

The case for more

Marine Conservation Zones

A report for Government by The Wildlife Trusts

We all need a healthy sea

The Wildlife Trusts have been campaigning for a well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas since 2003. Concerned about the serious declines we were seeing in our species and habitats, we challenged the Government to take a new approach. After a long campaign which attracted enthusiastic cross party support from the backbenches, the Marine and Coastal Access Act passed in 2009. Similar legislation followed in Scotland and Northern Ireland. These are the laws to deliver a UK-wide network of Marine Protected Areas. The challenge is to make it happen.

Devolution means our seas are managed in different ways, but the Act required the UK Government to designate Marine Conservation Zones in English and Secretary of State Waters. With other stakeholders, we began to map out the Marine Conservation Zones, recommending a network of 127 sites. To support their designation, we surveyed sites to build scientific evidence, gathered signatures from the public, and marched on parliament on numerous occasions.

In 2013, the first tranche of 27 Marine Conservation Zones were designated. A second tranche of 23 were added in early 2016. Taken with our European Marine Sites (Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) this is significant progress, but it is not yet an ecologically coherent network. Now the UK



Joan Edwards
Joan is Head of Living Seas at The Wildlife Trusts. She led our campaign for the Marine Bill, and has worked on the designation of the first two tranches of MCZs

Government has committed to designating a third and final tranche of Marine Conservation Zones.

All sites currently in the network play an important role and following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, it is crucial that protection of our European Marine Sites is not weakened or lost. Likewise, progress towards the third tranche of Marine Conservation Zones under UK law should not be derailed or significantly slowed. Completion of our ecologically coherent network is vital to help our seas recover and thrive; this report sets out what we believe is the minimum requirement for designation in English and Secretary of State waters to complete the network. It provides information on 48 sites – the large gap fillers in the Blue Belt that the Conservative Government committed to designate in their 2015 manifesto.

We also include information on the six sites in Welsh offshore waters, which have been postponed as these waters are likely to be devolved shortly. These sites risk falling between the political gaps, but they are too important in completing the network to be forgotten about.

Designation of this network is an important first step to allow our seas to recover and thrive. But we still have a lot of work to do to ensure the sites are properly managed and protected. And, if this Blue Belt is to be truly ecologically coherent, then we need more progress in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

White-beaked dolphin off the Northumbrian coast, by John Carnell. No MCZ currently exists to protect this species

Marine Conservation Zones: The principle of Ecological Coherence

To be truly coherent, the sites in the UK network need to meet five crucial criteria

In the past, Marine Protected Areas have tended to be isolated, with little or no consideration of how they work together at an ecosystem level.

Yet an ecologically coherent network can maintain the processes, function and structures of protected features more effectively than individual sites on their own.

This rationale comes from the OSPAR Commission – a group of 15 Governments and the EU formed to protect

the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. The Commission proposes five main principles, illustrated below, which are crucial to developing a network.

A network formed on these principles, together with good stakeholder involvement, proper management and ongoing monitoring, could maximise the benefits of a MPA network in the UK. Essentially, the network would be worth more than the sum of its parts.



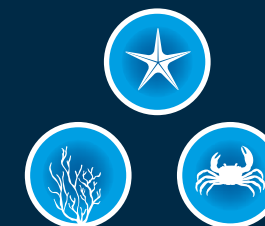
1. Features

Sites should be identified for their range of species and habitats (known as features). Consideration should be given to those species and habitats that are in decline, rare or threatened.



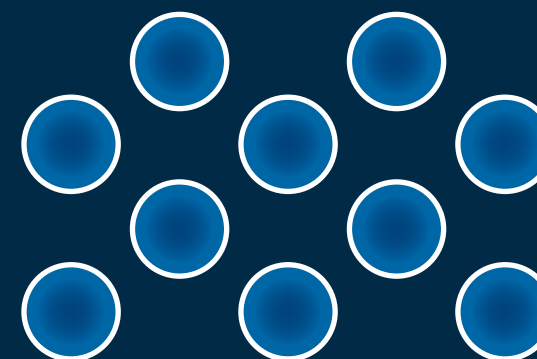
2. Connectivity

Sites should be well distributed, but close enough to ensure ecological links are maintained so that fragmented habitats can recover.



