

Designation of Nature Conservation MPAs – FAQs

July 2014

Why have new MPAs been designated in Scotland?

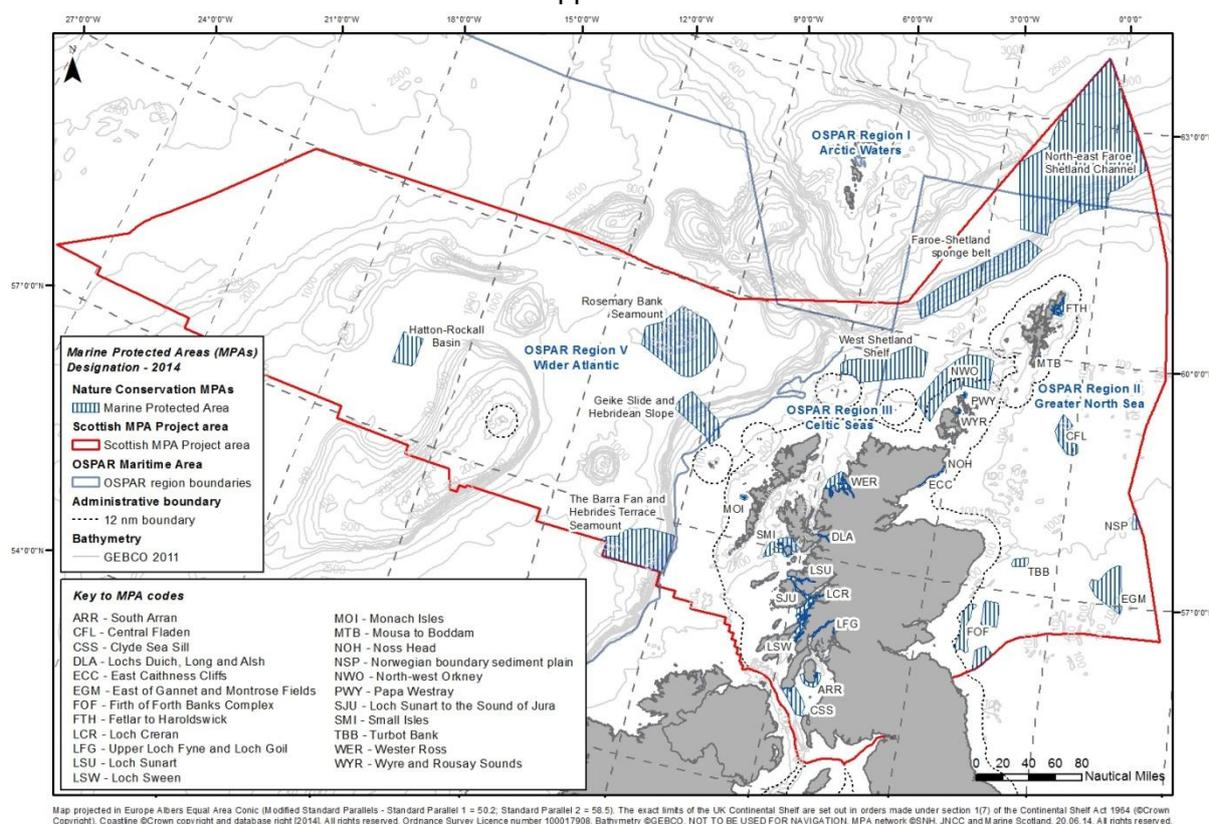
With an area six times that of its landmass, Scotland's seas support a rich array of marine habitats, species, seabed geology and undersea landforms and are home to approximately 6,500 different species of plants and animals, with a seabed every bit as varied as the land.

Existing protected sites such as Special Areas of Conservation offer protection to a limited number of habitats and species considered to be of European importance, and marine parts of Sites of Special Scientific Interest for habitats and species of national importance at the coast. To date there had been no mechanism to protect the full range of Scotland's nationally important marine life throughout Scotland's seas. The suite of 30 Nature Conservation MPAs will help protect the full range of features in Scotland's seas for which MPAs are considered appropriate.

What are Nature Conservation MPAs?

In July 2014, 30 new Nature Conservation MPAs were designated in Scotland's seas. The sites have been identified to protect a range of marine habitats, species and geodiversity features. Together with existing MPAs, such as Special Areas of Conservation, the new sites will contribute to the development of an ecologically coherent and well-managed MPA network by the end of 2016 to help fulfil international and European commitments.

The 30 Nature Conservation MPAs are mapped below:



How have these sites been identified?

The work to identify suitable Nature Conservation MPAs has drawn from the best available information on the marine environment, and has included an extensive programme of new marine surveys and research.

The [Scottish MPA Selection Guidelines](#), which were jointly produced between Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), JNCC and Marine Scotland with input from key stakeholders, set out the **5-stage process** that was followed to select Nature Conservation MPAs in Scotland's seas. Our application of the selection guidelines is described in the Detailed Assessment against the Guidelines document produced for each Nature Conservation MPA.

