

Torbay Marine Conservation Zone

Where is this site?

Torbay MCZ is an inshore site located in the south west of the UK. The site covers an area of coastline in South Devon between Oddicombe Beach and Sharkham Point, protecting a total area of approximately 20 km². Beginning at the coastline, the boundary extends between 1 – 2.5 km out to sea and encompasses Hope's Nose near Torquay and Berry Head near Brixham.

Why is this site important?

The high level of biodiversity in the surrounding area has previously been recognised, with Torbay being described as “the jewel in South Devon’s crown” for marine wildlife. Extending from the shoreline out to a depth of 30 metres the site includes a range of habitats exposed to different environmental conditions. This variation creates an area that is capable of supporting a rich array of marine wildlife including the nationally rare long-snouted seahorse.



What does this Marine Conservation Zone protect?

Nine different habitats are protected within this MCZ. The inshore areas of Torbay's natural harbour are predominantly soft muddy sands which are characterised by animals such as heart urchins and brittlestars.

The less muddy sand found closer towards the shore hold dense populations of species including razor shells whereas the site's rocky areas support sponges, sea squirts and seaweeds.

Seagrasses are plants with dark green, long, narrow, ribbon-shaped leaves and are the only flowering plant that is able to live in seawater and pollinate whilst submerged.

Seagrass beds provide a habitat for a wide range of animals such as seahorses and pipefish which shelter amongst the leaves as well as molluscs and worms which burrow into the roots and surrounding sediments.

They also act as nursery areas for a range of animals giving protection to marine species of commercial importance such as bass and cuttlefish, which in turn support a range of diving birds at this site such as Red-breasted merganser (*Mergus serrator*) and Great northern diver (*Gavia immer*).



Greater Pipiefish and Common Starfish on sandy seabed © Paul Kay



Bass © Paul Kay



Seagrass bed with snakelocks anemones © Paul Kay

The long-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) also inhabits seagrass beds and is found within Torbay MCZ, the only MCZ to protect this species. Seahorses are bony fish that swim upright. They wrap their long tails around plants preventing them from being swept away by strong currents. Instead of scales, they have skin stretched over a series of bony plates which are visible as rings around the body. This bony armour helps protect them from predators as does their excellent camouflage.

The long snout of this particular seahorse is more than one third of the length of its head and acts like a vacuum cleaner for food. Seahorses are known to form faithful pairs for at least the duration of the breeding season, and are unique in the animal kingdom in that it is the male that carries the developing young. The female transfers her eggs into a pouch on his stomach, where they are fertilised, and the pouch sealed. The male gives birth to fully formed young about three weeks later.



Long-snouted seahorse © S Trehwella

Features	General management approach
Intertidal coarse sediment	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mixed sediments	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mud	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal sand and muddy sand	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal mud	Recover to favourable condition
Low energy intertidal rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Moderate energy intertidal rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal underboulder communities	Maintain in favourable condition
Seagrass beds	Recover to favourable condition
Long-snouted seahorse (<i>Hippocampus guttulatus</i>)	Recover to favourable condition
Native Oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Maintain in favourable condition
Peat and clay exposures	Maintain in favourable condition

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.marinemangement.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 and commercial fisheries. 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.

With regards to fisheries management the Torbay MCZ is within the jurisdiction of Devon and Severn IFCA. All D&SIFCA District-wide byelaws will apply to this site, in addition to all relevant national and EU fisheries legislation. Further information is available at

www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/monitoring/regulations_bluebook.htm

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 D&SIFCA website

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/