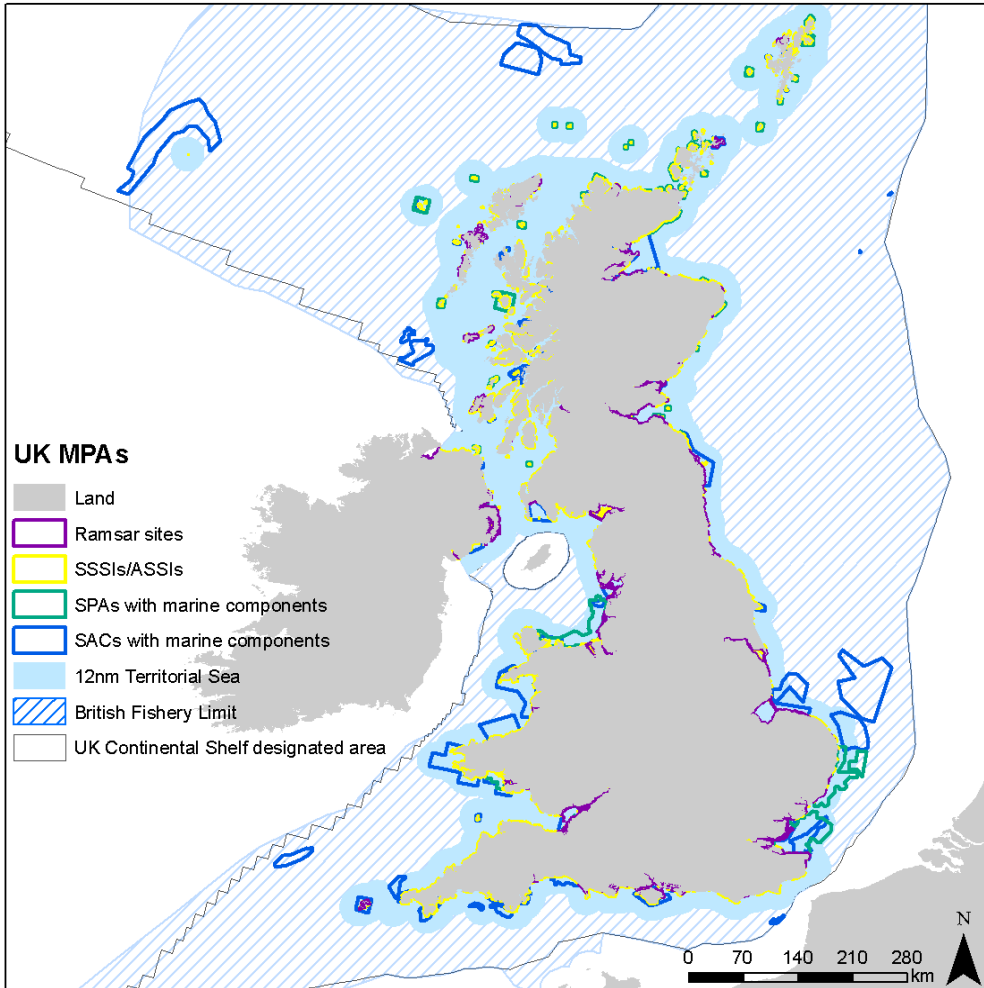


A ‘protected area’ is defined by the IUCN as ‘a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’. This document focuses on Marine Protected Areas designated to protect the natural environment.





Map projected in Europe Albers Equal Area Conic (Modified Standard Parallels - Standard Parallel 1 = 50.2; Standard Parallel 2 = 58.5). The exact limits of the UK Continental Shelf are set out in orders made under section 1(7) of the Continental Shelf Act 1964 (© Crown Copyright). World Vector Shoreline © US Defense Mapping Agency. Map copyright JNCC 2010. AR 20/08/2010

In the UK we have several types of Marine Protected Area (MPA) giving different levels of protection (see map for the areas of sea that are already protected within MPAs). The MPAs that we already have are:

- ◆ Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);
- ◆ Special Protection Areas (SPAs);
- ◆ Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)/Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs);
- ◆ Ramsar sites;
- ◆ Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs).

The UK has signed up to international agreements that aim to establish an 'ecologically coherent network of MPAs' by 2012. This means the MPA network will be a collection of areas that work together to provide more benefits than an individual area could on its own. In England and Wales the MPA network will be made up of the current MPAs listed above, plus a new type of MPA called a Marine Conservation Zone. Similarly in Scotland the MPA network will be made up of the MPAs listed above, but include a new type called a Nature Conservation MPA. Northern Ireland will be introducing a Marine Bill to the Northern Ireland Assembly by 2011, this will outline proposals for nature conservation in Northern Ireland's territorial waters.

European Sites

European legislation allows for the designation of MPAs in the marine environment. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are required by law under the European Habitats Directive. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are required by law under the European Wild Birds Directive. Together SACs and SPAs make up a Europe wide network of protected areas called the Natura 2000 network. The marine areas of both SACs and SPAs are collectively termed European Marine Sites. European Marine Sites protect the specific species and habitats that are listed in the European legislation. Sites are managed to protect the designated features from any damaging activities, only restricting activities where it cannot be proved that they will not have an adverse effect.

