



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Inner Silver Pit South

Consultation factsheet for candidate Highly Protected
Marine Area (HPMA)

Date: July 2022



Figure 1: *Sabellaria spinulosa* and *Alcyonidium diaphanum* © JNCC/NE/Cefas

Introduction

This factsheet outlines why Inner Silver Pit South has been identified as a candidate HPMA, providing an overview of the ecological importance, where this area is located and our current knowledge of the activities within the area. This factsheet may be updated with additional evidence after consultation if this area is designated.

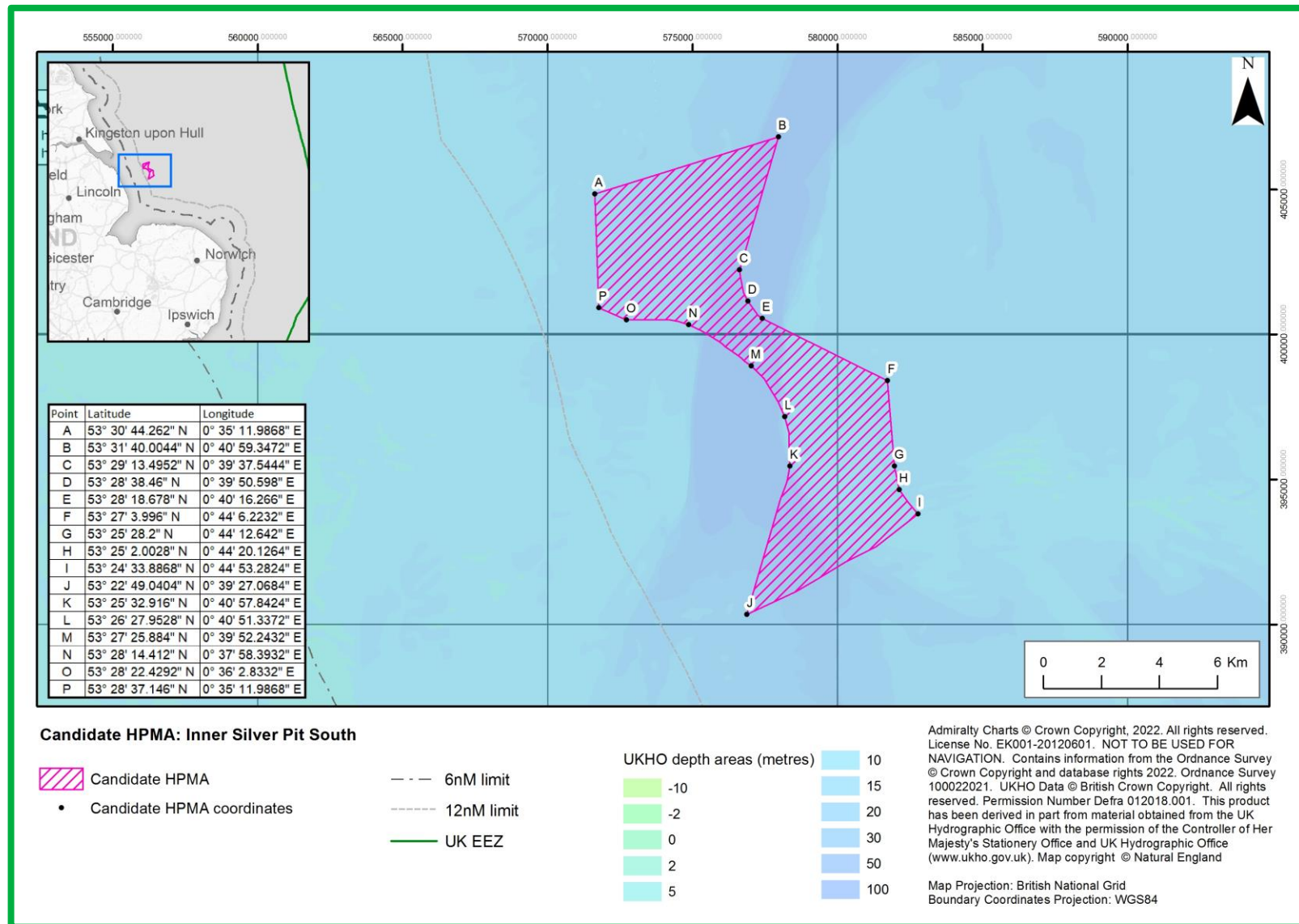
Where is the candidate HPMA located?

Inner Silver Pit South is situated just beyond the 12 nautical mile territorial sea limit in the Southern North Sea region, covering 62.5km². This candidate HPMA is located approximately 28km off the coast of Lincolnshire and approximately 35km south-east of the Humber Estuary. The average depth of the area is 30m, ranging from 12m to 96m below sea level.