3. Representativity

The full range of habitats and species found in the geographical area should be represented within the network and an adequate proportion of features should be included.



4. Resilience

Individual sites should be large enough to provide meaningful protection, and replicated to ensure a resilient network.



5. Management

Each site should be managed to ensure protection of the features for which it was proposed. There should be no damaging activities.

Support for marine protection is widespread

The public, political parties, industry and our 800,000-strong membership are all behind us



The British public

There is strong support for marine protection in general and Marine Conservation Zones in particular. In 2013 The Wildlife Trusts, Marine Conservation Society, RSPB and WWF presented a petition signed by over 350,000 people to Downing Street calling for greater protection of our seas. This shows the vast social value of marine protection and healthy seas.



UK Politicians

There is all-party support for MPAs across the UK. By December 2014, over 180 MPs and Peers had signed in support of an ecologically coherent network. We are asking new MPs to sign on wcl.org.uk/marinecharter. All the main parties referred to MPAs in their manifestos. The Conservatives are now committed to 'a Blue Belt to protect precious marine habitats'.



Local fishermen

Protecting the seabed from damaging trawling can help protect the livelihoods of other fishermen. For example, trawling activity off the Holderness Coast in 2012 resulted in the loss of £250,000 worth of static gear and loss of earnings. Protecting the seabed here would safeguard the environment, the wildlife it supports and livelihoods for the future.



Marine industries

We have signed a joint Statement with the Sea Bed Users Development Group alongside MCS, RSPB and WWF. This statement urges the Government to make sure that the network of Marine Protected Areas is properly established, resourced and managed. See wildlifetrusts.org/MPA

Marine Conservation Zones can boost local economies

Economic studies suggest they are worth more intact than destroyed

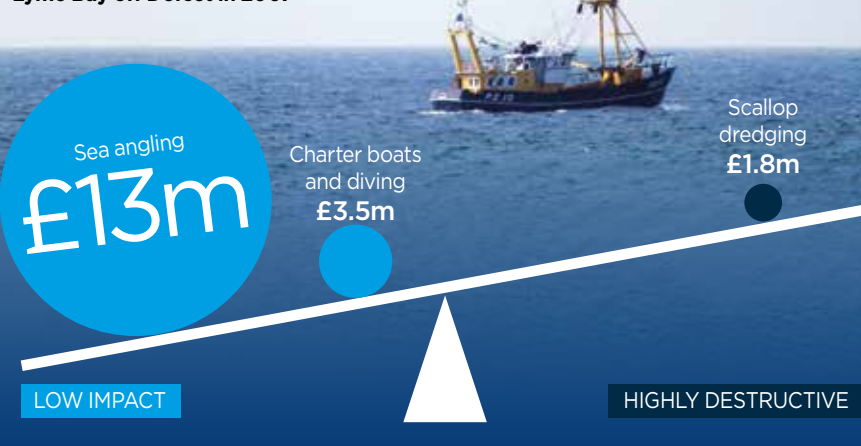
The Natural Capital Committee was set up by Government to recommend a strategy on better valuing nature so that we can continue to benefit from services such as pollination, flood reduction and carbon storage.

Some of the sites not consulted on for tranche 2 were deemed to place too great a burden on industry. Little consideration was given to the benefits that protecting and recovering these sites could bring.

It is vital that we capture the benefits of Marine Conservation Zones. This will help decision makers to avoid focusing on short-term costs, and instead to understand that designation is an investment that can deliver to society.

Sustainable v unsustainable in Lyme Bay

Values of marine businesses in Lyme Bay off Dorset in 2007



Estimate of Economic Values of Activities in proposed conservation zone in Lyme Bay, Report to The Wildlife Trusts (2007)

Marine protection really matters

We are surrounded by the sea, but we don't often stop to consider how much our daily lives rely upon it.

No matter where you live you are connected to the sea. The world's oceans produce half of the world's oxygen and absorb almost one third of human produced carbon dioxide. They regulate our weather and form clouds that bring us fresh water. We take fish to eat, use the surface for transport and now look to the sea to provide us with renewable energy too.

For too long we have assumed that the sea will provide, without much thought about

how to look after this environment, upon which we all depend. As a result, our seas and seabed are simply not as diverse or healthy as they could be. A well-managed network of protected sites will help them to recover from past damage and give them the resilience to better cope with a changing climate and the continued pressure we put them under.

If we look after the sea, it will look after us. Asking for greater protection of an already over-used resource is really a small ask – that will have huge implications for generations to come.

Did you know?

The world's oceans produce half of the world's oxygen and absorb almost one third of human-produced carbon dioxide

'Every second breath you take comes from the sea'



The big gaps in the network

There are different types of Marine Protected Area that will make up the network across the whole of the UK. These include European Marine Sites protecting habitats and species of European importance (Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation) and national sites – in England called Marine Conservation Zones.

While the sites already in place, in England and Secretary of State waters, provide crucial protection to a variety of habitats and species, there are still key ecological gaps. Unless they are filled, the network will not provide robust, comprehensive protection for our seas.

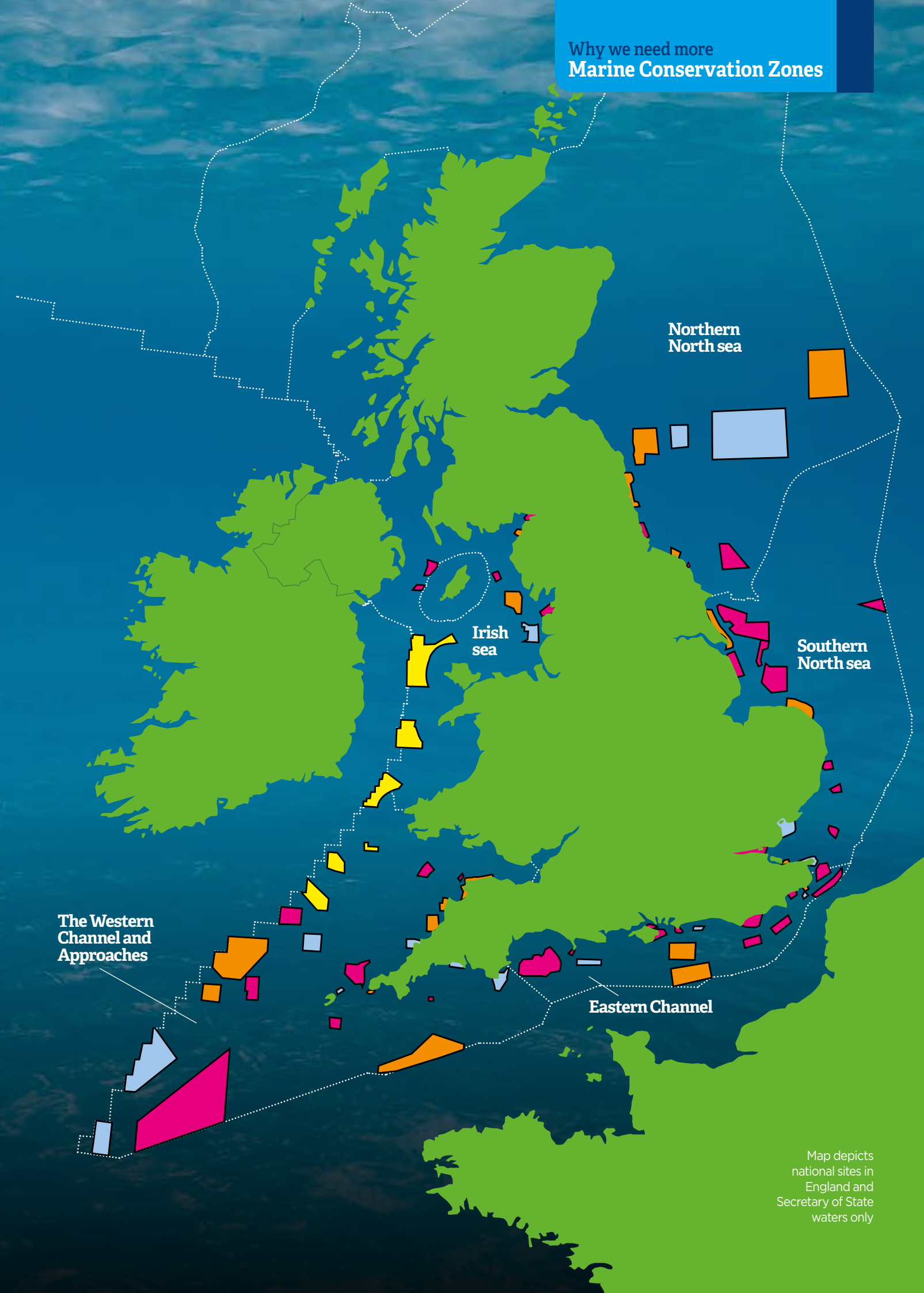
In order to assess the network, Government scientists have split our seas into biogeographical regions; we have used the same regions in this report.

