

## Axe Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

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

**31 May 2019**



Lower Axe Estuary @ Georgina Evans

### 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?

The Axe Estuary MCZ is an inshore site that covers an area of approximately 0.33 km<sup>2</sup>. The site is within the Axe Estuary in Devon which runs from near Colyford to Axmouth and Seaton, opening up into Lyme Bay. The site is constrained by the boundaries of the estuary and lies adjacent to the Seaton Wetlands, a series of local nature reserves.

## 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 Axe Estuary is an important link between the surrounding wetlands and the open sea. The areas of coastal saltmarshes, intertidal sediments and rocky habitats act as important nursery grounds for juvenile fish, including sea bass, and support habitats for sensitive species of birds, crustaceans (such as crabs, lobsters and barnacles) and molluscs (such as mussels, native oysters and cockles). The estuary is also home to the critically endangered European eel.

Coastal saltmarshes and saline reedbeds border the site and support a wide variety of species. They are one of the most productive ecosystems in the world with significant economic value, as well as being important foraging grounds for wading birds and wildfowl, providing sheltered refuge at high tide. Specialised salt and flood tolerant flowering plants help to stabilise sediments and prevent erosion, while an abundance of marine worms, crustaceans and tiny snails live within the damp sediment surrounding the vegetation.

Due to the highly dynamic nature of the site, the areas of intertidal sediments, consisting of muds, coarse and mixed sediments, create a mosaic of different habitats supporting a wide variety of species.

The shoreline habitats protected by this MCZ, particularly rocky areas, saltmarshes and reed beds, support a wide selection of species including juvenile fish. Coarse sediment shores appear, on the surface, to be devoid of life and present difficult places for creatures to survive; but dig a little deeper and animals can be found, such as shrimp-like sandhoppers which feed on plant material washed up. The marine life within these areas often provide an important food source for fish and birds.

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
Coastal saltmarshes and saline reedbeds	Maintain in favourable condition
Estuarine rocky habitats	
Intertidal coarse sediment	
Intertidal mixed sediment	
Intertidal mud	

# 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
<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>

<p><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></p> <p><b>Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS</b></p>	<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>
<p><b>Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities</b></p>	<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 coasts and estuaries, including aquaculture in the intertidal zone.</li> </ul>
<p><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></p>	<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>
<p><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></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vessel safety consents, including certification of seafarers and equipment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Natural England (NE)</b>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england</a></p>	<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>
<p><b>The Planning Inspectorate</b>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate</a></p>	<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>

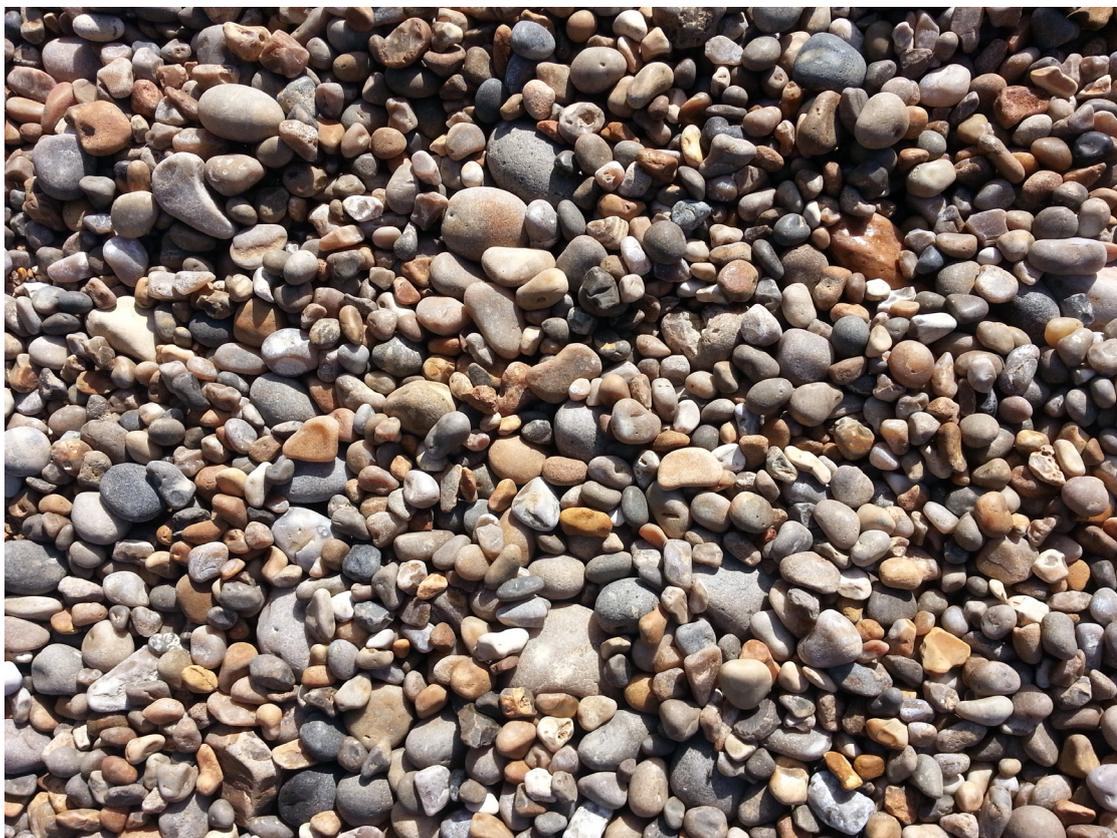
## Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:

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

See Natural England's advice on MCZs at:

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



**Intertidal coarse sediment © Georgina Evans**



© 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)