

Devon Avon Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

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

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Devon Avon Estuary, Intertidal mud © Christine Singfield, Natural England

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 Devon Avon Estuary MCZ covers an area of 2 km² and is located on the south coast of Devon, in the Western Channel and Celtic Sea region. The site extends from the mouth of the estuary up to a tidal weir at Aveton Gifford.

The Devon Avon Estuary is a narrow meandering drowned river valley of about 7 km in length, which lies within a steep sided valley. It is characterised by a subtidal river channel bisecting the intertidal areas, which are sandy in the outer reaches and muddier in the inner reaches. The mouth of the estuary has semi-exposed rock platforms with rich rockpool, under-boulder and overhang communities on the lower shore.

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 Devon Avon Estuary MCZ is an important site supporting a variety of habitats and wildlife. Various species of worm, crustacean and shrimp can be found here, including the nationally scarce tentacled lagoon worm. This is a tiny bristleworm which grows up to 5 mm in length. It 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.

Like all of the main estuaries of the south west, the Devon Avon Estuary is an important nursery area for fish species and is potentially important for seahorse populations as it provides suitable food and shelter. The saltmarshes provide habitat for crustaceans (such as crabs, lobsters and barnacles), molluscs (such as mussels and oysters) and a nursery area for fish, as well as feeding grounds for birds.

You can find detailed information about each feature at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>.

Protected features	General management approach
Coastal saltmarshes and saline reed beds	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mud	
Intertidal sand and muddy sand	
Moderate energy intertidal rock	
Tentacled lagoon worm (<i>Alkmaria romijni</i>)	

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 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
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) http://www.association-ifca.org.uk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensing for exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves.

<p>Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy</p> <p>Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Department for Transport (DfT) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy on environmental impacts associated with ports and shipping, including pollution from ships. • Policy on maritime safety including navigation safety.
<p>Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - An Executive Agency of the Department for Transport https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vessel safety consents, including certification of seafarers and equipment.
<p>Natural England (NE) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment and management of the English 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.
<p>The Planning Inspectorate https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>

Read the advice provided by Natural England on MCZs at:

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



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