The following pages outline where we think the key gaps in the network are and the sites that we think might fill them. The gaps vary across the regions as the habitats and species found in each are quite different.

While these sites are a vital step towards completing this network, they are unlikely to be all that is needed. We still need more data to better understand our marine species and habitats. In future, additional sites may be needed, or habitats and species added to existing sites, to complete the network.

Key

- Designated in Tranche 1
- Designated in Tranche 2
- Welsh offshore sites
- Areas containing The Wildlife Trusts' recommended MCZs for Tranche 3



Plaice, by Paul Naylor. This commercially valuable species relies on healthy gravel habitats

Why we need more
Marine Conservation Zones

Southern North Sea

From Flamborough to mid Kent, this region covers the waters of the Southern North Sea. Sites needed to fill gaps here include Silver Pit, which would protect deeper water sediment



Crabs and lobsters need many years free from disturbance before reaching commercially valuable size. Pic by Paul Naylor

habitats. The section known as Inner Silver Pit is a 50km glacial tunnel valley. The grounds here are important for edible crab and lobster, while ross worms create biogenic reefs (made up of tubes of sand created by the worms themselves) along the seabed. Designation would protect these valuable grounds from heavy towed fishing gear.

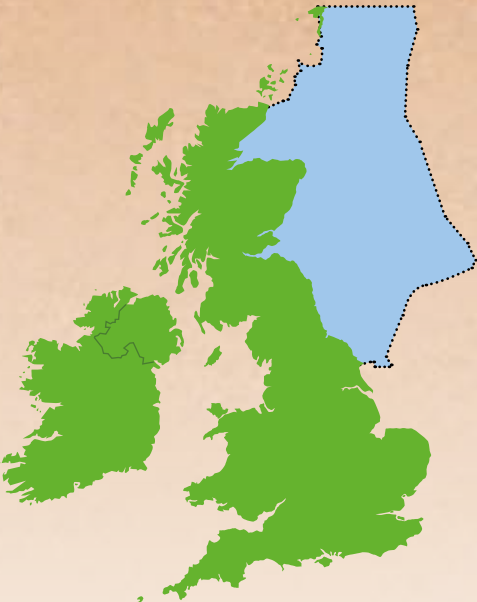
Silver Pit encompasses two original regional site recommendations; Silver Pit and Holderness Offshore, incorporating both deeper shelf habitats and the entire extent of the glacial feature.

