Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Beachy Head East Marine Conservation Zone

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

31 May 2019

High energy circalittoral rock © JNCC

Overview

This site became a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in May 2019. This means that specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities.

Where is the site?

Beachy Head East MCZ is an inshore site that covers an area of 195 km^2 and is located along the coast near Eastbourne in East Sussex, in the Eastern Channel region.

Why is the site 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.

Beachy Head East has a sandstone / chalk reef system which provides a home for a wide range of species. Between Beachy Head point and Holywell a chalk reef extends from the subtidal area up to the coast and white cliffs forming sheltered rockpools at low tide. The soft chalk is pitted by holes created by rock-boring piddocks, a type of bivalve mollusc (an invertebrate with a hard external shell). Once empty, these holes can also house crabs, sponges, anemones and worms. Chalk extending above the high water mark supports rich littoral chalk communities, namely unique communities of seaweeds in the areas where the chalk cliffs and sea caves are splashed by waves. Marine chalk is a globally rare habitat, a large proportion of which is contained in the UK. The largest underwater chalk seascapes are predominantly found in Kent and Sussex, including within the Beachy Head East site.

Short-snouted seahorses and Ross worm reefs are also found within this site. Ross worms build tubes from sand and shell fragments. Large colonies can form reefs, stabilising the seabed, providing shelter for other creatures and boosting the number and types of species in the area.

The site is also considered an important nursery area for herring, plaice and Dover sole. Plaice and Dover sole survive by camouflaging themselves in subtidal sand allowing them to avoid predators, whilst subtidal sand and coarse sediments provide a habitat for invertebrate species on which adult fish prey. High and moderate energy circalittoral rock features provide habitats for a wide variety of animals due to the varying conditions that can be found in these areas.

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
Littoral chalk communities	Maintain in favourable condition
Short-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*)	
Subtidal coarse sediment	
Subtidal sand	
High energy circalittoral rock	Recover to favourable condition
Moderate energy circalittoral rock	

Peat and clay exposures	
Ross worm reefs (*Saballeria spinulosa*)	
Subtidal chalk	

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 and national laws that regulators use to manage fishing, coastal development, 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, including introducing voluntary measures, use of the existing planning and licensing framework, specific byelaws and orders. 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 making processes. Find out more about marine licensing in MCZs at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-mczs-and-marine-licensing.

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	• 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	• Fisheries within British limits around the coast of England. • Licensable activities such as construction, alteration or improvement of works, dredging and disposal, other removals or deposits, incineration or the scuttling of vessels within England's marine area.

	• Section 36 (of the Electricity Act 1989) Consents and Safety Zones for offshore renewable energy installations producing up to 100MW. • Activities requiring a marine wildlife licence.
Environment Agency (EA) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency	• Fisheries for migratory and freshwater fish. • Coastal protection and flood management. • Water quality, including environmental permits for discharges from terrestrial sources.
Oil and Gas Authority https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/	• Licensing for exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves.
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy **Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS**	• Oil and gas related activities • Renewable energy related activities • Environmental approvals and consents for offshore oil and gas related activities, Carbon Capture and Storage and Gas Unloading and Storage, and decommissioning activities.
Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities	• Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for ports and coastal waters within their limits. • Local planning authorities manage activities at the coast. These include coastal recreation, public rights of way (including the English Coastal Path), tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection, and planning and development on coasts and estuaries, including aquaculture in the intertidal zone.
Department for Transport (DfT) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport	• Policy on environmental impacts associated with ports and shipping, including pollution from ships. • Policy on maritime safety including navigation safety.
Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - An Executive Agency of the Department for Transport https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency	• Vessel safety consents, including certification of seafarers and equipment.
Natural England (NE) https://www.gov.uk/government/orga	• Establishment and management of the English

nisations/natural-england	Coastal path. • Activities requiring consents and ascents within or adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). • Activities requiring wildlife licences for terrestrial and intertidal species.
The Planning Inspectorate https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate	• Activities requiring Development Consent Orders under the Planning Act 2008, regarded as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/marine-conservation-zone-designations-in-england

See Natural England's advice on MCZs at:
http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5703660445368320

Subtidal chalk communities, edible crabs grazing © Paul Naylor/The Wildlife Trusts

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/publications

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk