

## Medway Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

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

**31 May 2019**



Smelt © Jack Perks

### Overview

This site became a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in November 2013. An additional feature, smelt (*Osmerus eperlanus*), was added in May 2019, along with a small extension to the site boundary. The original site and extended boundary apply only to smelt. For all other features, designated in 2013, the original site boundary continues to apply.

Following designation, specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities.

## Where is the site?

Medway Estuary MCZ is an inshore site located on the Kent coast. It encompasses the Medway Estuary from Rochester down to its mouth, and extends seaward to include an area between Sheerness and the Isle of Grain. A total area of 60 km<sup>2</sup> is protected by this MCZ.

## 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.

The Medway Estuary MCZ is a complex and dynamic ecosystem. The transition between fresh and sea water combined with tidal movement creates changing levels of salinity and nutrients that provide a fertile environment for large populations of animals, particularly invertebrates, fish and birds. Numerous species of commercially important fish, including bass, herring, cod, plaice and sole, use the area as a nursery ground.

The nationally scarce tentacled lagoon-worm is found within the estuary, both in the upper reaches of the river close to Rochester and a single brackish lagoon on Common Marsh, at Cuxton. This is a tiny bristleworm which grows up to 5 mm in length and creates and lives in tubes within the mud habitats of the estuary. These worms have tentacles around their mouths used for gathering food from the surrounding muddy sediments. The tentacled lagoon-worm is particularly vulnerable to activities that cause changes in its habitat.

Peat and clay exposures are an uncommon habitat type which is effectively irreplaceable as it was formed millions of years ago from ancient lakebeds and forested peatlands. Elongated bivalve molluscs called piddocks are typically found on the surface of peat and clay exposures. These burrow into the habitat creating holes that, once empty, can be inhabited by and provide shelter to animals such as crabs and anemones.

The site also protects intertidal habitats, and species living in these habitats are known to support local bird populations, particularly the colony of Sandwich terns at Burntwick Island. Sandwich terns are not a feature of the site, but by protecting the site's features it is likely there will be benefits to the colony. This is an example of the wider benefits of MCZs outside of the site boundaries.

Smelt were once widespread in estuaries in the UK but have declined considerably over the past 200 years. They are known to congregate in large shoals in lower estuaries and to migrate into freshwater where they spawn in spring. Estuaries such as the Medway therefore provide critical habitats required to complete smelt lifecycles, including for



feeding and post-larval development. Smelt are viewed as an indicator of ecosystem health, being very sensitive to a broad range of environmental degradations, including overfishing, loss of spawning habitat, blockage to migration and water quality impacts.

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
Estuarine rock habitats	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mixed sediments	
Intertidal sand and muddy sand	
Low energy intertidal rock	
Peat and clay exposures	
Subtidal coarse sediment	
Subtidal mud	
Subtidal sand	
Tentacled lagoon-worm ( <i>Alkmaria romijni</i> )	
Smelt ( <i>Osmerus eperlanus</i> )	Recover to 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 is an existing legal framework that regulators use to manage fishing, coastal development, recreation and pollution. This also applies 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 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>.

# Regulators

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

Lead regulator	What it manages
<b>Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs)</b> <a href="http://www.association-ifca.org.uk">http://www.association-ifca.org.uk</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries in the inshore area (0-6 nautical miles (nm)) including commercial fisheries and recreational sea angling.</li> </ul>
<b>Marine Management Organisation (MMO)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries within British limits around the coast of England.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Section 36 (of the Electricity Act 1989) Consents and Safety Zones for offshore renewable energy installations producing up to 100MW.</li> <li>• Activities requiring a marine wildlife licence.</li> </ul>
<b>Environment Agency (EA)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fisheries for migratory and freshwater fish.</li> <li>• Coastal protection and flood management.</li> <li>• Water quality, including environmental permits for discharges from terrestrial sources.</li> </ul>
<b>Oil and Gas Authority</b> <a href="https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/">https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing for exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves.</li> </ul>
<b>Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy</a>  <b>Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oil and gas related activities</li> <li>• Renewable energy related activities</li> <li>• Environmental approvals and consents for offshore oil and gas related activities, Carbon Capture and Storage and Gas Unloading and Storage, and decommissioning activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for ports and coastal waters within their limits.</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

	coasts and estuaries, including aquaculture in the intertidal zone.
<b>Department for Transport (DfT)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy on environmental impacts associated with ports and shipping, including pollution from ships.</li> <li>• Policy on maritime safety including navigation safety.</li> </ul>
<b>Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - An Executive Agency of the Department for Transport</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vessel safety consents, including certification of seafarers and equipment.</li> </ul>
<b>Natural England (NE)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishment and management of the English Coastal path.</li> <li>• Activities requiring consents and ascents within or adjacent to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).</li> <li>• Activities requiring wildlife licences for terrestrial and intertidal species.</li> </ul>
<b>The Planning Inspectorate</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities requiring Development Consent Orders under the Planning Act 2008, regarded as Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects</li> </ul>

## Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/marine-conservation-zone-designations-in-england>

Read the advice provided by Natural England on MCZs at:

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5703660445368320>



Tantacled lagoon-worm © Gavin Black

**OGI**

© Crown copyright 2019

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v.3. To view this licence visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>.

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to [defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk](mailto:defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk)