

Appendix M5 – Natural England’s Best Practice Protocol for Vessels in Red-Throated Diver SPAs

Natural England has developed the following text for licence conditions or vessel management plans for proposals where a Red Throated Diver (RTD) Best Practice Protocol is required. The Protocol is to be adopted where there is a need to minimise risk from vessel disturbance from activities like cable installation or where construction, operation and maintenance vessels will transit through a site designated for this species.

Vessel disturbance

Using best practice in the management of vessel traffic a significant disturbance to RTD can be avoided. Best practice should be applied both within RTD SPAs and out to 2km beyond the SPA boundary.

Example of relevant best practice include:

- Where possible avoid works during the over winter period 1st Nov – 31st March inclusive
- selecting routes that avoid known aggregations of birds;
- restricting (to the extent possible) vessel movements to existing navigation routes (where the densities of divers are typically relatively low);
- maintaining direct transit routes (to minimise transit distances through areas used by divers);
- avoidance of over-revving of engines (to minimise noise disturbance); and,
- briefing of vessel crew on the purpose and implications of these vessel management practices (through, for example, tool-box talks).