The map on the following page shows the current boundary of the candidate HPMA

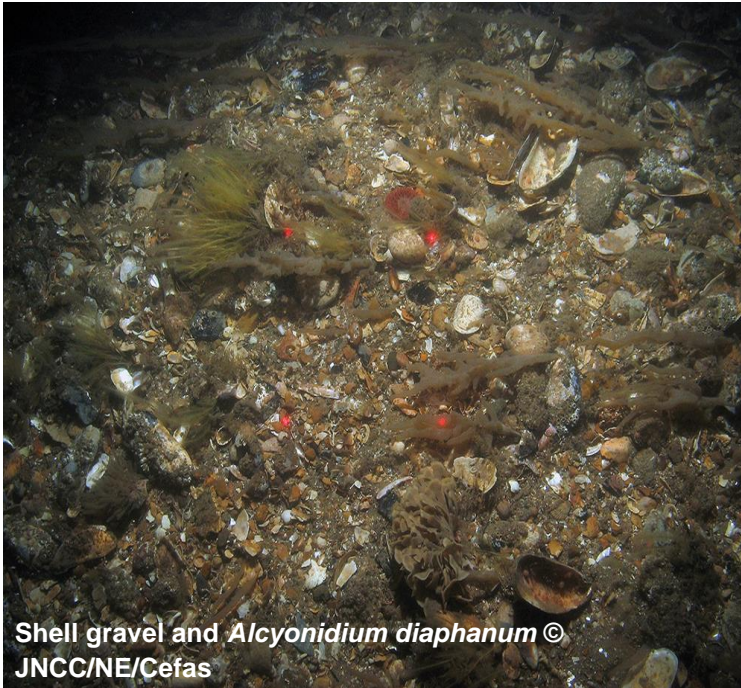
The area overlaps with two Marine Protected Areas (MPA); the Greater Wash Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A map showing these MPAs in relation to the candidate HPMA can be found in Annex 1.

Map of Inner Silver Pit South candidate HPMAs



What habitats and species are found in this candidate HPMA?

The Inner Silver Pit South area has relatively high levels of biodiversity compared to other areas in the Southern North Sea region, hosting a wide range of marine mammal, seabird and fish species.



A mosaic of different habitats characterises the seabed ranging from rocky areas through to sandbanks, sediment-dominant habitats and biogenic reefs including blue mussel beds and ross worm reefs. These reefs support diverse and highly productive communities and provide feeding and nursery grounds for

ecologically and commercially important fish species. This in turn provides foraging areas for seals, cetaceans and seabirds, with this candidate HPMA being identified as an important foraging area for northern gannet and razorbill.

Why have we identified this as a candidate HPMA?

Inner Silver Pit South was primarily identified for its regionally important biodiversity, which includes a wide range of seabed dwelling organisms as well as nineteen mobile species including commercially important fish species, marine mammals and seabirds.

Sedimentary habitats and biogenic reefs in Inner Silver Pit South contribute to the high levels of biodiversity in this area, enhancing productivity. Higher levels of productivity provide both feeding and nursery grounds for ecologically and commercially important fish species. The area is important in the key life cycle stages of a high number of species, including those of commercial importance such as cod, mackerel, herring, plaice, sole and whiting. These species provide foraging for seals, cetaceans and seabirds, therefore protecting and recovering these habitats has the potential to have wider ecosystem benefits.

Inner Silver Pit South is relatively degraded following the impacts of human activity however the sandbanks and reef habitats have a strong potential for recovery subject to the removal of pressures. Designating an HPMA therefore presents a good opportunity to recover this area.

Protected features which exist both within the HPMA and existing MPAs will be subject to the higher conservation objective proposed for HPMA's in the overlapping area.

Taking a whole site approach to protection

HPMAs will take a ‘whole site approach’, therefore the whole marine ecosystem within the HPMA boundary will be designated for protection. The proposed protected feature description for pilot HPMAs as will be listed in the designation order is:

‘The marine ecosystem, habitats and species of flora and fauna, abiotic elements, and their supporting ecosystem function and processes, including the seabed, water column and sea surface, within the site boundary.’

The features this candidate site would protect include the types of species and habitats that have been recorded in Inner Silver Pit South candidate HPMA which are listed below. However, this is not an exhaustive list.

This candidate HPMA contains a range of broadscale habitats including blue carbon habitats, together with their associated communities. Features include:

- Atlantic and Mediterranean moderate energy circalittoral rock
- Circalittoral mixed sediments
- Sublittoral coarse sediment
- Sublittoral sand
- Sublittoral mixed sediments
- Sublittoral biogenic reefs

As well as these habitats, a range of species, including birds, marine mammals and multiple species of fish and shellfish are also likely to use this area.

