

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Steps for assessing Marine Conservation Zone proposals

March 2013

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Introduction

The Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) consultation document contains full details of the background to the process for identifying potential MCZ sites, including the process by which the stakeholder-led Regional Projects made their recommendations, the development of the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies' (SNCBs) advice on these recommendations and the Impact Assessment of potential costs and benefits.

The text below is intended to be a technical description of the steps undertaken in the assessment process for selecting sites to propose for designation in the first tranche. An explanation of this processes intended for non-experts was provided in paragraphs 4.1.1 - 4.1.11 of the consultation document: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/consult/2012/12/13/marine-conservation-zones-1212/>

Step 1 - Ecological importance

If site meets any one of the criteria below then it is a potential candidate for designation in 2013 and so go on to step 2. If not then the site is classed as "not suitable for designation".

Criteria:

- Site has more than 5 features
- Features that are not protected in any of the existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs): in the Regional Project area or whole MCZ area if the latter info is available
- Only a small proportion of a feature is protected in any of the existing MPAs: in the Regional Project area or whole MCZ area if the latter info is available
- Features that are rare or scarce (limited in distribution across the MCZ area)
- Features that are in the OSPAR species & habitat list¹ or BAP habitat list²
- Features that are identified as the best examples of the feature at regional or national level
- Features that are identified as one of the best examples of the feature at regional or national level
- Features for which the adequacy (replication) criterion³ will not be met if this site is not designated
- Features for which the representative criterion⁴ will not be met if this site is not designated

¹ http://www.ospar.org/content/content.asp?menu=00730302240000_000000_000000

² <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5706>

³ OSPAR criteria for an ecologically coherent network: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/06-03e_Guidance%20ecol%20coherence%20MPA%20network.pdf

- Features that contribute 50% or more of the area needed for that feature to meet the adequacy criterion
- Features that make the biggest contribution of all MCZs in the Regional Project (or whole MCZ area if that information is available) to meeting the adequacy target for the relevant feature
- Features that makes the second biggest contribution to meeting replication/adequacy targets.
- Site includes areas of additional ecological importance (AAEI), e.g. fish nursery grounds etc

Where the SNCBs have said that a site is not viable, then it will need to be classed as "requires further consideration".

Step 2 - For sites in the bottom three quartiles for quantified costs

If they do not meet either of the caveats below then the site is a potential candidate for designation in 2013 and so go on to step 4.

Caveats:

- If there is a clear indication that there might be high non-quantified costs (including on non-UK fleets) - then the site is classed as "needs further consideration" (i.e. ahead of potential inclusion in a later tranche).
- For any sites that passed step 1 by virtue of only providing an AAEI (i.e. the site met no other criteria in step 1) - reassess these and decide whether they should progress or not.

⁴ OSPAR criteria for an ecologically coherent network: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/06-03e_Guidance%20ecol%20coherence%20MPA%20network.pdf

Step 3 - For sites in the top quartile for quantified costs

If the site provides a "very good ecological contribution", and does not meet the caveat below, then the site is a potential candidate for designation in 2013 and so go on to step 4.

Caveat:

- If there is a clear indication that there might be high non-quantified costs (including on non-UK fleets) - then the site is classed as "needs further consideration" (i.e. ahead of potential inclusion in a later tranche).

If a site does not provide a "very good ecological contribution", then it is classified as "needs further consideration" (i.e. ahead of potential inclusion in a later tranche).

A "very good ecological contribution" is defined by meeting one of the following:

- Offers protection for one or more feature where there are limited opportunities⁵ to protect that feature in the national MCZ/MPA network, or that is deemed to be the best example of the feature nationally.
- Offers protection for multiple features where there are limited opportunities to protect those features in the regional MCZ/MPA network, or they are deemed to be the best examples of the feature regionally.

[NB: the requirement for multiple features can be a combination of features that have limited opportunities to be protected regionally and features that are the best examples regionally].