Other proposed sites include Kentish Knock East, a series of sandbanks offshore between Kent and Essex. The sand and gravel sediments here provide habitat for burrowing species and foraging ground for rays and catsharks. Thermal fronts make this a productive area, with the presence of many species of mid-water fish and birds feeding in summer and winter.

Sediment habitats important for shellfish



Northern North Sea



Stretching down from the north-east coast of Scotland to Flamborough, this region covers the waters of the Northern North Sea.

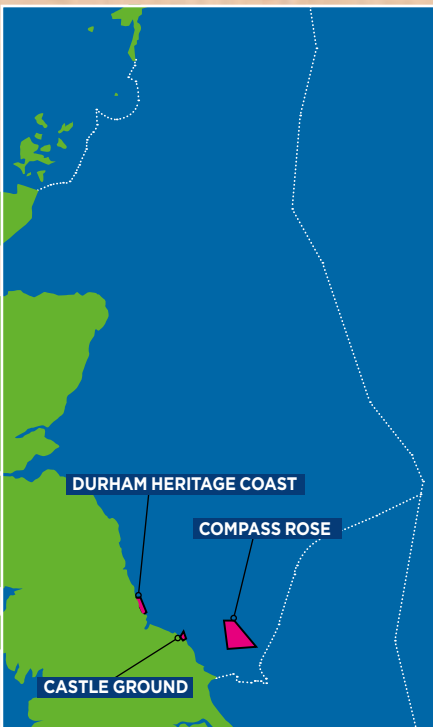
Sites identified here include Compass Rose which would help fill the gap for subtidal sand. Its habitats provide spawning and nursery

grounds for fish including plaice, herring, lemon sole, sandeel and sprat. In summer the area captures much of the northerly section of the Flamborough Front, an upwelling of nutrients where the cooler northern and warmer southern waters of the North Sea mix, providing an important food source for marine mammals.

We are also proposing Castle Ground to protect the range of intertidal habitats found here, including rare underboulder communities. This area provides a window into the world beneath the waves: home to seaweeds, sea hares, crabs and molluscs such as blue-rayed limpets. Dotted underneath rocks are anemones and sponges, alongside common starfish and brittlestars.

Even with designation of these sites, a number of gaps may remain in the network in this region. We urge both the UK and Scottish Governments to work together to ensure that the network is ecologically coherent in this region.

Important spawning grounds for fish



Eastern Channel

These waters range from the mid-Kent coastline to just south of the Dart Estuary. Recommended sites include the mud habitats of Hythe Bay. These sediments are unique to the region, packed with the burrows and tubes of an astonishing variety of species, including the square crab and the green-tongued spoon worm.

There are concerns from the fishing industry about the impact of designating Hythe Bay. We are engaged in local discussions to find a

compromise that meets industry wishes and allows protection of this important habitat.

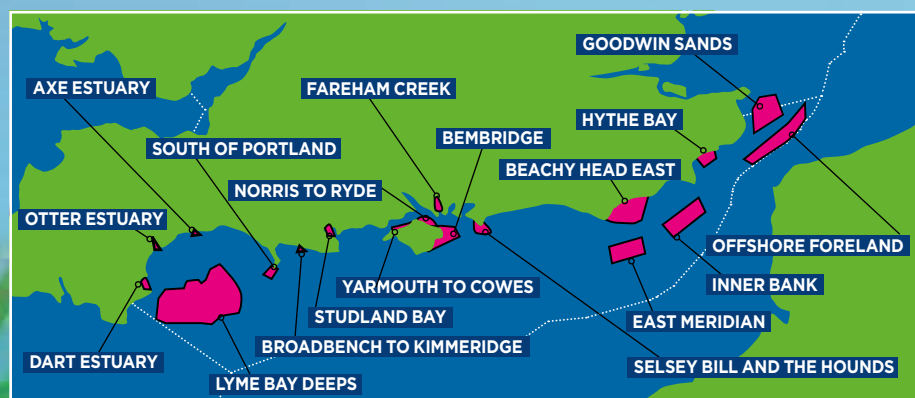
This region also has vast meadows of seagrass. Seagrass beds are not only valuable breeding grounds for fish and feeding grounds for seabirds; they also help to regulate our climate by storing carbon. Sites put forward include Studland Bay (with breeding populations of both UK species of seahorse), Norris to Ryde and Yarmouth to Cowes, both containing a rich diversity of habitats and species alongside their seagrass beds.

Bembridge rMCZ is significant due

to the high species richness found within the site and is particularly important for the populations of peacock's tail seaweed found here, thought to be important for seeding other areas around the Isle of Wight.

Goodwin Sands is important as it is as a transition site, straddling two biogeographical zones. This means that the species and habitats found here are likely to be unique. Designation of the site would help protect subtidal coarse sediments, sand and rock habitats, as well as fragile ross worm reefs and blue mussel beds.

Seagrass meadows are vital breeding grounds



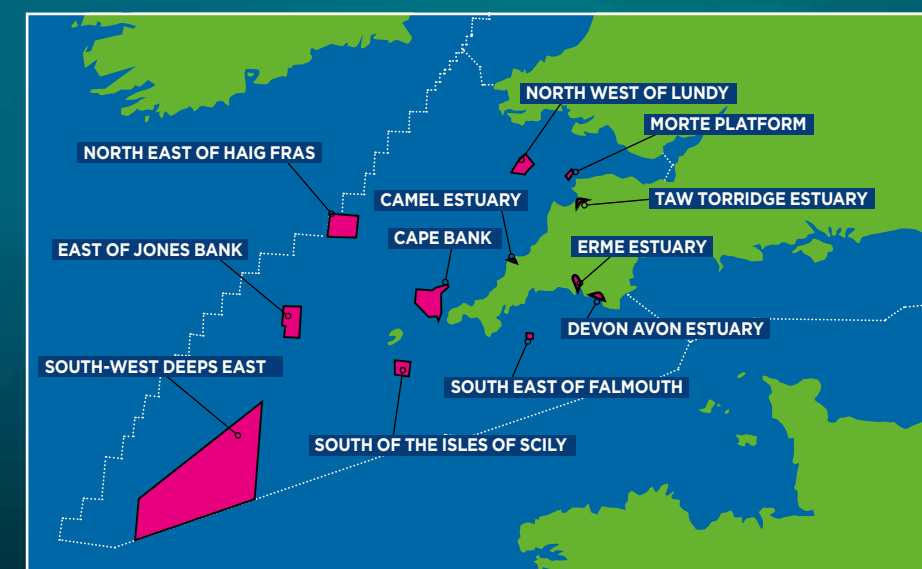
Long-snouted seahorse in Studland Bay, by Julie Hatcher

Why we need more
Marine Conservation Zones

Basking sharks use the Western approaches to follow plankton blooms. Pic by Andrew Pearson

The Western Channel and Approaches

A wide variety of habitats and species



The Western Channel includes waters on the south-west coast from south of Dartmouth, stretching around Cornwall and encompassing the north coast waters of the south west until St David's on the Welsh coast.

Habitat gaps identified here include deep sea bed and subtidal sand. South-West Deeps East is a vital site for the network; the only

site that can fill the gap for deep sea bed, a very rare habitat off English coasts. Lying 170km off Land's End, the southern boundary aligns with the UK continental shelf limit. As well as protecting the deep sea bed habitats, designation would protect the Celtic Sea Relic Sandbanks, some of the deepest and largest shelf sand ridges. The site also overlaps a seasonal thermal front

and is a nursery/ spawning ground for a range of fish, and feeding ground for seabirds and cetaceans.

Other sites include Cape Bank, lying to the west of Land's End peninsula. The large, crescent shaped reef included within this site provides shelter for crawfish as well as habitat for colonising species including filter feeding bryozoans and the Devonshire cup coral.

Irish Sea

This region includes waters of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Designation of three sites (Slieve Na Griddle, Mud Hole and South Rigg) has been delayed because of so-called economic concerns about the impact on the Northern Ireland *Nephrops* fishery.

These areas of seabed are mainly deep-water mud habitats with communities of delicate sea pens, hydroids, urchins, molluscs, and burrowing prawns, shrimps and crabs. The volume and variety of life here may be on a par with that of rainforests. Two of the sites have rocky outcrops, which provide a stable base for some creatures to colonise. South Rigg includes a rare breeding population of the long-lived ocean quahog. The productivity of this region makes it an important foraging area for seabirds, basking sharks, whales and dolphins.

All three are deep, low-energy sites with little natural disturbance. Their seabed communities are more diverse and consist of longer-lived species than those of high-energy areas. Unfortunately this also makes them sensitive to human pressures.

The Wildlife Trusts believe that these sites have an important role in

protecting the wider Irish Sea and question the long-term sustainability of the prawn fishery as currently carried out. We are working with local communities and the Government to create a better understanding of management issues in these areas.

Without these sites, we risk leaving a gap in the network. It is therefore vital that all three are included, unchanged, in the next round of MCZ designations.

Coastal and deep water mud habitats



Nephrops, better known as scampi or langoustine, lives in burrows in the Irish Sea mud. Pic by Paul Naylor

White beaked dolphins filmed off Northumberland, by Ben Burville. Little is known about this species

Why we need more
Marine Conservation Zones

Proposed site for white beaked dolphin

A significant gap in the network also exists for some of our highly mobile species, including birds and some dolphins. Specifically, we would like to see gaps in the network filled for white-beaked dolphins, which occur in shelf waters around the UK.

The species is most commonly found in waters cooler than 18°C, and frequently in those below 13°C. European waters probably contain 50%-75% of the global population, meaning these waters are of major conservation importance for the species. Despite this, white-beaked dolphins remain relatively poorly understood, with no conservation strategy in place.

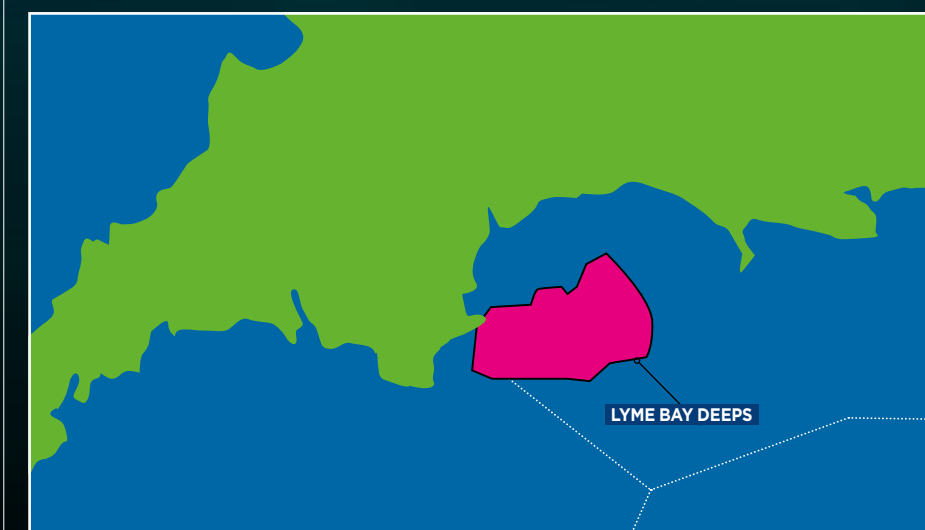
The south western portion of Lyme Bay appears to be particularly important, with more than 70 sightings since 2006, and encounters in all months and subsequent years. More than 200 individuals have been recorded which amounts to around 1% of the total European Atlantic

population. This makes the area nationally important for the species.