Further details on the specific habitats and species recorded in this candidate HPMA can be found in the ecological narrative located in Annex H.

Conservation objectives

A designation order covering a HPMA will set out the protected features and the conservation objectives applicable within the HPMA

site boundary. The proposed conservation objective for all pilot HPMAs, including Inner Silver Pit South is:

“To achieve full natural recovery of the structure and functions, features, qualities and composition of characteristic biological communities present within HPMAs and prevent further degradation and damage to the marine ecosystem subject to natural change.

Which activities are likely to be affected?

HPMAs will prohibit extractive, destructive, and depositional uses, allowing only non-damaging levels of other activities. Our current understanding about the sectors and activities which are thought to be taking place in the candidate HPMA is based on the best available evidence at the time and therefore may not present a comprehensive view of all activities taking place in this area. We are gathering additional evidence through the consultation to better understand activities in the area and potential impacts of HPMA designation on these and other activities. Specific information gaps have been identified in the Impact Assessment together with additional information on the activities set out below.

Commercial fishing

UK vessels

Our evidence, based on Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) and sightings data, suggests that the following gears are used within the site:

- Pots

The VMS data suggests, a small annual average of UK vessels (<5), greater than 12m in length, used this area between 2017 and 2019, harvesting mainly edible crab, and European lobster, mainly landing at Bridlington and Grimsby.

The sightings data, used to better understand the under 12m fleet without VMS, indicates vessels less than 12m in length make up the majority of the UK fleet operating in this area, with an annual average of 53 vessels recorded here. Our evidence suggests vessels here are mainly landing European lobster, edible crab and whelk, mainly landing at Bridlington, Grimsby, Hornsea and Wells.

Non-UK vessels

A relatively small number of non-UK vessels, greater than 12m in length, utilise this candidate HPMA (8 vessels), making up less than half of unique vessels present in this area, based on VMS data from between 2016 and 2020. The non-UK effort in this area is mostly from French vessels with limited use from Dutch vessels.

Displacement of commercial fishing

Displacement of dredging and potting activity into adjacent areas may be challenging due the concentration of existing human activities and an existing MMO marine conservation byelaw to protect designated feature of biogenic reefs built by ross worms.

Existing relevant management measures

This is not an exhaustive list of fisheries management measures relating to this area, instead highlights where specific existing restrictions may be relevant to the designation of a HPMA (i.e. existing closed area or prohibition of existing gear types).

- [Seabass commercial fishing restrictions](#) – MMO
- [Marine conservation byelaw: Haisborough, Hammond and Winterton European Marine Site \(Specified Areas\) Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw](#) – MMO
- [The Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge Special Area of Conservation \(Specified Areas\) Prohibited Fishing Gears Byelaw 2022](#) – MMO

Recreational sea fishing

Due to the offshore nature of this candidate HPMA only boat-based angling is possible in this location. Charter and private boat fishing is possible, but opportunities would be limited due to the need for good weather to access the site. As a result, it is unlikely that there is a lot of activity by either private or charter boats.

Anchoring

We do not have any evidence of anchoring areas within the Inner Silver Pit South candidate HPMA.

Activities which may be taking place at non-damaging levels

Management measures for activities that are not extractive, destructive and depositional, most likely non-licensable and/or recreational, will depend on existing activity in the site and the sensitivity of the species or habitat to activities taking place in that area. Examples of non-licensable activities that may threaten biodiversity include motorised recreation, wildlife watching and land-based recreation. Some of these activities currently occurring in the sites could be damaging to the species and habitats. This consultation will help us improve our evidence about activities occurring in the sites, which will help SNCBs to develop the conservation advice for the sites and enable any necessary management measures to be determined. Management may be voluntary. For example, some activities might benefit from voluntary codes of conduct such as diving (to encourage divers to avoid resting on the seabed, removing species or touching features), dog walking (to avoid disturbing species) or powerboating (to encourage users to reduce their speed).