Step 4 - Sense-check

Have following the rules in steps 1-3 thrown up any anomalies? i.e. sites that are no longer in the frame for 2013 that should be, or site that have been classified as "not suitable for designation" or "needs further consideration" that should still be strong contenders for 2013?

These sites were considered on a site by site basis.

⁵ We assumed that if a feature is protected (or proposed for protection) in 3 MPAs or less nationally (i.e. 3 or less existing sites that protect that feature and/or recommended sites that protect that feature) then there was limited opportunity to protect that feature nationally. If there are 3 or less sites in the area that a regional project covers in which this feature is (can be) protected then there is limited opportunity to protect that feature regionally.

Step 5 - The data certainty for presence and extent

Data certainty levels needed to justify inclusion in the 2013 tranche:

- a) Acceptable confidence level for each feature to support inclusion of the site in the 2013 tranche

General rule: At least a moderate data certainty⁶ for both presence and extent

- b) Acceptable levels of data certainty for site to be included in the 2013 tranche

General rule:

- If at least 50% of the number of features proposed for designation have an acceptable data confidence level (as defined above) then that site will be included in 2013 tranche and those features with acceptable data certainty will be put forward for designation. The remaining features will be considered for designation at a later stage.
- If less than 50% of the number of features proposed for designation have an acceptable data confidence level (as defined above) then that site will be considered for designation in a later tranche.

Exception:

For high risk sites - even if the 50% limit is not reached, a site will be put forward for designation in 2013 if the site is a high risk site (i.e. included in the list of sites at high risk prepared by the SNCBs) and one of the following two conditions is met:

- The data confidence for, at least, one of the features that are at high risk is moderate or higher for both presence and extent. In this case, the site is included in the 2013 tranche. The features that are at risk are put forward for designation, along with any others that have acceptable data confidence. The remaining features will be considered for designation at a later stage.
- The data confidence for all the features that are at high risk are below moderate for presence and extent but there is at least one other feature from those proposed for designation for which the data confidence level is acceptable. The site is included in the 2013 tranche; the features that have acceptable data confidence and those that are at risk are put forward for designation. The remaining features will be considered for designation at a later stage.

⁶as assessed in the SNCB advice: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/MCZProjectSNCBAdviceBookmarked.pdf>

Step 6 - Certainty of appropriateness of Conservation Objectives

The SNCBs provided additional advice based on expert assessment of the certainty that features' conservation objectives were appropriate. This classified the certainty as "reasonably certain" or "reasonably uncertain".

Where a feature's conservation objective is assessed as "reasonably certain" then the feature may be designated in 2013.

Where a feature's conservation objective is assessed as "reasonably uncertain" then the feature would not normally be designated in 2013 (see exception below). These features will be included in the site at a later date once the conservation objective is more certain.

Where a feature cannot be designated in the 2013 tranche due to a "reasonably uncertain" conservation objective, and this reduces the proportion of features from that site to be designated in 2013 below the 50% requirement, then the whole site will be delayed until a later tranche.

