

Erme Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

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

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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 Erme Estuary MCZ is an inshore site that covers an area of approximately 1 km². The Erme is located on the south coast of Devon and opens into the Western Channel and Celtic Sea region.

The site covers the whole estuary from the mouth of the river to the limits of the tidal influence near the village of Ermington.

The MCZ falls within the Erme Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and at the mouth of the river it overlaps with the Prawle Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone Site of Community Importance.

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 Erme Estuary contains a wide variety of habitats from rocky shores to intertidal mud flats. These support a large number of important species including several that are rare, such as the nationally scarce tentacled lagoon worm. 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. Estuaries play an important role in the environment, creating areas for wading and migratory birds to feed and rest and forming nurseries for juvenile species of fish. The large mudflats and areas of muddy gravel that are exposed at low tide produce films of algae that are foraged upon by many species.

Areas of intertidal rock within the estuary form the feature 'Estuarine rocky habitats'. These areas of rock provide a hard surface for algae and animals to attach in an area dominated by sand and mud with variable salinity. At low tide these areas become foraging grounds for birds and crustaceans and at high tide they create shelter for juvenile species of fish.

At the mouth of the river, exposed rocks are pounded by waves and currents washing away sand and mud leaving only bedrock or boulders. Mussels, limpets and barnacles can be found clinging to the rocks with patches of brown and red seaweeds growing in the crevices and on the landward side of the rocks.

Designation of this site as a Marine Conservation Zone protects the following features. You can find detailed information about each feature at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>.

Protected features	General management approach
Estuarine rocky habitats	Maintain in favourable condition
High energy intertidal rock	
Intertidal mixed sediments	
Low energy intertidal rock	
Moderate energy intertidal rock	
Sheltered muddy gravels	
Tentacled lagoon-worm (<i>Alkmaria romijni</i>)	
Intertidal coarse sediment	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
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.
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-energy-and-industrial-strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oil and gas related activities Renewable energy related activities
Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental approvals and consents for offshore oil and gas related activities, Carbon Capture and Storage and Gas Unloading and Storage, and decommissioning activities.
Harbour Authorities and Local Planning Authorities	<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.
Department for Transport (DfT) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport	<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.
Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) - An Executive Agency of the Department for Transport https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/maritime-and-coastguard-agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vessel safety consents, including certification of seafarers and equipment.
Natural England (NE) https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england	<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.
The Planning Inspectorate https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/planning-inspectorate	<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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