

Torbay Marine Conservation Zone

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

31 May 2019



View of Flat Rock and the Ore Stone from Hope's Nose © Natural England

Overview

This site became a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in November 2013. This means that specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities. Two additional features, peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*) and subtidal coarse sediment, were added to the site in May 2019.

Where is the site?

Torbay MCZ is an inshore site that covers an area of 20 km² and is located on the South Devon coast between Oddicombe Beach and Sharkham Point.

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 high level of biodiversity in the area surrounding Torbay MCZ has previously been recognised, with Torbay being described as “the jewel in South Devon’s crown” for marine wildlife. Extending from the shoreline out to a depth of 30 metres the site includes a range of habitats exposed to different environmental conditions. This variation creates an area that is capable of supporting a rich array of marine wildlife.

The inshore areas of Torbay’s natural harbour are predominantly soft muddy sands which are characterised by animals such as heart urchins and brittlestars. The less muddy sand found closer towards the shore holds dense populations of species including razor clams whereas the site’s rocky areas support sponges, sea squirts and seaweeds. Seagrasses are plants with dark green, long, narrow, ribbon-shaped leaves and are the only flowering plant that is able to live in seawater and pollinate whilst submerged. Seagrass beds provide a habitat for a wide range of animals, such as seahorses and pipefish, which shelter amongst the leaves, as well as molluscs and worms which burrow into the roots and surrounding sediments. They also act as nursery areas for a range of animals giving protection to marine species of commercial importance such as bass and cuttlefish, which in turn support a range of diving birds at this site such as the Red-breasted merganser and Great northern diver.

The nationally rare long-snouted seahorse also inhabits seagrass beds and is found within Torbay MCZ. Seahorses are bony fish that swim upright. They wrap their long tails around plants, preventing them from being swept away by strong currents. Instead of scales, they have skin stretched over a series of bony plates which are visible as rings around the body. This bony armour helps protect them from predators as does their excellent camouflage. The long snout of this particular seahorse is more than one third of the length of its head and acts like a vacuum cleaner for food. Seahorses are known to form faithful pairs for at least the duration of the breeding season, and are unique in the animal kingdom in that it is the male that carries the developing young. The female transfers her eggs into a pouch on his stomach, where they are fertilised, and the pouch sealed. The male gives birth to fully formed young about three weeks later.

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
Intertidal coarse sediment	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mixed sediments	
Intertidal mud	
Intertidal sand and muddy sand	
Intertidal underboulder communities	
Low energy intertidal rock	
Moderate energy intertidal rock	
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	
Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	
Peat and clay exposures	
Long-snouted seahorse (<i>Hippocampus guttulatus</i>)	Recover to favourable condition
Seagrass beds	
Subtidal coarse sediment	
Subtidal 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 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 Offshore Petroleum Regulator for Environment and Decommissioning (OPRED) – Part of BEIS	<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.
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>



Seagrass bed © Doug Anderson, Natural England

**OG
L**

© 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

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to defra.helpline@defra.gov.uk