The EC Birds and Habitats Directives require that site selection is based on scientific grounds and do not permit economic or social impacts to influence the choice of sites or their boundaries. The UK as a Member State must identify the sites and boundaries based on the presence of the best examples of habitats and species populations specified in the Directives. The sites are identified and recommended to Government by the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies. Once identified, they are the subject of a formal public consultation when people with additional scientific information are invited to provide it.

Special Areas of Conservation

SACs can be identified for the habitats and species listed on the Directive (these include sandbanks, reefs and bottlenose dolphins). The network of SACs in the UK is almost complete on land and work is progressing to identify sites at sea.

Special Protection Areas

SPAs must be identified for birds listed on Annex I of the Directive and regularly occurring migratory species. The country conservation agencies, Northern Ireland Environment Agency and JNCC are currently working to identify extensions out to sea for coastal SPAs and additional SPAs at sea.



Starfish (*Henricia* sp.) at Hilsea © Keith Hiscock

Other Sites

European sites protect a limited number of species and habitats. Therefore we have additional sites that aim to protect examples of the range of our wildlife that is not protected by European legislation.

Ramsar Sites

Ramsar sites are designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance 1971. The Convention adopts a broad definition of wetland, namely "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres". Wetlands "may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands". As such, Ramsar sites that protect intertidal or subtidal habitats and species are considered MPAs.



Kelp forest at Runnelstone, Cornwall © Keith Hiscock

Sites of Special Scientific Interest/ Areas of Special Scientific Interest

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England, Wales and Scotland and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) in Northern Ireland protect species, habitats and geological features of national importance. They are notified and managed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Act 1985 (as amended). They are considered MPAs where they protect intertidal or subtidal habitats and species, however, they do not normally offer protection below the low water mark and therefore offer protection to a limited range of marine wildlife.

Marine Nature Reserves

Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) can currently be designated under the same legislation as SSSIs and ASSIs. However, MNRs are limited in scope and the Marine and Coastal Access Act introduced the mechanism for them to become Marine Conservation Zones (see below). This has already happened for Lundy which has become the UK's first MCZ.

New National Sites

The current MPA designations can only protect the specific species and habitats listed and therefore there are large areas of our seas, particularly away from the coast, that are not protected.

Marine Conservation Zones

The Marine and Coastal Access Act received Royal Assent on 12th November 2009. It creates a new type of MPA, called a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). MCZs will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology and they can be designated anywhere in English and Welsh inshore and offshore waters. Sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but the range of marine wildlife. Unlike other MPA designations, social and economic factors may also be taken into account when identifying new sites.

A Marine Conservation Zone Project has been established for English inshore waters and English, Welsh and Northern Irish offshore waters. The project aims to recommend a network of sites to Government by October 2011. To provide further information on the MCZ Project we have produced another document called “The Marine Conservation Zone Project”.

Welsh inshore waters are not covered by the MCZ Project. A significant proportion of Welsh inshore waters are already protected by some form of designation. The Welsh Assembly Government intends to use the MCZ mechanism to designate a small number of highly protected MCZs (these are sites where all damaging and disturbing activities will be excluded). In Wales MCZ selection will be managed by the Welsh Assembly Government in collaboration with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and will engage widely with the public and stakeholder interests. The project aims to recommend sites to the Welsh Assembly Government in 2012. Close links will be maintained with the MCZ Project in England, especially where proposed zones share borders.



Red sea fingers (*Alcyonium glomeratus*) © Keith Hiscock

Scottish Marine Protected Areas

Under the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act and the Marine (Scotland) Act, Nature Conservation MPAs can be designated in the seas around Scotland for the conservation of nationally important marine habitats and species and features of geological or geomorphological interest. Marine Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and JNCC are working in partnership on the Scottish MPA Project.

Nature Conservation MPAs will be identified using science-based selection guidelines, but socio-economic data may be used to select between sites of equal scientific merit, during boundary setting and to address the feasibility of management measures. Throughout the MPA site selection process, additional data from stakeholders will be sought to help ensure, where it is possible to do so, the development of a network of MPAs that causes minimum disruption to legitimate social and economic uses of the sea.



Common lobster (*Homarus gammarus*) © Keith Hiscock

Websites are listed below for further information on Marine Protected Areas:

United Kingdom

Defra

W: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/biodiversity/marine

JNCC

W: www.jncc.gov.uk/marineprotectedsites

England

Natural England

W: www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/marine/protectandmanage/mpa

Wales

Welsh Assembly Government

W (English): www.wales.gov.uk/environment (under Conservation and Management)

W (Welsh): www.cymru.gov.uk/amgylchedd

Scotland

Scottish Government

W: www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/25-MarineScot/index.htm

Cover image. Camber Sands, East Sussex © Amy Ridgeway 2009



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