

**Joint Nature Conservation Committee
2011 Consultation on three offshore Special Areas of Conservation**

**Pisces Reef Complex SAC Selection Assessment supplementary brief
6th July 2011**

The scientific justification for the existing Pisces Reef Complex pSAC boundary is outlined in the current SAC Selection Assessment Document version 4.0 (18th March 2011). Three areas of reef have been mapped and identified from acoustic data and photography (video and stills) originating from a variety of sources. These three areas of reef comprise the currently recommended Pisces Reef Complex pSAC (see site map in the SAC Selection Assessment document)

Since JNCC made the recommendation for the Pisces Reef Complex draft SAC to Defra, re-analysis of data by British Geological Survey to provide a map of predicted locations of rock at or within 0.5m of the seabed surface across UK waters has become available to assist in the identification of Marine Conservation Zones (MB 103 data contract¹). This dataset shows four additional areas of 'rock' in the vicinity of Pisces Reef Complex pSAC (see areas coloured green in Figure 1). The records for the four areas of potential reef in this dataset are based on Admiralty Chart data, with either seismic survey (BGS_168) or multibeam bathymetry (BGS_160) for two polygons. JNCC have investigated the detailed information on these areas to determine if they really are rock or reef at the seabed, and what biota they may support, and from this, consider whether any of them should be included within the Pisces Reef Complex pSAC recommendation. From the partial multibeam data for the area marked BGS_160 on Figure 1, it appears not to be rock exposed at the seabed surface that could be Annex I reef habitat, and will therefore not be considered for inclusion within the Pisces Reef Complex SAC recommendation. JNCC are investigating the data behind the other three polygons and will continue to do so during the consultation period.

JNCC would like to ascertain whether there is further information which would help to determine if these areas are actually rock exposed at the seabed surface. This further information must have accurate location data, and could take the form of acoustic (echo sounder, AGDS, sidescan, multibeam or OLEX data, or plotter tracks from fishing vessels), We would also like to know whether there is any ground validation information indicating the nature of the seabed and what flora or fauna exist at these locations, such as grab sampling, photography, other sampling, or seabed information from fishing.

Please forward relevant information with your consultation response, clearly indicating that you have supplied information as requested in this supplementary brief.

If no additional information is provided on these three potential reef areas (BGS167, BGS_168 and BGS_161) during the consultation, JNCC do not consider that there is enough data on these areas to confirm whether they are Annex I reef habitat, and if so, what species are present. Therefore, unless suitable additional data are provided, JNCC will recommend that these polygons are *not* added to the Pisces Reef Complex pSAC recommendation.

If suitable data are provided, JNCC will consider whether the data indicate the presence of Annex I reef, consider the areas against the site selection criteria, and, if justified, add any of relevant areas to the site recommendation.

¹ British Geological Survey 2010 Developing the necessary data layers for Marine Conservation Zone selection - Distribution of rock/hard substrate on the UK Continental Shelf. Defra Marine Biodiversity Research and Development Programme: Project MB 103.

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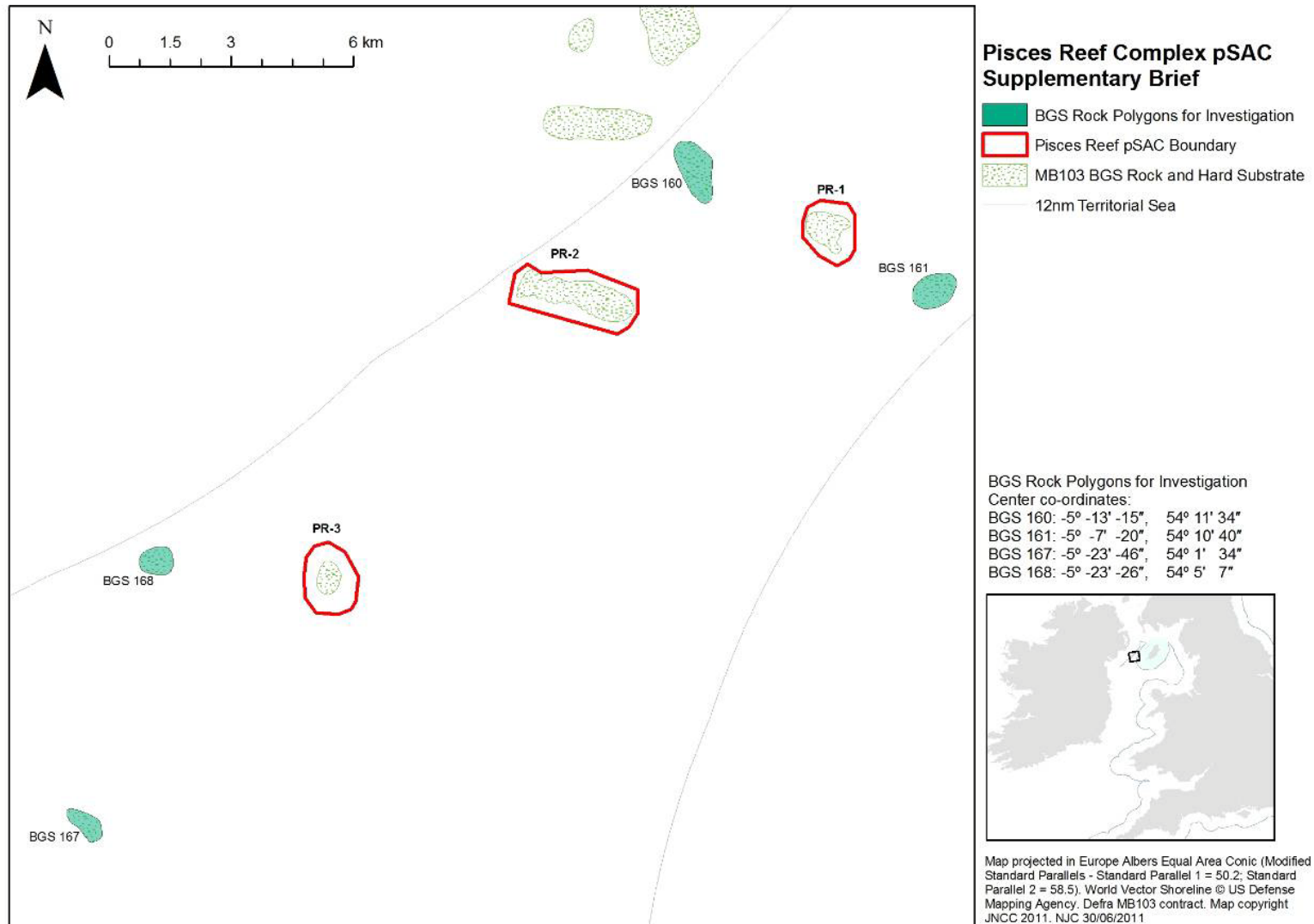


Figure 1: BGS 'rock' areas for consideration