Irish Vegetation Classification (IVC)

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Community Synopsis

Scientific name	*Elytrigia atherica* saltmarsh
Common name	Sea Couch saltmarsh
Community code	SM7B

Vegetation

These are coarse swards dominated by very dense, glaucous growth of *Elytrigia atherica*. There are no other constant species and the only frequent plant is *Festuca rubra*. Mixed in one will occasionally find small amounts of *Aster tripolium*, *Atriplex prostrata* and *Agrostis stolonifera*. Some care must be taken during identification as it is also not unusual to find some stems of *Elytrigia repens* amongst the sward.

Ecology

This sward is to be found on fertile soils at the very top of saltmarshes, along the sides of large creeks and around lagoons. These sites are usually ungrazed and soil conditions are base-rich.

Sub-communities

No sub-communities have been described for this community.

Similar communities

Elytrigia atherica occurs rarely in the SM7A *Elytrigia repens* saltmarsh but does not dominate; SM7B may co-occur with SM7A but forms slightly lower in the tidal frame.

Records and distribution

Number of records (all)

Clearly assigned:	18
Transitional:	0
Total:	18

Number of records (mapped)

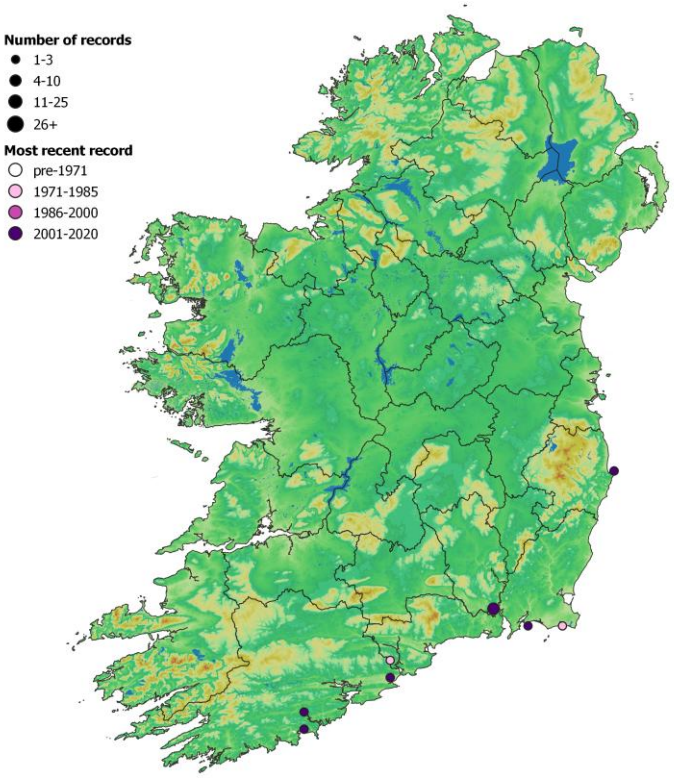
2001-2020:	16
1986-2000:	0
1971-1985:	2
Pre-1971:	0
Total:	18

Number of hectads (by most recent time period)

2001-2020:	6
1986-2000:	0
1971-1985	2
Pre-1971:	0
Total:	8

Number of hectads (records in each time period)

2001-2020:	6
1986-2000:	0
1971-1985	2
Pre-1971:	0



Synoptic table (*n* = 18)

Species	Frequency (from I-V)	Cover min (med) max	Species	Frequency (from I-V)	Cover min (med) max
Elytrigia atherica	V	5-(10)-10			
Festuca rubra	III	+-(3)-5			
Aster tripolium	II	+-(2)-4			
Atriplex prostrata	II	+-(2)-4			
Elytrigia repens	II	3-(4)-5			
Agrostis stolonifera	II	+-(3)-5			
Cochlearia anglica	I	2-(3)-3			
Cochlearia officinalis agg.	I	1-(3)-4			
Glaux maritima	I	3-(4)-4			
Juncus maritimus	I	4-(5)-5			
Atriplex portulacoides	I	+-(+)-+			
Juncus gerardii	I	8-(8)-8			
Phragmites australis	I	2-(2)-2			
Potentilla anserina	I	2-(2)-2			
Rumex crispus	I	2-(2)-2			
Senecio vulgaris	I	2-(2)-2			
Sonchus asper	I	2-(2)-2			
Triglochin maritimum	I	4-(4)-4			
Tripleurospermum maritimum	I	3-(3)-3			

Affinities

GHI: CM2 Upper salt marsh

ZM: MF02A Agropyrion pungentis Géhu 1968

EUNIS: A2.511 Atlantic saltmarsh and drift rough grass communities

NVC: SM24 *Elymus pycnanthus* salt-marsh community (69.0%)

Annex I: 1330 Atlantic salt meadows

Proxy environmental data

Light: 8.8 Reaction: 7.0 Wetness: 6.0 Fertility: 6.0 Salinity: 3.8

Conservation value

Although they are off low plant diversity (species/4 m^2 = 3.6, *n* = 17), these swards constitute part of the spectrum of communities within the EU HD Annex I habitat 1330 Atlantic salt meadows.

Management

These are ungrazed swards that are likely to be replaced by other saltmarsh communities following the introduction of livestock. Sea-level rises as a result of climate change will have an impact, particularly in areas susceptible to coastal squeeze. As they occur at the very top of the saltmarsh profile, they are vulnerable to reclamation.

Key references

Perrin, P.M., Waldren, S., Penk, M.R., O'Neill, F.H. (2020) Saltmarsh Function and Human Impacts in Relation to Ecological Status (SAMFHIRES) (2015-W-MS-19) (EPA Research Report No. 313). Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford.

Synopsis version: V1.1 **Synopsis date:** March 2025 **Synopsis author(s):** P.M. Perrin

Photo 1. SM7B *Elytrigia atherica* saltmarsh, Crompaun Bridge, Womanagh River, Cork (P. Perrin, August 2018)

Photo 2. SM7B *Elytrigia atherica* saltmarsh, Broad Lough, Wicklow (P. Perrin, August 2018)