

Skerries Bank and Surrounds Marine Conservation Zone

Where is this site?

The Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ is an inshore site located on the South Devon coast. It runs along the coast from Leek Cove at Limebury Point to Torcross, and extends from the coast line out to depths of approximately 70 metres. The site overlaps with the Start Point Inshore Potting Agreement. Skerries Bank and Surrounds is an area that supports a highly diverse range of species that live on the seabed or in the water column and is also known to be an important breeding area for flat fish.

Why is this site important?

Skerries Bank and Surrounds is known to cover an area that has a high diversity of seabed-dwelling species. The wide range of seabed types within the site contributes to this level of biodiversity by providing a variety of environments where marine wildlife can live. Skerries Bank and Surrounds has the largest extent of moderate energy infralittoral rock found within any of the Marine Conservation Zones in the south west region. Protecting this, as well as 10 other habitat types means this is an important site.



Moderate energy infralittoral rock © Natural England

What does this Marine Conservation Zone protect?

This site protects 11 different habitat types and their associated species as well as offering specific protection to two species of conservation importance. Rocky seabed is present across the site from the intertidal to deeper water.

As the water depth increases, the amount of light reaching the seabed declines, restricting what can live there. Plants including kelps and seaweeds dominate the shallower areas (infralittoral) but further out to sea where it is deeper and light is limited, the rocky habitats are dominated by a rich array of marine animals (circalittoral). Starfish, sea urchins and brittlestars are found here along with important inshore commercial fisheries species such as lobster and crab.

A variety of subtidal sediments are protected within the site. This includes diverse muddy gravelly sands and mosaics of cobbles and pebbles that are found embedded in or lying upon mud, sand or gravel. Not only do these sediments support a wide range of marine species but they also play an important role in the global cycling of many elements, including carbon and nitrogen.

| Features | General management approach |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Intertidal coarse sediment | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Intertidal mixed sediments | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Intertidal sand and muddy sand | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Subtidal coarse sediment | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Subtidal mud | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Subtidal sand | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Moderate energy intertidal rock | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Moderate energy infralittoral rock | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Moderate energy circalittoral rock | Recover to favourable condition |
| High energy intertidal rock | Maintain in favourable condition |
| High energy infralittoral rock | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Pink sea-fan (<i>Eunicella verrucosa</i>) | Maintain in favourable condition |
| Spiny lobster (<i>Palinurus elephas</i>) | Recover to favourable condition |

Spiny lobsters (*Palinurus elephas*) are also protected within this MCZ. They can be found near the coast or up to depths of 70 metres amongst seascapes of bedrock and boulders. Lobsters are at their most active during the night and typically spend days hidden under rocks, within caves or beneath overhangs. Spiny lobsters require protection to reverse the considerable decline in population number that has occurred in UK waters over the past 40 years.

The pink sea-fan (*Eunicella verrucosa*), a type of coral, is found growing on rocks within the site. It can grow up to 80 cm high and 100 cm across and typically grows perpendicular to the prevailing water currents enabling it to catch as much food from the passing water as possible. Pink sea-fans are very fragile and slow growing, and as such are particularly vulnerable to damage from some activities.



Who will manage Marine Conservation Zones?

Many activities within the marine environment are regulated through marine licences. More information regarding the marine licensing process in relation to MCZs can be found on the MMO website www.marinemanagement.org.uk/licensing/marine.htm

Other activities are regulated through different mechanisms. For example fishing activities are managed through European legislation, national statutory instruments, byelaws and self-imposed voluntary agreements. Similar arrangements are in place to manage the range of activities that may impact MCZs including pollution, coastal development and recreation.

Management of sites is currently being prioritised nationally according to the potential or actual adverse impacts of activities on the features designated in relation to fishing activities. This prioritisation will be further refined at a local level taking into account relevant information and will guide regulators to those sites which may need protection before others.

Any management measures that are required for MCZs will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Management measures will be implemented at sites most at risk of damage first, regulating only those activities which have a detrimental impact on the features. In cases where there is a high risk to designated features being damaged emergency measures may be put in place to ensure the protection of vulnerable habitats and species.

What happens now this site has been designated?

The site specific information below provides an overview of which activities may be affected by the designation of the MCZ and the current management measures. As with all management measures, they may, of course, be subject to change in the light of new evidence becoming available.

Current activities identified at this site which could be affected include port and harbour operations. Any future activities undertaken by the ports and harbour authorities will be regulated through the appropriate licensing regimes. MCZ designation will need to be taken into consideration when assessing environmental impacts of marine works as part of the licensing application process. The Skerries Bank and surrounds MCZ site extends beyond 6nm therefore the lead authority will for managing the site will be Devon & Severn IFCA out to 6nm and the MMO beyond this. Any fisheries related management will be developed between these regulatory authorities. Beyond 6nm management measures will need to be proposed and agreed through the European Commission in accordance with the Common Fisheries Policy, applying to UK and non-UK fishing vessels alike. Defra will coordinate input from the MMO and JNCC before formally submitting proposals to the EC. The MMO will be the lead authority regarding implementation and compliance of those measures.

Relevant restrictions relating to this site include the proposed Potting and Shellfish Permit Byelaw and the proposed Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw. Through these permit byelaws Devon & Severn IFCA will have a regulatory mechanism through which additional management can be introduced to specifically meet the conservation objectives for the designated features. For further information visit the IFCA website at <http://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk>

Where can I find out further information?

An interactive map showing this MCZs and other marine protected areas is available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5201>

Additional information about this site and other MCZs is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/protecting-and-sustainably-using-the-marine-environment>

and within Natural England's advice available at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/category/1499649>



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Annex: Management

| Lead organisation | Activities |
|---|--|
| Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fisheries (0-6nm) including commercial fisheries and recreational fishing activities such as sea angling For further information visit www.association-ifca.org.uk |
| Marine Management Organisation (MMO) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fisheries (management) (6-12nm)• Fisheries (enforcement) national and EU legislation• Licensable activities such as deposit and removal activities below mean high water springs, including subsea cables (up to 12nm), construction (including renewables <100MW, ports and coastal protection), dredging and disposal• Harbour Orders and Harbour Empowerment Orders• Section 36 and safety zone consents• Enforcement of licensable activity and other consents (including deemed marine licences)• Development of marine plans integrating the social requirements, economic potential and environmental priorities of marine plan areas• Activities requiring a wildlife licence For further information visit www.marinemangement.org.uk/fisheries or www.marinemangement.org.uk/licensing/marine.htm |
| Environment Agency (EA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fisheries management for migratory and fresh water fish• Coastal protection and flood management• Water quality• Permitted discharges from terrestrial sources For further information visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk/default.aspx |
| Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oil and Gas related activities• Renewable energy related activities For further information visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change |
| Harbour Authorities and local planning authorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for the port and coastal waters within their jurisdiction• Local authorities have role to manage, regulate and facilitate activities at the coast. These include management of coastal recreation, tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection, spatial planning and coastal zone and estuary management, For further information contact your local authority or IFCA |
| Department for Transport (DfT) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for shipping, harbours, ship pollution and offshore safety For further information visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport |
| Natural England (NE) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public access For further information visit www.naturalengland.org.uk/ |