

6th July 2011

Dear Stakeholder,

RE: 2011 CONSULTATION ON THE SELECTION OF THREE SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION IN UK OFFSHORE WATERS

I am writing to invite you to participate in the forthcoming public consultation on the selection of three possible offshore Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) – Croker Carbonate Slabs, Pisces Reef Complex, and Wight-Barfleur Reef. The three sites are areas in UK offshore waters which JNCC has recommended to Government for selection as SACs for their seabed habitats of European importance.

Croker Carbonate Slabs pSAC is in the Irish Sea and is proposed for selection for the “submarine structures made by leaking gases” which occur there. Pisces Reef Complex in the Irish Sea and Wight-Barfleur Reef in the English Channel are both proposed for selection for their reef habitat.

The public consultation on the selection of the three sites will begin on the 6th July 2011 and will run for a 12 week period. We are inviting comments on:

- i. the scientific justification for the selection of each site as an SAC; and
- ii. the assessment of the likely economic impact of designation of each site as an SAC (the ‘Impact Assessment’, formerly known as Regulatory Impact Assessment).

The deadline for JNCC to receive feedback from consultees is the **29th September 2011**. Further information about this public consultation, including full explanatory documents and maps for each possible site and a form for responses, is available online at www.jncc.gov.uk/marineconsult.

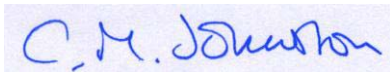
If you cannot access the documents from our website we can provide all the necessary information to participate in this consultation on a CD - please send an email with 'Information request: 2011 Offshore SACs Three Sites Consultation' in the subject line to offshoreconsult@jncc.gov.uk, or contact Luke Laletin on 01733 866833.

Please see brief explanatory notes below, and further information on our website at www.jncc.gov.uk/marineprotectedsites. If you would like to meet with JNCC to discuss the consultation, or if you require any more information, please contact us using the contact details above.

Once the consultation period has closed, JNCC will compile and consider responses, and revise our site recommendations if appropriate, update the supporting Impact Assessments, and report to the Secretary of State as required under Regulation 8 of the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats &c. Regulations) 2007 (as amended). A report of the consultation will be made publicly available. The Secretary of State will then decide whether to submit the possible sites to the European Commission.

We look forward to receiving your input to the consultation.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "C. M. Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light blue rectangular background.

Charlotte Johnston
Marine Natura Sites Manager, JNCC

Explanatory Notes:

The identification of offshore SACs is required under the Offshore Marine Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 2007 (as amended), which entered into force on 21 August 2007. These regulations form the legal basis for the implementation of the EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Wild Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) in UK offshore waters. JNCC is responsible for the identification of SACs in the UK's offshore marine area.

The possible SACs at Croker Carbonate Slabs, Pisces Reef and Wight-Barfleur Reef have been put forward by JNCC to the UK Government on the basis of selection criteria contained within the EC Habitats Directive Annex III, and EC Guidance on implementation of the Natura 2000 network in the marine environment. Selection of sites and their boundaries must be based on the selection criteria, and relevant scientific information, not on socio-economic grounds, so marine activities information provided for the site-specific Impact Assessments will not be used to modify the possible sites boundaries but could be used to inform possible management measures.

This consultation does not concern future management of activities potentially affecting a site that may be required in order to maintain, or where appropriate to restore, habitats at favourable conservation status, as required by the Habitats Directive. Management of activities likely to affect sites will be undertaken by competent authorities under the terms of the Offshore Marine Conservation Regulations. To help Competent Authorities to manage their activities in relation to these sites, JNCC will establish Conservation Objectives and provide advice for Competent Authorities on operations which may adversely affect the integrity of the site. Indicative 'Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations' are provided for each site in draft form on JNCC's website for information during the consultation process. Any future management measures required are likely to be subject to public consultation.