

MMO information sheet

Ocean Quahog (*Arctica islandica*)

Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is gathering evidence on the impacts of fishing on habitats and species found within marine protected areas (MPAs). Evidence gathered so far has been presented in three impacts evidence documents each focused on certain fishing gear.

One of the species included is the ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*), which can be found within the following Stage 3 MPAs: Farnes East, Fulmar, Holderness Offshore, and North East of Farnes Deep.

What is an ocean quahog?

The ocean quahog is an extremely long lived species of mollusc, regularly living over 100 years old, and with one individual reported to be over 500 years old, making it one of the oldest animals ever recorded. The ocean quahog is a species of mollusc with thick oval-shaped shells, up to 13 cm in length. The outside of their shells range in colour from brown, in smaller individuals, to greenish brown to black, in larger ones. The outer layer is thin and papery so might peel away to reveal a brownish-white shell beneath. Ocean quahog are mostly found buried, or partly buried, in the top few centimetres of sandy seabed. Ocean quahog can be found throughout the waters surrounding the UK, with a depth range of 4 to 482 m. Ocean quahog are a food source for commercially important fish species including cod.



Ocean quahog can grow up to 13 cm but vary in size depending on age and location (left). Ocean quahog from Liverpool Bay (right) © Patrick Clarke at Cape Clasp © Ian Wallace for The Wildlife Trusts.

Impacts of fishing activity

Fishing activity can cause physical damage to the seafloor and associated habitats and species, including ocean quahog. Due to their long life-span and slow growth rate, ocean quahog populations take a very long time to recover from damage and disturbance, especially physical disturbance of the sediments and seabed. In the North Sea for example, recovery from the impacts of fishing is likely to take decades.

For more information on the ocean quahog please see [MarLIN's website](#).



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