

## Nomination

*Larus fuscus fuscus* Lesser Black Backed Gull



## Geographical extent

OSPAR Regions; I

Biogeographic zones: 12, 13

Region & Biogeographic zones specified for decline and/or threat: as above

Five subspecies of the Lesser Black-Backed gull have been described and the classification is widely accepted (ICES, 2002). Three subspecies, *L. f. fuscus*, *L. f. intermedius*, and *L. f. graellsii*, breed entirely or partly within the OSPAR area. The subspecies *Larus fuscus fuscus* breeds in Sweden and northern Norway to the western part of the Kola Peninsula and the western White Sea (Strann, Semashko & Cherenkov, in Anker-Nilssen *et al.*, 2000). The breeding colonies are found along the coast, as well as inland on bogs or other flat areas with rich vegetation. It is a migratory species leaving the breeding areas from August to fly south to the Black Sea and the eastern part of the Mediterranean and Africa.

## Application of the Texel-Faial criteria

The Lesser Black-Backed Gull was nominated by one Contracting Party. The criteria cited were decline, rarity and sensitivity, with information also provided on threat.

### Decline

The total population of this subspecies is believed to be under 15,000 pairs, of which about 2,500 pairs breed within the Barents Sea on Norwegian and Russian coasts (Anker-Nilssen *et al.*, 2000). The evidence for a marked decline in breeding numbers of *L. f. fuscus* in northern Norway is very strong. It has been estimated that the population of *L.f.fuscus* has declined by 90% since 1970. The species has

also disappeared from the Murman coast and the north-western White Sea (Anker-Nilssen *et al.*, 2000).

### Rarity

The relatively small population and limited number of breeding sites make this a rare sub-species in OSPAR Region I.

### Sensitivity

Due to the small numbers breeding at a very limited number of locations, this species is considered to be sensitive to disturbance, predation, and oil pollution.

### Threat

The nomination form submitted for this species cites the likely principle threats as man-made pollution such as PCBs, decline in prey species, and competition and predation by the Herring Gull. Threats to *L. f. fuscus* are summarised by Anker-Nilssen *et al.* (2000).

## Relevant additional considerations

### Sufficiency of data

There is evidence of a decline in the number of breeding *L.f.fucus* but only hypotheses about the reasons for this decline at the present time.

### Changes in relation to natural variability

The extent to which the decline in numbers of *L.f.fucus* can be attributed to natural variability as opposed to other factors is unknown.

### Expert judgement

There is good evidence to support the view that this species has declined. Less is known about the reasons for the decline.

### ICES evaluation

The ICES evaluation of this nomination is that the evidence that numbers of *L. f. fuscus* have declined is compelling, and that this subspecies is a strong candidate for inclusion as a priority of concern for OSPAR (ICES, 2002).

## Threat and link to human activities

*Cross-reference to checklist of human activities in OSPAR MPA Guidelines*

*Relevant human activity:* Fishing, hunting, harvesting; landbased activities; aquaculture/mariculture. *Category of effect of*

*human activity*: Biological – removal of target species, introduction of microbial pathogens or parasites, introduction of non-indigenous species; Chemical – synthetic compound contamination

Causes of the decline of *L. f. fuscus* are not known (Anker-Nilssen *et al.*, 2000). Strann and Vader (1992) suggested that a change in food resources in breeding areas (particularly the long-term lack of young herring) was the main reason. Whether this is linked to human activity i.e. fishing is unclear.

## Management considerations

Management measures should ensure that breeding area remain suitable for use by these birds and seek to minimise predation on the chicks. Until more is known about the reasons for their decline and the possible link with food supply it is difficult to suggest any specific management measures.

The lesser black backed gull is listed on Annex II of the EU Birds Directive but not the subspecies *Larus fuscus fuscus*.

## Further information

*Nominated by*:  
Norway

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### *Useful References*:

Anker-Nilsen, T. *et al.* 2000. The status of marine birds breeding in the Barents Sea region. Norwegian Polar Institute Report. No. 113. 213 pp.

Lorentsen, S.-H. 2000. The national monitoring programme for seabirds. Results including the breeding season 2000. NINA Oppdragsmelding 670: 1–30.

Strann, K.B., and Vader, W. 1992. The nominate lesser black-backed gull *Larus fuscus fuscus*, a gull with a tern-like feeding biology, and its recent decrease in northern Norway. *Ardea*, 80: 133–142.

Thingstsd, P.G. 1986. The Lesser Black-Backed Gull; a pilot project of an endangered subspecies. *Økoforsk Utredning* 1986, 3: 1–50.