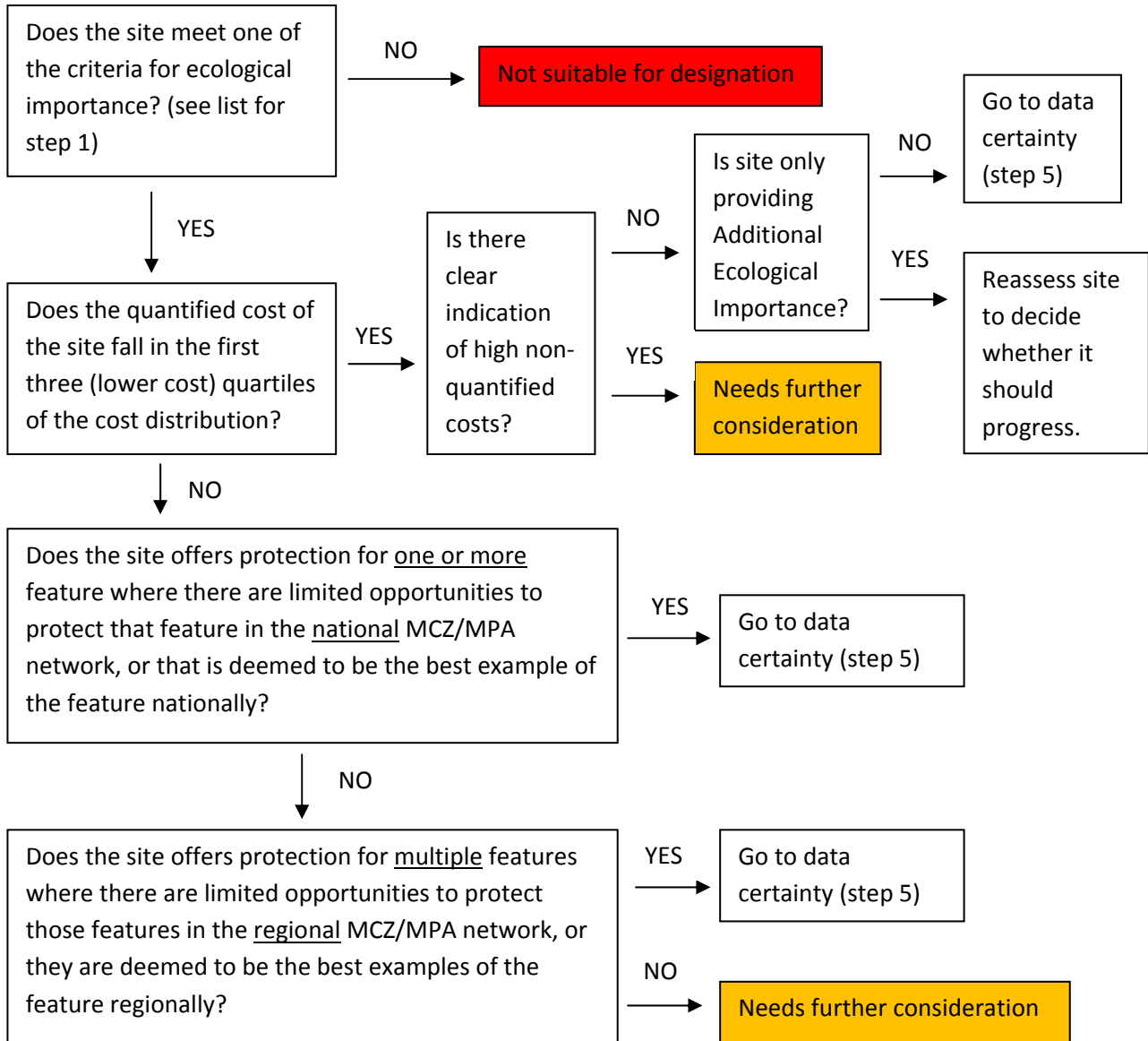
The exception is for features which have been assessed by the SNCBs as being at high risk in that site. These can go forward for designation in 2013 even with "reasonably uncertain" conservation objectives. If there are less than 50% of a site's features going forward for 2013 designation then the feature identified as high risk in that site will be designated in 2013 along with any other features that have "reasonably certain" conservation objectives (and passed the presence and extent data certainty requirements in step 5).

Step 7 - Sense-check

Have following the rules in steps 5-6 thrown up any anomalies? i.e. sites that should be in the 2013 tranche but are not because of data certainty requirements that do not seem appropriate in their case (or vice versa), or any individual features inappropriately not included in sites that are proposed for designation in 2013 for some of their other features.

