

Offshore Overfalls Marine Conservation Zone

This document sets out why this site is important, the features protected and general management information.

17 January 2016



Survey image from Offshore Overfalls of an anemone (*Urticina* sp.) on a pebble and gravel seabed (subtidal coarse sediment) with encrusting bryozoa and keel worms (*Pomatoceros* sp.) © Crown copyright

Overview

This site becomes a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in January 2016. This means that specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities.

Where is the site

Offshore Overfalls MCZ is an offshore site located roughly 18km east of the southern part of the Isle of Wight. The site covers an area of 594 km².

Why it's important

MCZs, together with other types of marine protected areas, will form the UK contribution to an international network of protected sites in the north east Atlantic. The network will help to deliver the government's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. MCZs protect typical, rare or declining habitats and species found in our seas.

This site protects areas of sandy seabed, which support species of flat fish and sand eels camouflaged on the surface of the sand, with worms and bivalves (with their pair, hinged shells) living within it.

The MCZ also includes the second largest area of seabed mixed sediments in the region. As mixed sediments are so varied, they can support a wide range of animals, both on and in the sediment. Animals found here include worms, bivalves, starfish and urchins, anemones, sea fans and sea mats.

In the north west corner of the site is an area called the ‘Overfalls’ which has been highlighted as an area of high scientific value due to the unusual area of mixed sediments, sands and gravels that form sandwaves. These are important for a range of fish species such as bass, turbot and brill, cod, rays (specifically blonde rays), tope, brown crab and sandeels.

The site also protects the geological English Channel Outburst feature which was formed at the end of the last glaciation by the collapse of either ice sheets or glaciers.

Designation of this site as a Marine Conservation Zone protects the following features. You can find detailed explanations of each feature at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>.

| Protected features | General management approach |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Subtidal coarse sediment | Recover to favourable condition |
| Subtidal mixed sediments | Recover to favourable condition |
| Subtidal sand | Recover to favourable condition |
| English Channel outburst flood features ¹ | Maintain in favourable condition |

Management of the site

Now that this site has been designated, some activities may need additional management. Activities and the management measures used to regulate them may need to change if new evidence becomes available.

Most marine activity is already regulated by the relevant regulatory bodies. There are existing byelaws, national laws and European Regulations which regulators use to manage fishing, recreation and pollution. These also apply in MCZs.

Regulators will manage each site according to the features and activities in, or near, a specific area. Management measures will be implemented at sites most at risk of damage first, regulating only those activities which have a detrimental impact on the designated features. Any management measures that are required for MCZs will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Management in MCZs can take several different forms, from using existing licensing framework, specific byelaws and orders or an EU Regulation for a site. There has to be public consultation on permanent byelaws and orders. For activities that already need a marine licence, regulators consider the MCZ in their decision as soon as the site is consulted on. Find out more about marine licensing in MCZs at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-mczs-and-marine-licensing>.

¹ Geological feature

Regulators

This table lists the authorities responsible for MCZs and the activities they manage.

| Lead regulator | What it manages |
|--|---|
| Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) http://www.association-ifca.org.uk | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries in the inshore area (0-6 nautical miles (nm)) including commercial fisheries and recreational sea angling |
| Marine Management Organisation (MMO) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries in the 6-12nm area • Fisheries: enforcement of national and EU legislation • Licensable activities such as dredging and disposal of dredged material, removal of gravel below mean high water springs, subsea cables (up to 12nm), construction (including renewables below 100MW generating capacity, ports and coastal protection) • Harbour Orders and Harbour Empowerment Orders • Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and safety zones for offshore renewable energy installations consents • Enforcement of licensable activity and other consents (including deemed marine licences) • Development of marine plans • Activities requiring a wildlife licence |
| Environment Agency (EA) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries for migratory and freshwater fish • Coastal protection and flood management • Water quality • Permitted discharges from terrestrial sources |
| Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oil and gas related activities • Renewable energy related activities |
| Harbour Authorities and local planning authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for the port and coastal waters within their jurisdiction • Local authorities manage activities at the coast. These include coastal recreation, tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection and planning on coasts and estuaries For further information contact your local authority or IFCA |
| Department for Transport (DfT) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ports, shipping, harbours, ship pollution and offshore safety |
| Natural England (NE) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public access |

Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/marine-environment>

See JNCC's advice on MCZs at:

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6658>



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