

What are Marine Conservation Zones?

Marine Conservation Zones are a new way of extending environmental protection in our seas. They will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology. Sites will be selected to protect the range of marine wildlife, not just the rare and threatened.

Around England, Marine Conservation Zones will be part of a network of protected areas at sea. This network will also include:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- Special Areas of Conservation
- Special Protection Areas
- Ramsar sites

Irish Sea Conservation Zones is one of four similar projects around England and Wales that are part of the Marine Conservation Zone Project, which has been established by Defra, Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to identify and recommend Marine Conservation Zones to the government. The other regional projects are Net Gain in the North Sea, Balanced Seas in south-east England and Finding Sanctuary in south-west England.



Who chooses Marine Conservation Zones?

A 'stakeholder group' made up of people with an interest in the Irish Sea is at the heart of the process. They will recommend where the conservation zones should be, and what form the protection should take.

We expect the government to accept the recommended sites, providing they meet certain ecological criteria that the stakeholder group will be working with.

We work at arm's length from our national partners and an independent, professional facilitator is in charge of setting up the stakeholder group.

It's important that we hear from everyone with an interest in the Irish Sea. People who are not on the stakeholder group still have important information and opinions to contribute. Our liaison officers are talking to as many people as possible.

Where will Marine Conservation Zones be?

We don't yet know where the conservation zones are likely to be because the stakeholder group is not due to make its recommendations to the government until June 2011.

However, we know that the recommended sites must meet certain scientific criteria, while seeking to minimise the social and economic costs and maximise the benefits to society.

What activities may be restricted?

We don't yet know what activities may be restricted in the conservation zones. It will depend on what species or habitat is being protected and will be decided on a case by case basis as the stakeholder group makes its recommendations.

However, it is important to understand that some activities will be restricted. That's why it's important to have your say now.

Project area

The Irish Sea Conservation Zones project covers roughly 40% of the Irish Sea – around 18,000 square km. This includes the inshore waters of England plus the offshore waters of Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.

Irish Sea
Conservation Zones
project area



Background

The seas around the UK and Europe enjoy relatively little environmental protection, especially compared to the land.

The UK government is increasing the protection of our marine environment. It is creating a network of 'marine protected areas', places that have some level of restriction to protect living, non-living, cultural or historic resources.

The network of Marine Protected Areas – which includes Marine Conservation Zones – is required so that the UK meets its commitments under international conventions and its legal obligations under European directives.

The UK government's vision is to:

"recover and protect the richness of our marine wildlife and environment through the development of a strong, ecologically coherent and well-managed network of Marine Protected Areas that is well understood and supported by all sea-users" by 2012.



Contact

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Project partners



Sister projects



Photography: Dave Willis, Colin McPherson, Rowan Byrne, Gordon Fletcher and Ron Crosby.
Design: Creative Concern.

Printed on 100% recycled paper, 75% post-consumer waste stock using vegetable-based inks.

Irish Sea
Conservation Zones

Get involved





Did you know?

The Irish Sea covers 45,000 square km and is 300m deep at its deepest point. Around six million people live within 10km of the Irish Sea.

Diving, sea angling, sailing, wind surfing, kite surfing, kayaking, power boating, jet skiing and rambling are amongst the popular recreational activities on the Irish Sea.

Over 38,000 tonnes of fish with a value of £42.5 million were landed from the Irish Sea in 2008, according to the Marine Fisheries Agency. Three quarters of this was shell fish.

About a dozen species of whale, dolphin and porpoise are found in the Irish Sea and leatherback turtles visit each summer as they pursue swarms of jellyfish, their staple diet.

There are 17 active oil and gas drilling platforms in the Irish Sea.

Ten offshore wind farms totaling 742 turbines are either operational, under construction or approved in the Irish Sea, according to the British Wind Energy Association. Strong winds and shallow waters make it an excellent location.

Beneath the Irish Sea are diverse habitats such as honeycomb reefs made up of living worms, seagrass beds, rocky reefs, and muddy beds that are home to sea urchins, Dublin Bay prawns and brittlestars.

Irish Sea Conservation Zones is a project to help secure a healthy and productive future for the waters and coast of the Irish Sea.

Our seas offer a rich and diverse array of species and habitats. They also support many commercial and recreational interests, from renewable energy and commercial fishing to angling and sailing.

However, our activities can have a major impact on the quality of the marine environment.

We are working with the people who use, enjoy and make their living from the Irish Sea so that they can recommend where and how it should be protected.

We want everyone with an interest in the Irish Sea to be involved.

Leatherback Turtle

Sea Anemone (Sagartia Elegans)