

The Marine Conservation Zone Impact Assessment

An Impact Assessment (IA) for all of the Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) recommended by the regional MCZ projects is being prepared to accompany the consultation by Defra on all of the site recommendations. The aim of the Impact Assessment is to help people with an interest in the marine environment better understand:

- how and to what extent the recommended MCZs may impact on them and;
- the estimated economic, environmental, and social costs and benefits of the recommended MCZs.

The regional MCZ projects have produced IA material that covers the entire suite of MCZs recommended by the four regional MCZ projects across their project areas. It assesses the potential impacts of the suite of MCZs on the UK economy but also includes information on impacts on operators, some individuals and organisations and on non-UK fisheries. Impacts are assessed over twenty years following designation and are estimated relative to the situation if there were no MCZs.

The Minister will use this information, in addition to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Natural England Advice on the recommended MCZs to make decisions on which sites should be considered for designation in 2013 and which should be considered for designation at a later date. Defra will draw on the IA material produced by the regional MCZ projects to produce the impact assessment that will accompany the formal consultation on MCZs in December 2012.

Who has produced the material for the impact assessment?

Each regional MCZ project team included an economist who collected, analysed and presented material for the IA. The material was drawn together into an assessment of the impacts of the entire suite of sites. The projects adopted consistent approaches in their analyses. An economist in Natural England provided the regional MCZ project economists with advice on how to undertake their analyses and helped them adopt a consistent approach. Defra's economists provided feedback on draft material to ensure that it with the government's requirements and provided quality assurance.

Stakeholder involvement in the impact assessment

Feedback on draft material for the IA was sought from economists in other government departments, from the Regional Stakeholder Groups (RSG) and Named Consultative Stakeholders that were directly involved in developing the site recommendations. They were invited to review draft material for the IA in three stages in late 2011 and early 2012.

RSG members and Named Consultative Stakeholders were contacted directly and kept informed by the regional MCZ project teams. The feedback was processed by the regional MCZ projects and used to inform their revision of the material for the IA.

What is in the impact assessment?

The impact assessment:

- Summarises the regional MCZ project recommendations.
- Summarises the benefit of designating the recommended MCZs.

- Identifies activities that may need to be managed to achieve the conservation objectives of the recommended features on sites.
- Identifies possible management measures.
- Assesses the impact of designating the recommended MCZs on different sectors on a site-by-site basis, and a regional basis where appropriate.
- Provides information on the evidence used to identify the possible management measures and assess the impact of designation.

The assessment of costs includes:

- Costs that arise from operators altering their operations to mitigate likely impacts on the features protected by MCZs. For example, if there is evidence that bottom trawling impacts on the condition of a feature protected by an MCZ, the site may be closed to fishing using bottom trawls. The IA estimates the impact of this on the UK economy and on value of landings for fishers. The assessment is based on mitigation of impacts that is likely to be needed, though this may differ from the mitigation that will be put in place by regulatory authorities. The cost of mitigation in the IA has been identified based on official data and information provided by stakeholders on human activities taking place on the recommended MCZs, national data sources and advice from JNCC and Natural England and stakeholder discussions about the mitigation that could be provided.
- The increased costs that are likely to be incurred by operators in undertaking the environmental assessments that accompany future licence applications. These increased costs arise because the assessments will need to explicitly include assessment of impacts on features protected by MCZs.
- Costs of monitoring and enforcing management of the sites.
- Costs of verifying MCZ features and the monitoring programme that will assess the condition of features protected by MCZs.

The assessment of benefits includes anticipated impacts on ecosystem services (impacts on the benefits that the environment provides to people). Specifically the assessment provided by the regional MCZ projects includes:

- Anticipated qualitative benefits of the suite of sites. This assessment draws on key evidence of the impact of marine protected areas on ecosystem services and the anticipated benefits of the policy decision to have a network of marine protected areas.
- Qualitative assessment of the beneficial impacts of individual sites on ecosystem services. This is informed by research was contracted out by Natural England and JNCC and a review of key evidence.
- Information provided by stakeholders on potential benefits to people and other potentially beneficial environmental impacts.

Possible management measures

To meet Regulatory Policy Committee¹ requirements, the IA also indicates the potential management measures that might be employed (such as byelaws and voluntary agreements) to manage human activities in MCZs. These measures are based on advice provided to the regional MCZ projects by the relevant authorities including the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The management scenarios used in the IA to assess the costs of mitigating impacts of human activities on MCZ features has been informed by:

- Information provided to the regional MZC projects by stakeholders and regional and national data sources on the level of human activities taking place in the sites.

¹ The Regulatory Policy Committee (RPC), established in 2009, is tasked with providing for the first time in the UK, independent scrutiny of proposed regulatory measures put forward by Government. Our role is to challenge where proposals are not supported by robust evidence and analysis.

- Advice from JNCC and Natural England on the sensitivity of features to pressures caused by human activities and the mitigation of impacts that might be needed.
- Current knowledge on the environmental condition of each MCZ feature.
- The protection already afforded through existing management.
- RSG discussions about the mitigation that could be provided.

Stakeholder input to the assessment of costs

- Umbrella organisations that represent the industry were asked by the regional MCZ projects to provide feedback on proposed assumptions that are used for the analysis in the IA to assess impacts on aggregate extraction, carbon capture and storage, interconnectors and telecom cables, and oil and gas exploration, production and storage. The organisations were also asked to estimate the anticipated costs. This exercise was also undertaken by the regional MCZ projects with individual operators for wind farms that are located in recommended MCZs.
- Quantitative assessment of the impact on the UK economy arising from the impact on fisheries has been estimated using four sets of information:
 - value of landings data submitted by fishers to UK government authorities;
 - distribution of fishing effort for over 15 metre vessels provided by analysis of official statistics;
 - distribution of fishing effort for under 15 metre vessels collected by the regional MCZ projects from stakeholders (through a process known as Fishermap);
 - information collected as part of the Seafish economic survey².
- The qualitative assessment of the impact of MCZs on fisheries includes anticipated responses of fishers, including displacement of fishing effort, switching of gear types and target species, and considers impacts on employment and local communities. This assessment uses information collected by the regional MCZ projects from stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the fisheries that are being impacted on, as well as IFCA and the MMO.
- Impacts on non-UK fisheries are assessed using qualitative information collected by JNCC from representatives of fisheries in those countries. Generally, impacts have not been assessed quantitatively because the necessary data were not available.
- The MMO and IFCA provided estimates of the costs of enforcing management.

Monitoring

The details of how MCZs will be monitored are not yet fully developed, so assumptions were made for the purposes of the IA only. These assumptions relate to the MCZ features themselves and the frequency of monitoring activities: it has been assumed feature condition will be assessed once every six years.

Next Steps

On receipt of the regional MCZ project site recommendations and associated Impact Assessment material and Natural England and JNCC's formal advice, Ministers will consider the supporting evidence and potential environmental, social and economic impacts of MCZs before deciding which sites to take forward for designation. The factors considered in reaching the Government's decisions will be made clear in the public consultation documentation.

As part of the formal consultation, scheduled to take place in 2012, all stakeholders will be invited to comment on and provide further input to the consultation IA produced by Defra. Following the consultation, Defra will analyse the consultation responses and make appropriate revisions to the IA that will then be used to help inform the Government's decisions on designating individual MCZ sites.

² Seafish Economic Survey of UK Fishing Fleet 2009
Produced by Natural England and JNCC
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