Additional information

[Link to SNCB ecological advice](#)

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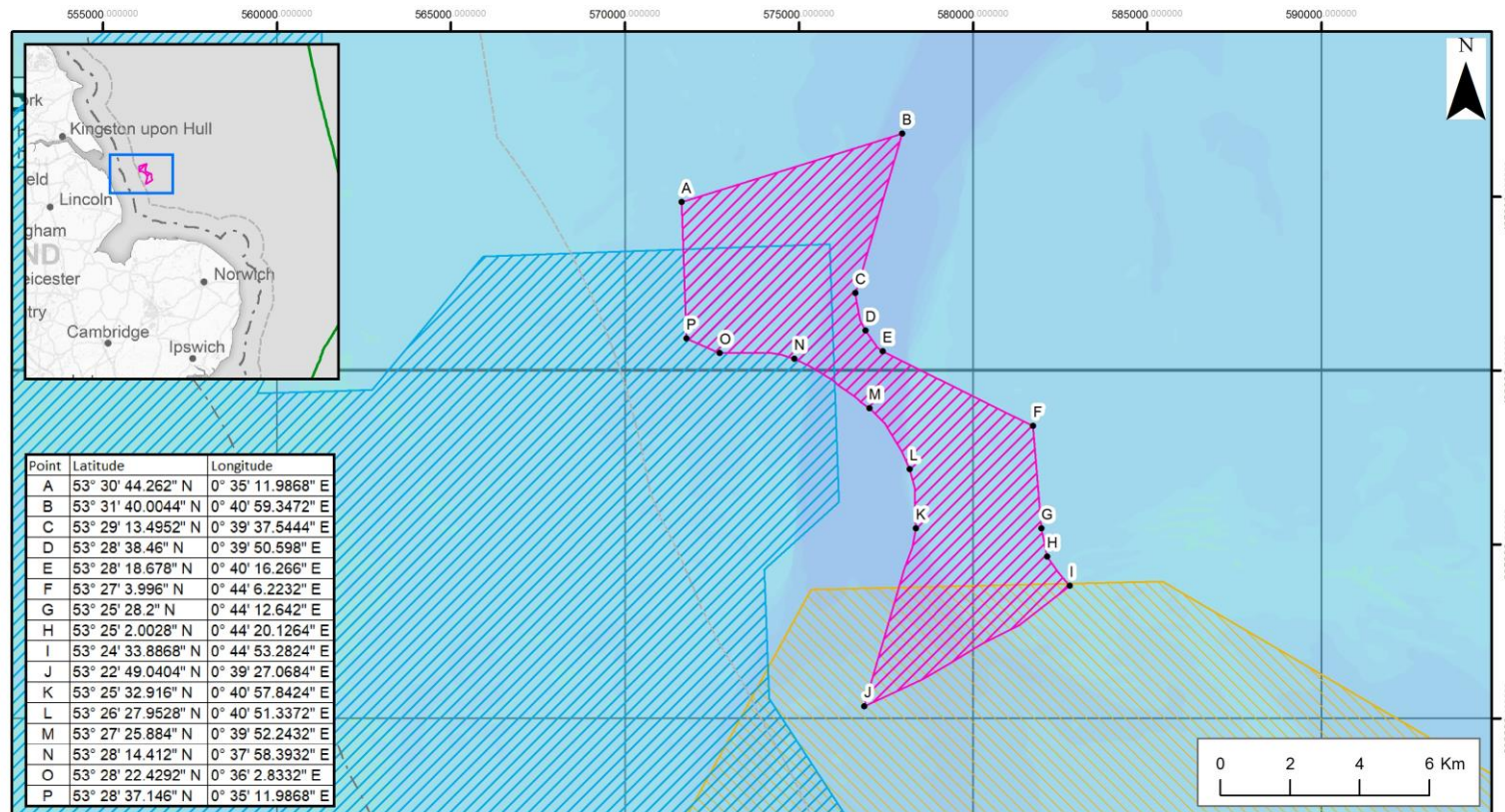
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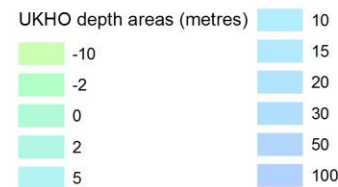
Annex 1: Inner Silver Pit South candidate HPMA map with existing MPAs



Candidate HPMA: Inner Silver Pit South

- Candidate HPMA
- Candidate HPMA coordinates
- Special Protection Areas
- Special Areas of Conservation

- 6nM limit
- 12nM limit
- UK EEZ



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Map Projection: British National Grid
Boundary Coordinates Projection: WGS84

Annex 2: Designated features of overlapping MPAs

The MPAs which Inner Silver Pit South candidate HPMA overlap with are designated for the following features:

Greater Wash Special Protection Area (SPA)

- A065 Common scoter (*Melanitta nigra*) – non-breeding
- A193 Common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) – breeding
- A177 Little gull (*Hydrocoloeus (Larus) minutus*) – non-breeding
- A195 Little tern (*Sterna albifrons*) – breeding
- A001 A Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*) – non-breeding
- A191 Sandwich tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) – breeding

Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

- H1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time
- H1170 Reefs