

Western Channel Marine Conservation Zone

This document sets out why this site is important, the features protected and general management information.

17 January 2016



Survey image of Western Channel MCZ showing a hermit crabs (*Pagurus prideaux*) with cloak anemones (*Adamsia palliata*) on subtidal coarse sediment © Crown copyright

Overview

This site became a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) on 17 January 2016. This means that specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities.

Where is the site

Western Channel is an offshore site to the south of Cornwall, which covers about 1,614 km². The northwest tip of site is closest to land, at 54km south-east of the Lizard Peninsula. The depth of this site is mostly between 50 and 100 meters, but in the west it is more than 100 meters deep.

Why it's important

MCZs, together with other types of marine protected areas, will form the UK contribution to an international network of protected sites in the north east Atlantic. The network will help to deliver the government's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. MCZs protect typical, rare or declining habitats and species found in our seas.

This site is important for protecting coarse sediment on the seabed, only a small amount of which is currently protected in existing marine protected areas in the region. It's also important to protect this example of the sediment habitat because it provides connectivity between sites in the region for the species that use these habitats, as the other examples of protection for this habitat are at least 80km away.

This MCZ protects two habitats, both of which support a variety of life. The coarse sediment is home to many animals like bristleworms, sand mason worms, small shrimp-like animals, burrowing anemones, carpet shell clams and venus cockles. These animals shelter by burying themselves under the surface of the sediment. The site also protects sand on the seabed. At first glance, sand may appear desert like, but close inspection can reveal flat fish and sand eels camouflaged on the surface of the sand, and worms living within it.

Designation of this site as a Marine Conservation Zone protects the following features. You can find detailed explanations of each feature at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>.

Protected features	General management approach
Subtidal coarse sediment	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal sand	Recover to favourable condition

Management of the site

Now that this site has been designated, some activities may need additional management. Activities and the management measures used to regulate them may need to change if new evidence becomes available.

Most marine activity is already regulated by the relevant regulatory bodies. There are existing byelaws, national laws and European Regulations which regulators use to manage fishing, coastal development, recreation and pollution, these also apply in MCZs.

Regulators will manage each site according to the features and activities in, or near, a specific area. Management measures will be implemented at sites most at risk of damage first, regulating only those activities which have a detrimental impact on the designated features. Any management measures that are required for MCZs will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Management in MCZs can take several different forms, from using existing licensing framework, specific byelaws and orders or an EU Regulation for a site. There has to be public consultation on permanent byelaws and orders. For activities that already need a marine licence, regulators consider the MCZ in their decision as soon as the site is consulted on. Find out more about marine licensing in MCZs at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-mczs-and-marine-licensing>.

Regulators

This table lists the authorities responsible for MCZs and the activities they manage.

Lead regulator	What it manages
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) http://www.association-ifca.org.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries in the inshore area (0-6 nautical miles (nm)) including commercial fisheries and recreational sea angling
Marine Management Organisation (MMO) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries in the 6-12nm area • Fisheries: enforcement of national and EU legislation • Licensable activities such as dredging and disposal of dredged material, removal of gravel below mean high water springs, subsea cables (up to 12nm), construction (including renewables below 100MW generating capacity, ports and coastal protection) • Harbour Orders and Harbour Empowerment Orders • Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and safety zones for offshore renewable energy installations consents • Enforcement of licensable activity and other consents (including deemed marine licences) • Development of marine plans • Activities requiring a wildlife licence
Environment Agency (EA) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries for migratory and freshwater fish • Coastal protection and flood management • Water quality • Permitted discharges from terrestrial sources
Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil and gas related activities • Renewable energy related activities
Harbour Authorities and local planning authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for the port and coastal waters within their jurisdiction • Local authorities manage activities at the coast. These include coastal recreation, tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection and planning on coasts and estuaries. For further information contact your local authority or IFCA
Department for Transport (DfT) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ports, shipping, harbours, ship pollution and offshore safety
Natural England (NE) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public access

Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/marine-environment>

See JNCC's advice on MCZs at:

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6658>



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