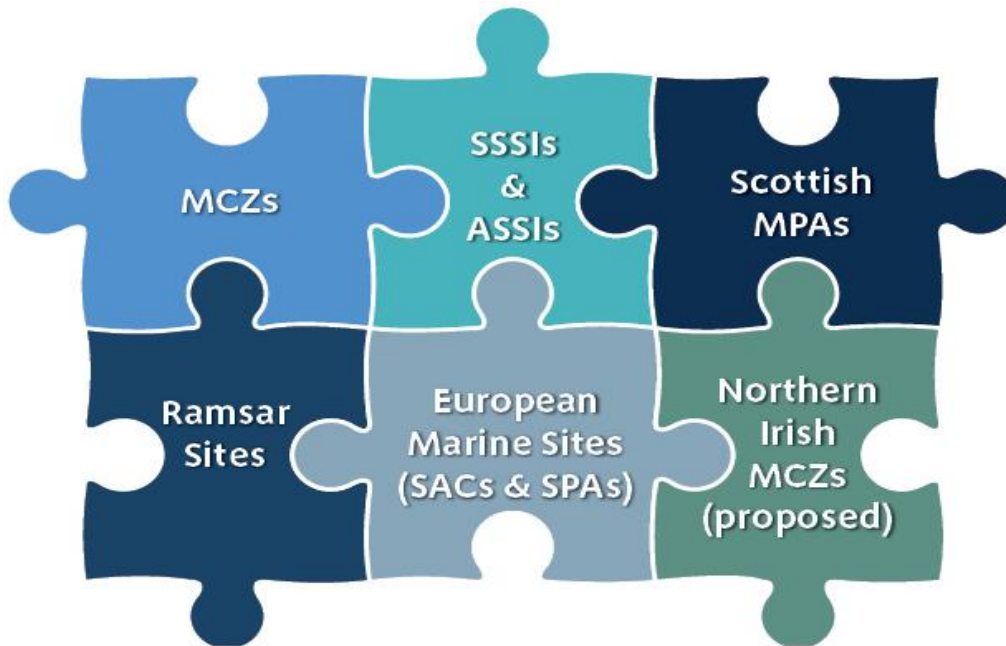


## Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the UK

The UK has signed up to international agreements that aim to establish an 'ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This means the network will be a collection of areas that work together to provide more benefits than an individual area could on its own. The collection of MPAs in UK waters will be made up of the designations illustrated below.



### Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs):

- MCZs are a new marine protected area designation introduced through the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.
- Once designated they will conserve nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology and sites will be selected to conserve not just the rare and threatened, but the range of marine wildlife.
- They can be designated anywhere in English and Welsh inshore waters and UK offshore waters around England, Wales, Northern Ireland.
- In England, recommendations for MCZs have been identified through the MCZ Project which is led by JNCC and Natural England. These recommendations have been made by four regional MCZ projects through a collaborative, stakeholder-led process.
- Science will be the first consideration in the selection of MCZs but socio-economic factors can be taken into account to try to minimise impacts on people's activities.
- The management measures for MCZs will be decided on a site-by-site basis and will depend on what the site has been designated for.
- The Welsh Government is identifying a small number of highly protected MCZs for designation in Welsh inshore waters through the MCZ Project Wales, following Site Selection Guidance for Highly Protected Marine Conservation Zones.
- Lundy Island became the first MCZ in England in January 2010, due to provisions in the Act which change its designation from a Marine Nature Reserve to an MCZ.

### European Marine Sites (SACs & SPAs):

- European Marine Sites is an umbrella term describing the marine areas of sites designated under the European Habitats and Birds Directives.

- These sites are called Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and can be designated or classified in the inshore and offshore areas of UK waters.
- SACs protect particular species or habitats of European importance and SPAs protect areas which support large populations of birds.
- These marine sites, together with terrestrial and freshwater sites, form part of the European Natura 2000 network of protected areas.
- Site selection must be based completely on scientific evidence and socio-economic considerations cannot be taken into account when identifying the features or boundary of the site.
- European marine sites are identified by statutory conservation agencies; JNCC, Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
- There are currently 96 SACs and 107 SPAs with marine components (three of which are entirely marine). Another package of sites has just been consulted on and there will be further rounds of consultation for new SPAs in 2013.

### **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (England, Scotland and Wales) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) (Northern Ireland)**

- SSSI/ASSI sites are designed to protect the best examples of the UK's plants, animals or geological features.
- They are primarily land-based, but some sites extend below the low water mark.
- They are set up under national legislation; SSSIs under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and ASSIs under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) 1985.

### **Ramsar sites:**

- Ramsar sites are designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, agreed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971.
- They are designed to protect wetlands defined as "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".
- They may also incorporate coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands.

### **Scottish MPAs:**

- The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 include powers for Scottish Ministers to designate Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Scotland's seas.
- Scottish Nature Conservation MPAs are a new national designation for the conservation of nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and undersea landforms. Nature Conservation MPAs are provided for under the Marine (Scotland) Act for Scottish inshore waters, and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act for offshore waters. Scottish Ministers have executive responsibility for nature conservation in offshore waters around Scotland.
- In addition to Nature Conservation MPAs, the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 outlines provisions for two other types of designation known as Demonstration/Research MPAs and Historic MPAs.
- The Scottish MPA project is a joint project between Marine Scotland (Scottish Government), Scottish Natural Heritage, JNCC, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.
- The Scottish MPA project will identify and recommend Nature Conservation MPAs to Scottish Government to help deliver national priorities on biodiversity and geodiversity, including Scotland's contribution to European and international commitments on biodiversity.
- Nature Conservation MPAs will be identified using science-based selection guidelines, but the likely effects on socio-economic activities can be considered in the designation of sites.
- Management of Nature Conservation MPAs will be dependent on the features present within a MPA and decisions will be made on a site-by-site basis.

### **Northern Irish MCZs**

- Northern Ireland has introduced a Marine Bill to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This includes provision for MCZs in Northern Ireland's inshore waters.