

Analysis of numbers and spatial distribution of wintering waders and wildfowl in Outer Courtmacsherry Estuary

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Key words: - Courtmacsherry Estuary; winter bird survey; disturbance.

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Courtmacsherry Estuary supports internationally important numbers of Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa islandica*) and nationally important numbers of nine other waterbird species, including Great Northern Diver (*Gavia immer*). In order to determine the potential impacts of a proposed marina development adjacent areas of Courtmacsherry Bay were surveyed (essentially east of the narrows and centred on Flaxfort Strand east to Wood Point). The study area was divided into 5 discrete sections to facilitate analysis of the numbers and spatial distribution of wintering waders and wildfowl. A one-day (full tidal cycle) survey was completed from three vantage points in each of four months (December 2006 to March 2007; 80 counts in all). Patterns of abundance and distribution were examined across sites, months, and tidal cycle and patterns of disturbance were noted. The mudflats north of the navigational channel supported the greatest diversity and number of birds (especially the western side of Flaxfort Strand). The sandier substrates were favoured Bar-tailed godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) rather than Black-tailed Godwit. The maximum single count of Great Northern Diver for this part of the estuary was 16; just under the national threshold of 20. Site usage by divers mirrored that of earlier studies indicating a degree of site fidelity. A total of 23 separate disturbance events were noted; human disturbance on the shore was the most common type of disturbance followed by water-based activity (fishing boats). These data build on extensive studies undertaken to date by other researchers within the inner estuary.