Photo-identification has shown that the same individuals are returning time and again, probably for feeding and breeding. Calves have been

observed in 20% of groups. We are recommending that this site, the Lyme Bay Deeps, is designated as a Marine Conservation Zone for white-beaked dolphins and Balearic shearwaters, amongst other associated species.

A site of national importance



The Welsh Offshore

During previous consultations, designation of six Marine Conservation Zones in Welsh offshore waters was postponed. This is because the offshore waters around Wales are likely to be devolved to the Welsh Government shortly.

Welsh offshore waters remain a large gap in our network of protected areas. The area has little protection at present. It is imperative that this gap is addressed as delays or even failure to designate offshore sites will leave huge gaps in the UK-wide network of marine protection, putting at risk efforts to restore marine ecosystems – efforts that will benefit people and wildlife alike.

The six recommended Marine Conservation Zones cover a range of habitats including rock, sand, mud and horse mussel reefs; and species including sea pen and the long-lived clam, the ocean quahog. Together these sites would make a large and significant contribution to the network of marine protection from

the Celtic Sea to the Irish Sea.

In addition to the sea bed features and associated species found in these sites, in particular, the waters in and around Celtic Deep are important for some of our highly mobile marine species including whales, dolphins and seabirds, emphasising the

ecological value of these sites.

Designation of sites in the Welsh offshore will make a huge contribution to the UK wide network, ensuring that sites off the coast of north Devon are connected to sites in the Welsh inshore and further north into the Irish Sea.

These sites can make a huge contribution



If left undisturbed, the ocean quahog can live for at least 500 years.
Pic by Paul Kay



Phosphorescent sea pen by Paul Naylor



Marine Conservation Zones are good for everyone

Designation of the sites in these pages would help the UK Government to fulfil their obligations towards an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in UK waters. We believe that all 48 sites, as well as the Welsh offshore sites should be designated as part of the third and final tranche of Marine Conservation Zones.

You can find more information about the individual sites proposed within this report on our webpages (wildlifetrusts.org/MCZs) and a full list of sites is below.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Alde Ore Estuary | ■ Goodwin Sands | ■ Sefton Coast |
| ■ Axe estuary | ■ Hythe Bay | ■ Selsey Bill and the Hounds |
| ■ Beachy Head East | ■ Inner Bank | ■ Silver Pit |
| ■ Bembridge | ■ Kentish Knock East | ■ Sleive Na Griddle |
| ■ Broad Bench to Kimmeridge Bay | ■ Lincs Belt | ■ Solway Firth |
| ■ Camel Estuary | ■ Lyme Bay Deepes | ■ South-East Falmouth |
| ■ Cape Bank | ■ Markham's Triangle | ■ South of Portland |
| ■ Castle Ground | ■ Morte Platform | ■ South of the Isles of Scilly |
| ■ Compass Rose | ■ Mud Hole | ■ South Rigg |
| ■ Dart estuary | ■ North-East of Haig Fras | ■ South-West Deepes (East) |
| ■ Devon Avon Estuary | ■ North West of Lundy | ■ Studland Bay |
| ■ Durham Heritage Coast | ■ Norris to Ryde | ■ Taw Torridge Estuary |
| ■ East Meridian | ■ Offshore Foreland | ■ Thames Estuary |
| ■ East of Jones Bank | ■ Orford Inshore | ■ Wash Approach |
| ■ Erme Estuary | ■ Otter estuary | ■ Wyre and Lune |
| ■ Fareham Creek | ■ Ribble Estuary | ■ Yarmouth to Cowes |

To keep up-to-date with the designation of Marine Conservation Zones and to help support our campaign for a truly ambitious network, why not join our e-mailing list and become a Friend of Marine Conservation Zones at

wildlifetrusts.org/MCZfriends



Cover picture: Studland Bay by Andrew Pearson