Marine Conservation Zones: Consultation on proposals for designation in 2013

rMCZ: Utopia (BS28)
ABP Port: Southampton

Q1. Do you agree that this site and specified features should be designated in the first tranche? Please explain and provide evidence to support your views as necessary.

Not applicable - this site is not a Tranche 1 site.

Q.2 Are there any additional features (not recommended by the Regional MCZ Projects) located within this site that should be protected? Please explain and provide evidence to support your views as necessary.

No comments.

Q.3 Do you have any comments on the proposed conservation objective(s)? Please provide evidence to support your comments as necessary.

Where the Conservation Objective (CO) is 'maintain' this should lead to a presumption that no additional measures are required for existing activities unless SNCBs provide clear evidence of significant impacts.

Q.4 Are there any significant reasons for alteration of this site's boundary? Please explain and provide evidence to support your views as necessary.

We have continuing concerns relating to port related activities – please see responses to Q6 and Q7.

Q.5 Is there any additional evidence to improve data certainty for features within this site? If yes, please provide evidence.

Not aware of any additional data

Q.6 Are there any additional activities (that may have an impact on the recommended features) occurring within this site that have not been captured within the Impact Assessment? Please provide evidence to support your views.

We do not have information on additional activities. However, there is potential for indirect interaction between dredging and disposal plumes associated with activities at the Port of Southampton. In our opinion, these interactions do not materially affect the conservation objectives for the features within each site, but we are mindful that the feature within the rMCZ (fragile sponge & anthozoan communities on subtidal rocky habitat) are particularly sensitive to sediment deposition. There is currently no evidence that dredging and disposal activities are significantly affecting such features (indeed, the continued presence of such features notwithstanding many decades of dredging and disposal activities suggests the activities are compatible with the protection of nature conservation features) and we maintain that the onus should be upon the SNCBs to provide clear evidence that existing activities are having an impact before any action is taken or any requirements are put upon operators. However, we remain concerned that if the MCZ policy approach to management places this onus on

dredging and disposal operators rather than the SNCBs to demonstrate with a high level of scientific certainty that they are not having a significant effect on such features, this could a be a very costly exercise (discussed further in Q7). Furthermore, if the SNCBs advise that they cannot be certain that there is an absence of any impact, this could jeopardise future maintenance dredging and disposal activities with a potentially major impact on ABP, other local port and harbour authorities and private terminal operators such as Esso and BP. There is therefore much uncertainty until the policy approach to such matters and the SNCBs advice on operations is clarified.

Q.7 Do you have any new information on costs to industry not covered in the Impact Assessment, that would be directly attributable to MCZs as opposed to costs stemming from existing regulatory requirements, or evidence that suggests the need for changes to the methodologies or assumptions used in estimating costs (including in relation to fishing displacement)? If yes please provide evidence.

We believe that the IA as currently drafted significantly underestimates the worst-case costs to the Ports industry. The SNCBs advice suggested that many of the potential additional survey, assessment and monitoring costs identified by the ports sector would be incurred anyway, because habitats and species of conservation importance are on the OSPAR or UK BAP lists and thus would require monitoring and assessment irrespective of MCZ designation. On this basis the SNCBs have chosen to ignore most of the potential additional costs identified by the ports sector.

We disagree with this approach as it is not consistent with the available evidence. The level of consideration that is currently given to OSPAR or UKBAP list habitats and species with port-related assessments is currently very minor, particularly when compared to the effort applied to features subject to national or international nature conservation designation. This largely reflects the differing importance attached to the various features in law and in policy. Should habitat and species features of conservation importance be subject to designation within MCZ, the relative importance attached to these features in law and in policy would significantly increase, resulting in enhanced requirements for survey, assessment and monitoring costs. A simple illustration of how the weight attached to conservation features can influence the costs of monitoring and assessment is provided by the Maintenance Dredge Protocol. This protocol has been introduced to facilitate the licensing of maintenance dredging and disposal applications that have the potential to affect European Marine Sites. There is no equivalent requirement to monitor or assess OSPAR or UKBAP list features;

As such, we remain concerned about the large uncertainties relating to the potential cost impacts, which in our estimation could vary by up to 2 orders of magnitude depending on the policy approach adopted to MCZ management. Implementation of a less pragmatic management approach may result in a requirement for the following additional studies (with example costs highlighted) and an overall significant cost impact:

For existing Port activities

- Additional costs of compiling MCZ information within MDP documents(c £6,750);
- Additional costs for studies to inform baseline (or equivalent) study where existing information is inadequate in terms of MCZ feature (e.g. additional monitoring of sediment dispersion and habitats to assess impacts, £5,000-£50,000); and
- Cost of additional mitigation measures (e.g. modification of existing sediment management scheme, £50,000-£1million annually).

For new Port developments/activities

- Additional costs associated with compiling EIAs etc (£10,000-£1million per development);
- Cost of additional studies where existing information inadequate in the vicinity of MCZ (e.g. dredged material dispersal studies, £5,000-£10,000 per development/activity);
- Cost of additional mitigation measures (e.g. implementation of sediment management scheme and/or modification to disposal practices, £50,000-£1million annually); and
- Other costs solely due to designation of MCZ (e.g. closure of disposal site/dredge channel/designated anchorage – unknown cost).

Q.8 Do you have any new information that was not available or used in the Impact Assessment to inform or quantify the value the benefits of MCZs?

No additional information.

General Comments

Q.9 You may wish to provide comments on other aspects of this consultation such as evidence requirements, identification and treatment of high risk sites. Where you disagree with the approach taken please provide evidence to support your views.

See covering letter.