Who identified the Nature Conservation MPAs?

The project is led by Marine Scotland in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Historic Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Marine Scotland Science. Although JNCC and SNH used a science-based approach to select Nature Conservation MPAs, there have been many opportunities for stakeholder engagement throughout the process. Marine Scotland led five [national stakeholder workshops](#) with a range of stakeholders invited to discuss and improve the data we hold on [marine features](#) and [marine activities](#), and consider the selection of [initial](#) and [additional](#) MPA search locations to develop the [MPA proposals](#). In addition to these national workshops, regular update meetings have and will continue to be, held with stakeholder groups – progressively being focussed on discussions around site management.

How has the information used to identify the sites been reviewed?

Following the public consultation on Nature Conservation MPAs, which closed in November 2013, Marine Scotland commissioned an [Independent Review](#) of the scientific evidence-base and the recommendations made by SNH and JNCC that underpin Nature Conservation MPA designations. The review assessed the scientific rationale behind both individual site recommendations and the degree to which the Nature Conservation MPAs, in combination with existing protected areas, contribute towards network adequacy.

Overall, the reviewers agreed with the proposed sites for designation and the conclusions drawn regarding their contribution to the adequacy of the MPA network in Scotland's seas. However, they recommended that some aspects of the assessments needed to be more clearly described in the site documentation. JNCC and SNH have since improved the site documentation packages at the request of Marine Scotland to reflect all essential changes proposed by the reviewers prior to designation.

Where is information about the sites available?

JNCC and SNH have prepared a package of documents to support each of the Nature Conservation MPAs. These documents are available on [SNH's website](#) for sites in territorial waters (within 12 nautical miles) and [JNCC's website](#) for offshore sites, and include:

- **A site summary document** - providing a brief overview of the site and its protected features
- **A data confidence assessment** - setting out our confidence in the presence and extent of the protected features
- **A detailed assessment against the MPA selection guidelines** - detailing the application of the five stages of the Scottish MPA Selection Guidelines
- **A management options paper** - considering the management options for achieving the conservation objectives for each of the protected features in the MPA

How were the MPA proposals consulted upon?

Over the summer of 2013, the Scottish Government undertook a public consultation on possible Nature Conservation MPAs (pMPAs), alongside parallel consultations on the draft National Marine Plan, Priority Marine Features (PMFs) and draft sectoral plans for offshore renewable energy, combined under the banner of 'Planning Scotland's Seas'. The consultation ran from 25th July 2013 until 13th November 2013, and invited respondents to

submit their views on the development of the MPA network and the specific MPA site proposals. Marine Scotland received 14,703 responses, and a summary of the responses is available on [Marine Scotland's website](#).

Fifty-six public consultation events took place around Scotland between 19th August and 30th October 2013. Coordinated by Marine Scotland, the event series included a number of JNCC and/or Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) led MPA drop-in sessions, and provided the opportunity for sea users and members of the public to find out about Nature Conservation MPAs. JNCC staff attended 14 of the events.

How were comments made in consultation responses addressed?

Following the end of the consultation, Marine Scotland officials undertook a preliminary review of the responses and at the end of December 2013 sought JNCC's advice on specific scientific and evidential aspects of 40 responses. JNCC's advice is available on the [JNCC website](#). SNH provided advice on questions regarding some science issues raised concerning MPAs in Scotland's territorial waters, which is available on the [SNH website](#).

JNCC provided detailed site documentation to support the public consultation on possible Nature Conservation MPAs. Some respondents provided detailed site-specific comments on both the evidence base and the proposed site boundaries. JNCC have pursued an ongoing programme to collect data and information for the offshore sites. Since the consultation, JNCC have been reviewing the MPA boundaries and supporting site documentation to take into account data delivered since spring 2013, together with scientific issues raised by consultation respondents. JNCC provided Marine Scotland with updated boundaries and revised documentation to support further discussions with stakeholders, and Ministerial decisions on designation.

What decisions were made about which options and science-based alternatives to designate?

At the point of public consultation, JNCC noted that there were some options within the network to represent certain features offshore. Some sites were considered to be ecologically equivalent for the same combinations of features, and some were identified as science-based alternatives for the representation of features as requested by Marine Scotland. Scottish Government considered the options, and decided which sites to designate for which features:

- Of the three ecologically equivalent options within the Fladen Grounds, Scottish Government decided to designate the Central Fladen MPA for to represent the burrowed mud feature (both tall sea pen and seapens and burrowing megafauna components) rather than the options of Western Fladen or South-east Fladen pMPAs.
- Of the two ecologically equivalent sites on the Hebridean Slope, Scottish Government decided to designate the Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope MPA as opposed to South-west Sula Sgeir and Hebridean Slope.
- Of the science based alternatives in the Northern North Sea, Scottish Government decided to designate the Firth of Forth Banks Complex MPA for all the proposed protected features (offshore subtidal sands and gravels, ocean quahog aggregations, shelf banks and mounds, and geodiversity interests), in addition to the Turbot Bank MPA to represent sandeels. Ministers also decided to designate Norwegian Boundary Sediment Plain for ocean quahog aggregations.

