



The coastline is the most exposed of all of England's coastlines. The natural beauty of the inshore area is important for tourism and recreation. The offshore area includes the waters in excess of 1000m, deepest of all English marine plan areas. The Severn Estuary to the north of the area has the UK's largest tidal range.

The plan areas are important for cetaceans, basking sharks and have significant estuarine populations of wading birds. Saltmarsh and mudflats are important habitats inshore, with deep sea habitats offshore. There are 27 Natura 2000 sites, and 33 proposed or designated marine conservation zones. The proposed harbour porpoise special area of conservation stretches into the plan areas and across Welsh waters.

Geology is varied, including dramatic folded chevrons of the sandstones and shale at Millbrook, and the mineral rich west Cornwall granites. While localised water quality issues occur, such as from historic mining runoff, water quality is among the best in the England.



Opportunities

- O1. as long as potential disturbance is managed, significant potential for wildlife watching with high number of whales, basking shark and bird life present [2]
- O2. marine plans could help to provide a mechanism to assess protected area boundaries when protected features redistribute under climate changes [5]
- O3. Severn Estuary tidal barrages and lagoons offer both environmental benefits (renewables energy) and challenges (habitat modification) [6]
- O4. the south west derives a significant sense of place and other ecosystem services from its distinctive and quality natural environment that has significant potential for social and economic gains if well managed

Challenges

- C1. declining fish species diversity due to fishing pressure (bass) with wider impacts on marine ecosystems and sensitive species
- C2. noise pollution is an increasing issue for sensitive species (basking sharks and marine mammals) particularly in the English and Bristol Channels [2]
- C3. disturbance remains a significant contribution to pressures on a number of important species (seal haul outs, bird nesting sites)
- C4. widespread marine litter and beach plastic are reducing aesthetic quality of the environment and resulting in wildlife mortality [7]
- C5. climate change and coastal squeeze are leading to coastal habitat loss for birds in the Severn Estuary
- C6. agricultural practices and land run-off carry nutrients and pollutants into the marine environment result in algal blooms, reduced biodiversity and the potential for water quality to deteriorate [4]



Evidence sources

[1] Shark Trust basking shark sightings
 [2] Marine mammal strandings network data
 [3] British Trust for Ornithology Seabird Monitoring Programme

[4] MSFD / WFD indicators on water quality in the south west
 [5] Natural England marine conservation zone boundaries data layer
 [6] MMO coastal officers' expertise on local issues