

MMO information sheet

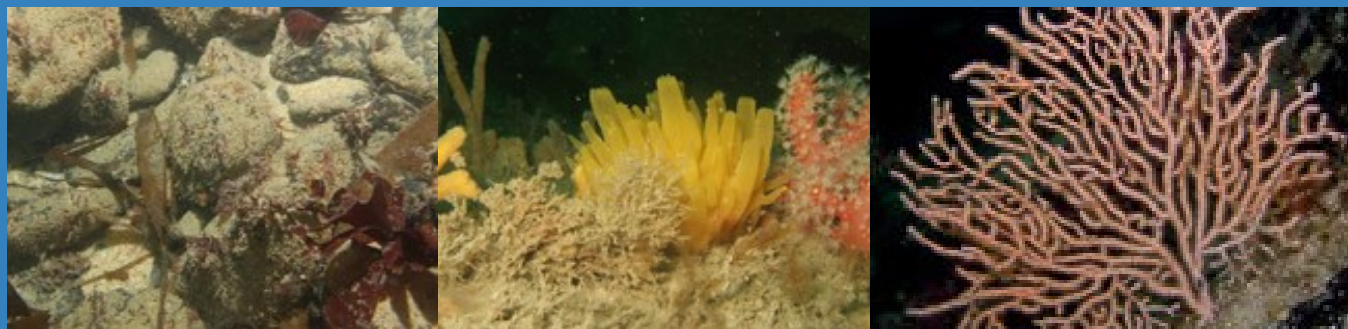
Rocky reef

Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is gathering evidence on the impacts of fishing on habitats and species found within marine protected areas (MPAs).

What is rocky reef?

Rocky reef includes the habitats moderate and high energy circalittoral rock, as well as Annex I Reef: rocky. Rocky reefs are habitats created by outcrops of rock located within the subtidal area (the part of the seabed always covered by water). Rocky reef provides important hard surfaces for a variety of animals to attach to, including pink sea-fans and sponges, as well as providing shelter for fish and crustaceans such as lobsters and crabs. Rocky reef habitats therefore support the wider food chain, including commercial fish stocks, and provide opportunities for activities such as SCUBA diving and recreational angling. Rocky reefs are distributed all around the coast of the United Kingdom.



Moderate energy circalittoral rock (left), sponge communities on circalittoral reef (centre) and pink sea-fans (right) © Natural England/Angela Gall & Ross Bullimore

Reef habitats are vulnerable to damage from bottom towed fishing. The interaction between rocky reef and bottom towed gears is considered across 13 MPAs as part of Stage 2 of the MMO's MPA fisheries management strategy. MMO is gathering evidence on the impacts of other fishing gears on rocky reef as part of Stage 3 of the strategy. Stage 3 includes 12 MPAs containing rocky reef. Evidence gathered so far has been presented in three impacts evidence documents, each focused on a particular fishing gear.

Impacts from fishing activity

Fishing activity can cause physical damage to the seafloor and associated habitats and species, including rocky reef. For example, fishing can damage the rocky reef directly or remove species attached to, or associated with it. Physical damage can split rocky reef into smaller, isolated fragments rather than continuous habitat. This is called fragmentation and can prevent reefs from recovering from damage. Such damage may reduce the reef's ability to support biodiversity and provide all of the associated benefits.

For more information about rocky reefs please see the [JNCC website](#).



Marine
Management
Organisation