



Research information note

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Identification of marine habitats relevant to SACs

Report Authors: BMT Cordah Ltd. and Leigh Jones, 2005

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Introduction

The 1992 Directive on the Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora was implemented. One of the requirements of the Habitats Directive is the selection and subsequent designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for a range of habitats and species listed in Annexes I and II of the Directive respectively. Of the current SAC series in the seas around England, all sites are inshore and attached to the coast.

The new methods necessary for the identification of offshore SACs developed by JNCC and the country conservation agencies, and the availability of new seabed geological information for English waters, provided new evidence for the widespread existence of possible Annex I habitat.

English Nature is now working towards identifying possible additional SACs for certain marine habitats (Reef and Sandbanks) within English Territorial Waters, building on the methodology developed in the JNCC-led work and data they have collated. As a first step towards this English Nature commissioned the British Geological Survey (BGS) to produce a GIS and database of seabed habitats and features largely based on geological and sediment information held by the BGS.

In order to progress site identification further, English Nature commissioned BMT Cordah to take the maps derived from data provided by Poulton *et al.* (2002) and refine and complete them, for English Territorial Waters¹. The purpose of this was to show the distribution of relevant habitats, provide summary description of relevant biological information. This report presents the findings of this project.

What was done

- validation of the distribution of habitats derived from BGS data, amended and augmented with new information, at an appropriate scale(s);
- addition of information on relevant habitats not identified from the BGS data in the course of the data collation exercise;
- significant spatial gaps not covered in the BGS data were filled in;

¹ The 12nm limit boundary and Territorial median lines applied in the maps were provided by DTI.

- production of a revised map showing known areas of Annex I habitat, including relevant target notes and text;
- collation of biological information relevant to Annex I habitats and summary descriptions of specific geographical areas or locations of habitat; and

Results and conclusions

Biological and additional sedimentological data has been acquired from a broad range of sources and in general confirm the sediment mapping of maps derived from data provided by Poulton *et al.* (2002). It has offered clarification on a number of locations and filled some data gaps with respect to seabed character. The data have allowed the characterisation of the habitats.

English Nature's viewpoint

This work provides an excellent starting point in work to identify and designate inshore SACs. This work will be followed by further data collation and survey work to ground truth the habitats identified in this report.

Selected references

JOHNSTON, C.M., TURBULL, C.G., & TASKER, M.L. 2002. *Natura 2000 in UK Offshore Waters: Advice to support the implementation of the EC Habitats and Birds Directives in UK offshore waters*. JNCC report no. 325.

POULTON, C.V.L., PHILPOTT, S.L., BEE, E.J., JAMES, J.W.C., TASONG, W.A., GRAHAM, C. & LAWLEY, R.S. 2002. *Framework for the identification of seabed habitats and features within offshore English waters to 12 nautical miles*. Coastal Geology and Global Change Programme. Commissioned Report CR/02/134. British Geological Survey.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

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