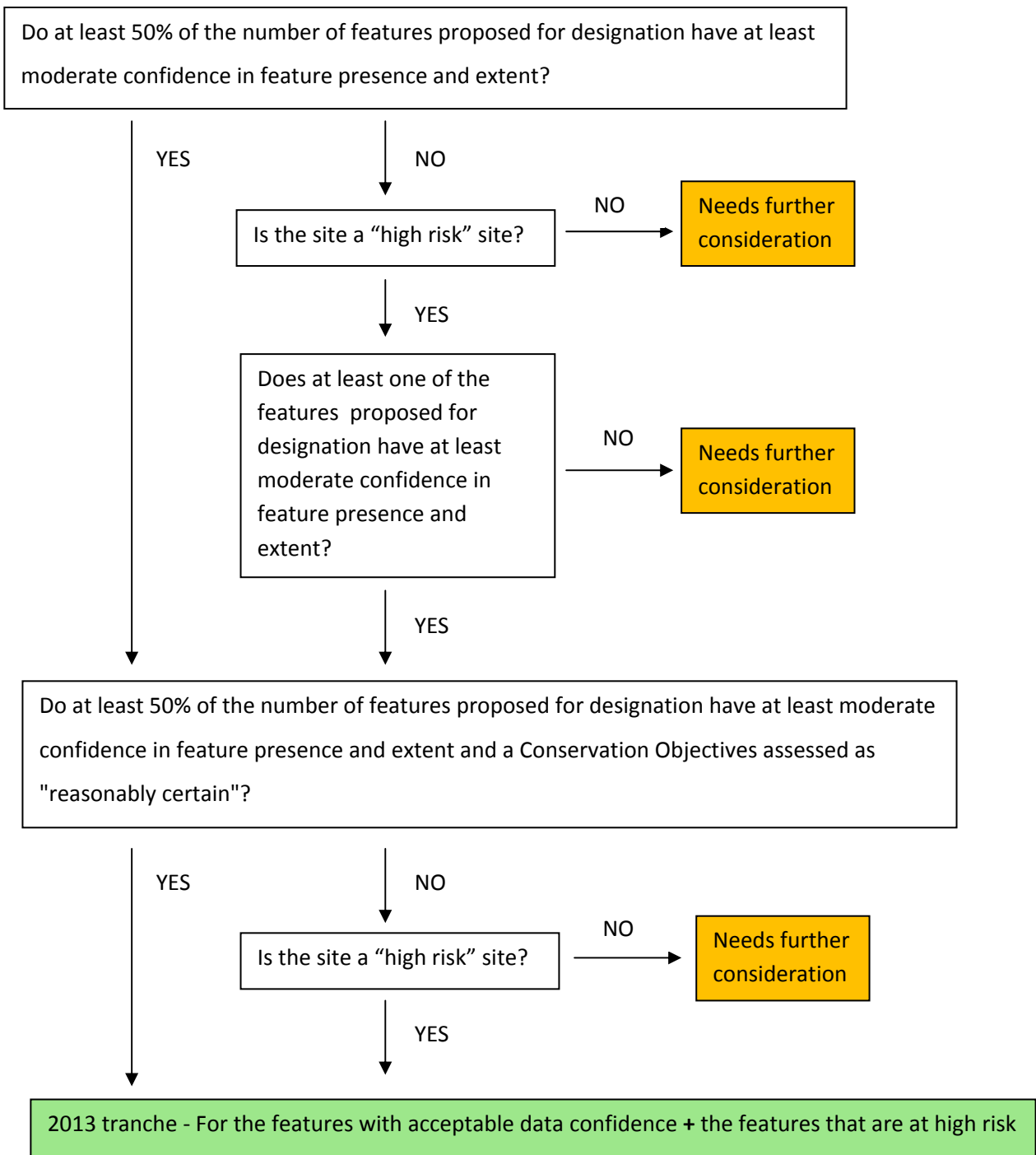
These sites were considered on a site by site basis.

Flowchart of steps 1-4: Ecological contribution and socioeconomic impacts



Limited opportunities to protect a feature: We assumed that if a feature is protected (or proposed for protection) in 3 MPAs or less nationally (i.e. 3 or less existing sites that protect that feature and/or recommended sites that protect that feature) then there was limited opportunity to protect that feature nationally. If there are 3 or less sites in the area that a regional project covers in which this feature is (can be) protected then there is limited opportunity to protect that feature regionally.

Flowchart of steps 5-7: Data certainty



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