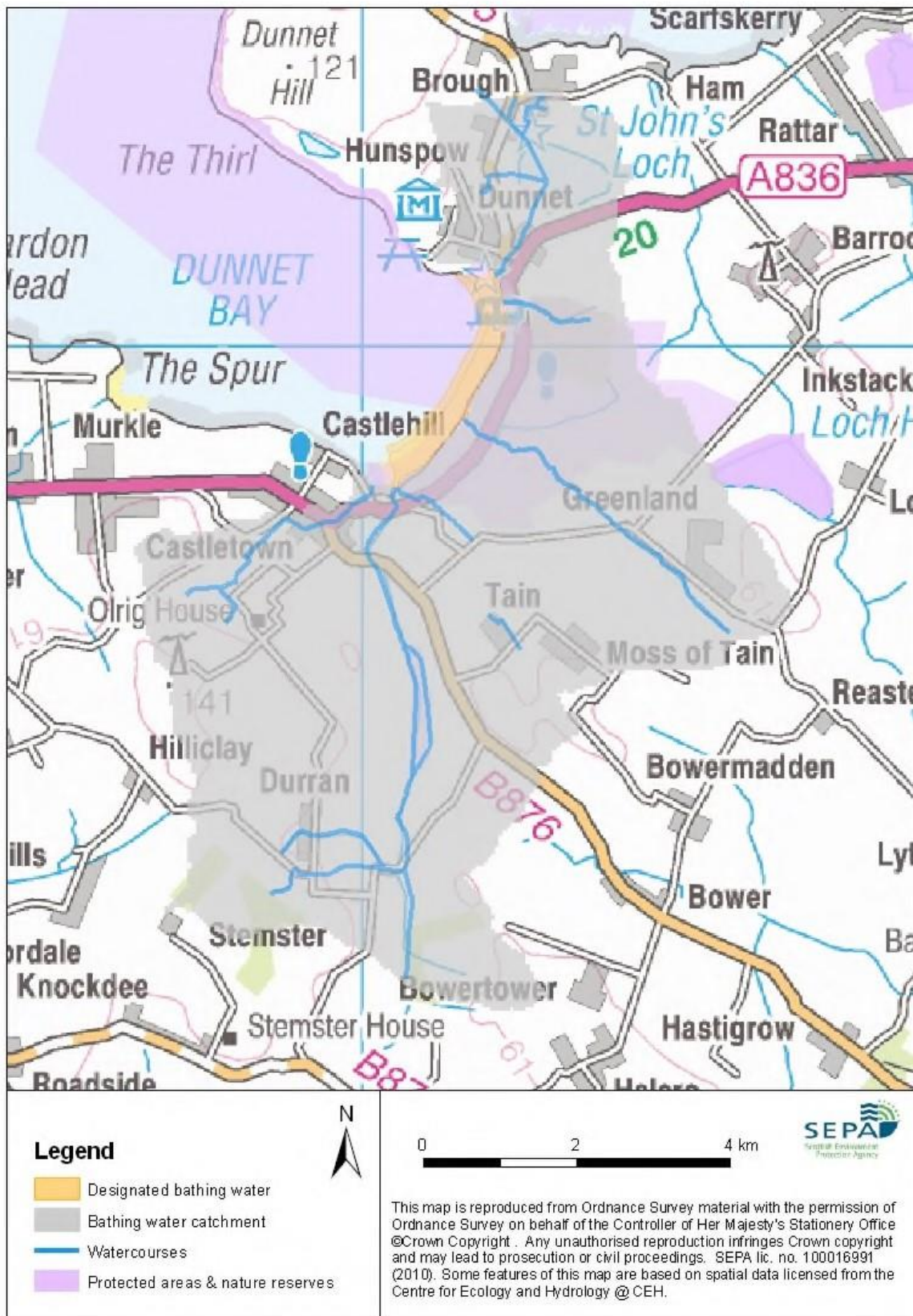
There is a risk that water pollution may occur after heavy rainfall. **Bathing is not advised during or 1-2 days after heavy rainfall. This is due to the risk to bathers' health from water pollution.**

Our regulatory and scientific assessment indicates that potential sources of short-term faecal indicator pollution at this bathing water can originate from human or animal sources.

Map 1: Dunnet Bay bathing water



Map 2: Catchment draining into Dunnet Bay bathing water



Improving bathing water quality

Improving diffuse pollution from agricultural sources

Diffuse pollution from agricultural sources is the result of rain driven events causing cumulative inputs of pollutants to rivers and streams.

There is potential for agricultural diffuse pollution to occur in the Stanergill Burn and some small burns at the eastern end of the beach. These catchments are a risk to Dunnet's bathing water quality, particularly during periods of wet weather.

Farm visits started in the catchments in 2020. These visits looked to identify diffuse pollution sources and pathways as well as agreeing mitigation measures with land managers to reduce the risk of bacterial pollution on water quality. The majority of farms in the Dunnet Bay area support predominantly beef with some arable.

SEPA will continue to work with the farmers in these catchments to reduce the risk of pollution to the bathing water.

Improving pollution from sewage and other discharges

Scottish Water provides most waste water collection and treatment services in Scotland.

The outfall from Castletown sewage treatment works discharges approximately 600–700 metres west of the bathing area. Its potential to affect bathing water quality is deemed minimal.

The discharge from Dunnet sewage treatment works is located immediately adjacent to the northern boundary of the designated bathing waters. It has the potential to affect water quality at Dunnet Bay.

There is also a pumping station at Dunnet with an emergency overflow into the Bay of Dunnet. The system is part of our inspection programme.

Improving pollution from diffuse urban sources

Urban diffuse source pollution comes from contaminated rainwater discharging to rivers and streams.

SEPA, local authorities and Scottish Water are working together to tackle urban diffuse pollution. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) have been incorporated into local plans and partner organisations have been encouraged to retrofit SUDS where possible.

Surface water from Castletown town enters the Stanergill Burn. Discharges to the burn can potentially affect bathing water quality.

Cyanobacteria (blue-green algae)

Marine waters are not at risk of cyanobacteria overproduction.

Algae

Current information suggests that this bathing water is not at risk of excessive growth of macroalgae (seaweed) or phytoplankton.

Jellyfish

There is a possibility of increased numbers of jellyfish in the water during summer months. This is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Most species common to the UK are harmless. The Marine Conservation Society advises to 'look but don't touch'.

Responding to pollution incidents

Please use our 24 hour hotline (0800 80 70 60) to report pollution. SEPA will investigate the incident and contact other relevant organisations. That may include Scottish Ministers, Scottish Water, the local authority and the relevant health board. Where necessary, measures will be put in place to resolve the problem.

If beach users or bathers are considered to be at risk, the local authority will warn the public by erecting signs at the bathing water. Information will also be available on our website.

SEPA will investigate whenever our sampling identifies pollution.

Beach users are encouraged to use the bins provided or to take litter home. Beach cleaning and litter clean-up is maintained by Highland Council for this bathing water.

Contact details and information sources

<p>SEPA Thurso office Thurso Business Park Thurso Caithness KW14 7XW 01847 894422 www.sepa.org.uk</p>	<p>Highland Council Glenurquhart Road Inverness IV3 5NX 01349 886606 service.point@highland.gov.uk www.highland.gov.uk</p>	<p>Keep Scotland Beautiful 01786 471333 beach@ksbscotland.org.uk www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org</p>
<p>Scottish Government Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ 0131 244 0396 eqcat@scotland.gsi.gov.uk www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Water/15561/bathingwaters</p>		
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