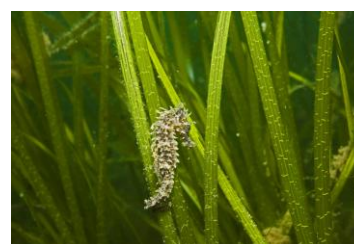


The Marine Conservation Zone Project

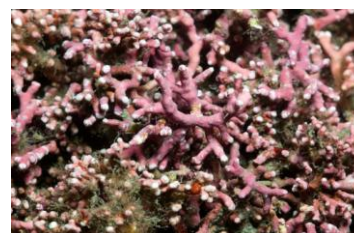
Why do we need MCZs?

The marine environment is an essential part of our heritage and future. The seas around England are home to over 8,000 species including many of national and European importance, from corals and jellyfish to seahorses and lobsters. The marine environment contributes substantially to our economic and social well-being. It supports a range of industrial and recreational activities, is a major source of food and plays an important role in climate regulation - absorbing and retaining more carbon dioxide than the land.

We know that human activities can adversely affect our marine environment. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are one of the key tools to integrate human activities with better protection of the marine environment, just as we do with nature reserves on land. UK MPA mechanisms can currently only protect specific species and habitats. For example, SSSI's only protect coastal species and habitats; and Special Areas of Conservation only protect species and habitats listed in the Habitats Directive. Therefore there are large areas of our seas and many British species and habitats, particularly further out at sea, that do not receive protection. Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are a new form of MPA created under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 which will protect a range of nationally important habitats and species. By protecting these species and habitats MCZs will contribute to a network of MPAs in the UK, together with existing MPAs (European Marine Sites, and marine elements of SSSIs and Ramsar sites) and other national designations being planned in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This means the MPA network will be a collection of areas that work together to provide more benefits than an individual area could on its own.



Spiny seahorse © Keith Hiscock



Coral maerl © Paul Kay

Existing MPAs have been taken into account in making recommendations for MCZs. MCZs will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology. Sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but the range of marine wildlife.

Why was the MCZ Project set up?

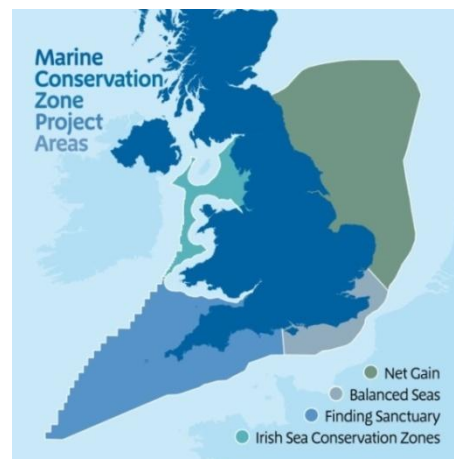
Historically, designation processes have begun with nature conservation bodies such as Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) providing the Government with advice on where sites should be designated. This advice would be followed by a Public Consultation to allow the public to comment on the proposals. However, the Government recognised the valuable knowledge and experience sea users and interest groups have of the marine environment, and judged it important to consider the social and economic impacts that MCZs might have. It therefore included, in the Marine and Coastal Access Act, provision for stakeholders to be involved in making the initial recommendations for MCZs. A south west project, Finding Sanctuary, was already engaging sea users to identify possible areas for marine protection, and it was considered to be a good approach. So, an additional three regional projects were set up to make initial site recommendations for MCZs: Balanced Seas (south east), Irish Sea Conservation Zones (Irish Sea) and Net Gain (North Sea) which collectively, with Finding Sanctuary, were known as 'the MCZ Project'

Each of the four regional MCZ projects had 'Regional Stakeholder Groups' (RSGs), involving local, regional, national and international stakeholders who use or have an interest in the sea. The area of sea

that the MCZ Project was asked to consider was: English inshore waters, and UK offshore waters around England, Wales and Northern Ireland.¹

How were MCZ recommendations made?

The four regional MCZ projects were established to provide technical expertise to support the RSGs in developing the MCZ recommendations and to handle the day-to-day management of the process. Natural England and JNCC produced written guidance to help the regional MCZ projects and the RSGs make their recommendations. The regional MCZ projects followed a detailed process which was explained in the Project Delivery Guidance² and used Ecological Network Guidance³ to identify MCZs and make recommendations that would contribute to an ecologically coherent network of MPAs.



The regional MCZ projects brought together stakeholders to make site recommendations. Their dedicated hard work and commitment meant that a broad range of stakeholders were involved in the process. Stakeholders were invited to provide information about which areas of the sea are important to them, when they use them and what they use them for, so that the recommendations which the regional MCZ projects were making could be fully informed by knowledge of existing use of the sea.

Over 2,500 interviews were conducted within local communities and the RSGs, representing a broad cross section of sea users and interest groups. After two years hard work and following 161 negotiation meetings around the country, these four RSGs made their final recommendations for MCZs in September 2011.

What happens to the recommended sites?

The recommendations made by the regional MCZ projects were passed to the Government unaltered. In addition, an independent Science Advisory Panel, and Natural England and JNCC have also provided advice to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on how the MCZs recommended by the four regional MCZ projects satisfy the Ecological Network Guidance.

The Government will hold a Public Consultation at the end of 2012 which will be the opportunity for local communities and the public to have their say and to comment on the proposed sites. Ministers will consider everything – the recommendations and the impact assessment from the regional MCZ projects; the Science Advisory Panel's advice; the advice from Natural England and JNCC; and people's feedback from the Public Consultation – before making final decisions on site designation.

How will MCZs be managed?

It is the responsibility of Public Authorities (such as the Marine Management Organisation and the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities) to implement any necessary management measures once MCZs are designated by Government. There is no automatic presumption about what designation means for the regulation of any particular human activity. Natural England and JNCC will provide detailed advice to Public Authorities on the sensitivity⁴ of MCZ habitats and species following designation. This will help them decide which activities need management in order to reduce their impact and to achieve the conservation objectives for the designated species or habitat. Before the sites are designated, Public Authorities and the general public can get an idea of which activities may require management from the draft conservation objectives set out in the regional MCZ projects' final recommendations reports and from the regional MCZ project impact assessment materials – as well as in Natural England and JNCC's Advice Package.

¹ The designation of MPAs in Scottish waters and of MCZs in inshore waters around Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the relevant Devolved Administrations.

² The MCZ Project Delivery Guidance provided the framework for identifying MCZs, including describing how stakeholders should be central to the decision making process and how socio-economic interests can be taken into account.

³ The MCZ Project Ecological Network Guidance provided Natural England and JNCC statutory advice on what is needed within the MCZ Project area to achieve the goals set out in the Marine and Coastal Access Act and associated policy, to establish an ecologically coherent network of MPAs.

⁴ Sensitivity is defined as a measure of the tolerance (or intolerance) of a species or habitat to damage from an external factor and the time taken for its subsequent recovery.