

MMO information sheet

Sandbanks and sediments

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. The habitats covered include sandbanks and sediments which can be found in nearly all of the Stage 3 MPAs.

What are sandbanks and sediments?

Sandbank habitats are comprised of distinct banks arising from horizontal or sloping plains of sandy sediment. The sediment is permanently covered by shallow sea water typically up to depths of 20 m, but sandbanks can sometimes be found at depths greater than this.

Within English waters, sediments can be grouped into four habitat types:

- Subtidal coarse sediment - coarse sand, gravel, shingle, pebbles and cobbles. Typically, unstable and found on the open coast or in tide-swept channels.
- Subtidal sand – clean medium-fine sands or loose slightly muddy sands found both offshore and on open coasts.
- Subtidal mud – muds and sandy muds found from the extreme lower shore to offshore habitats, mostly in sheltered waters.
- Subtidal mixed sediments – include muddy gravelly sands, cobble and pebbles within or upon sand, gravel or mud. Found from the extreme low water mark to deep, offshore habitats.

Sandbanks are usually home to burrowing animals such as molluscs and worms, as well as animals living on the surface such as shrimp, crabs, fish, anemones and sea-pens. Sediments support a variety of worms, cockles, urchins and sea cucumbers, this can vary between sediment types.



*Sandbanks and sediments support commercially important fisheries species such as sandeels (left), and European plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*) (right), and provide diverse habitats which support a variety of species such as starfish (centre) © JNCC/Cefas, © Crown Copyright and ©1134991400 iStock*

Impacts of fishing activity

Fishing activity can cause physical damage to the seafloor and associated habitats and species, including sandbank and sediment communities. The animals associated with these habitats can be vulnerable to damage from certain fishing gears that contact the seabed. You can find more information on sandbank and sediment habitats on [JNCC's website](http://jncc.gov.uk). Visit www.gov.uk/MMO to find out more and take part in our MPA consultation and call for evidence.



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