Why have the boundaries of some sites changed?

JNCC considered alternative boundaries proposed by stakeholders for some MPAs. We have provided advice to Marine Scotland on the ecological implications to the adequacy of the network of progressing these alternatives to designation. Having considered the

comments received as part of the formal consultation, JNCC recommended that a minimum of 12 of the 16 sites identified in Scotland's offshore waters be designated to contribute to an ecologically coherent network of MPAs.

For the majority of Nature Conservation MPAs in offshore waters, JNCC made only minor changes to the boundaries following the public consultation. These relate to simplifying the boundary lines of the sites to reduce the number of site coordinates listed in the Designation Orders, or to align with changes to the UK's offshore extent following the adoption of the UK Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in April 2014.

For six of the 13 MPAs, changes have been more significant:

- **Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt**

During the public consultation, JNCC received quality assured data products relating to the extent, distribution and density of records of deep-sea sponge aggregations within the MPA. There was also a request from stakeholders during the public consultation that the western extent of the MPA be reduced in size. After considering these data products, JNCC concluded that moving the western boundary to remove records of 'sparse' deep-sea sponge aggregations whilst retaining ocean quahog records would not affect overall network adequacy or the integrity of the protected features within the site.

- **North-east Faroe-Shetland Channel**

There was a request from stakeholders during the public consultation that the extent of the MPA should be reduced to focus on the features of interest. Marine Scotland requested JNCC consider this suggestion in light of feature integrity and network adequacy. The original southern boundary included the area of the continental slope predicted as suitable habitat for deep-sea sponge aggregations based on peer-reviewed information. On review, JNCC considered that on scientific grounds reducing the extent of the southern boundary would not affect network adequacy or integrity for the protected features. As such, the southern boundary on the upper slope was adapted to follow the 0° line, whilst including the full extent of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) recommended Vulnerable Marine Ecosystem (VME) closure, and fully encompassing ground-truthed records of deep-sea sponge aggregations. The revised boundary also took into consideration the new EEZ boundary, and simplified the other boundary lines to reduce the list of coordinates included in the Designation Order.

- **Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope**

There was a request from stakeholders during the public consultation that the extent of the MPA should be reduced. Marine Scotland requested JNCC consider this suggestion in light of feature integrity and network adequacy. In addition, Marine Scotland requested that JNCC consider findings from the Independent Review that suggested the MPA boundary at the base of the continental slope moving towards the abyssal plain could be drawn more tightly to the features of interest (namely sedimentary communities on the continental slope). JNCC considered this advice and adjusted the MPA boundary accordingly.

- **The Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount**

There was a request from stakeholders during the public consultation that the extent of the MPA should be reduced. Marine Scotland requested JNCC consider this suggestion in light of feature integrity and network adequacy. The original eastern boundary included an area of offshore subtidal sands and gravels on the continental shelf in OSPAR Region III. JNCC considered that the area of the MPA on the

continental shelf could be removed without compromising the overall adequacy of the network.

- **Turbot Bank**

During the public consultation, JNCC received quality assured products from a recent survey that provided improved detail of the extent of the Turbot Bank shelf bank feature. The western boundary of the MPA was increased and altered slightly to reflect the full extent of the shelf bank and mound feature.

How will Nature Conservation MPAs be managed?

Nature Conservation MPAs will be managed to ensure the protected features achieve their conservation objectives. The Scottish MPA Project [management handbook](#) sets out the approach to identify and implement any management measures required for Nature Conservation MPAs. The handbook, the Feature Activity Sensitivity Tool (FEAST) and [guidance on developing fisheries measures](#), together with discussions with stakeholders, supported the development of management options papers for each Nature Conservation MPA.

Following site designation, Marine Scotland is considering in more detail how sites might best be managed. If Ministers decide that a statutory measure (e.g. a fisheries order) is needed to deliver management, then a separate consultation will be held. The aim of this approach will be to gather views on the specific management measures being proposed. Further discussion on management measures will take place from 2014 onwards. The potential impacts of licensed activities on the protected features within the Nature Conservation MPAs will be assessed through the existing Environmental Impact Assessment process on a case-by-case basis. Early dialogue with Marine Scotland and JNCC will help identify and resolve any issues at an early stage in the process.

More information on the management options to achieve the conservation objectives of protected features is provided in the Management Options Paper for each Nature Conservation MPA.

Is the Scottish network now considered to be adequate?

At the time of designation and based on the information we hold on the extent and distribution of protected features, we consider the MPA search features to be adequately represented within the MPA network in Scotland as far as is possible to do so. A revised network adequacy report has been produced that gives a summary of adequacy considerations per MPA search feature.