

North East of Farnes Deep

Consultation factsheet for candidate Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA).

Date: July 2022



Introduction

This factsheet outlines why North East of Farnes Deep 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?

North East of Farnes Deep is an offshore HPMA situated beyond the 12 nautical mile territorial sea limit in the Northern North Sea Region. At its closest, it is approximately 55km from the coast to the east of Berwick-upon-Tweed.

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

Covering 491.8km² and ranging in depths from approximately 50m to 100m, this area overlaps entirely with a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) of the same name. A map showing this Marine Protected Area (MPA) in relation to the candidate HPMA can be found in Annex 1.

Map of North East of Farnes Deep candidate HPMA



What habitats and species are found in this candidate HPMA?

The seabed in this candidate HPMA has a mix of highly mosaiced habitats ranging from coarse sediments such as sand, where several species of filter feeding sponges have been identified, through to mixed sediment areas and mud dominated seabed habitats.



These wide-ranging, mostly stable habitats support high levels of biodiversity in comparison to the wider Northern North Sea region, with at least 263 benthic and demersal species recorded. These include the phosphorescent sea pen, common dragonet, and squat lobsters which occur in relatively large numbers across the area, as well as the long-lived ocean quahog, a type of mollusc which is under threat across the broader North-east Atlantic.

Several mobile species have been recorded in this area, including the rare and regionally distinctive European smelt, which is prey for larger fish, seabirds and marine mammals. At least ten nationally important seabird species and five marine mammal species have also been recorded within this area including the harbour porpoise and white beaked dolphin.

Why have we identified this as a candidate HPMA?

Together with high levels of biodiversity and the complex benthic habitats, the area has the potential to contribute to a range of ecosystem services. The large areas of muddy habitats, which cover over 27 km² (over 5% by area), are thought to be an important habitat for the storage of carbon. Overall, in English waters, seabed mud habitats have been identified to have a large stock of sequestered carbon, highlighting the importance of protecting and recovering this habitat as a nature-based solution to tackling climate change. This is the only offshore candidate HPMA with blue carbon habitats.

Evidence shows the complex sediment dominated seabed habitats in this area are important for the key life cycle for a range of species including birds, marine mammals and fish. This includes spawning and nursery habitats for up to ten commercial important species such as angler fish, surmullet, whiting and haddock. Protecting these areas therefore may help protect stocks of these species.

The North East of Farnes Deep area overlaps entirely with an existing MPA by the same name. It is the only MPA in the region where all the protected features are in favourable condition. As such, it is the only candidate HPMA in offshore English waters that represents a relatively natural ecosystem. This candidate HPMA can therefore help to safeguard the health of marine biodiversity in this area into the future. Protected features which exist both within the HPMA and existing MPA will be subject to the higher conservation objective proposed for HPMAs in the overlapping area. Due to the existing designation, survey data is also readily available to evaluate the impact of HPMA designation in a relatively shorter timeframe than newly designated sites.

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 North East of Farnes Deep 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:

Sublittoral coarse sediment

- Sublittoral mud
- Sublittoral mixed sediments

Sublittoral sand

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 North East of Farnes Deep 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:

- Bottom trawls
- Dredges

The VMS data suggests a small annual average of UK vessels (<5), greater than 12m in length, used this area between 2017 and 2019. Our evidence suggests vessels here were mainly harvesting great Atlantic scallop and Norway lobster, mainly landing at Hartlepool and Peterhead.

Based on sightings data we have no evidence of vessels under 12m in length using this area.

Non-UK vessels

Of the all the vessels which have been identified utilising this candidate HPMA, based on VMS data from between 2016 and

2020, just over 40% are non-UK vessels (33). Of these non-UK vessels, effort is predominantly from Dutch, German, French, Swedish and Danish vessels, with very small numbers of Lithuanian and Norwegian vessels.

Displacement of commercial fishing

At this stage, no significant restrictions on fisheries ability to displace activity have been identified. We are aware however that displacement could lead to a decrease in profitability of the displaced fishing fleet.

Existing relevant management measures

• Seabass commercial fishing restrictions – MMO

Recreational sea fishing

The offshore nature of this candidate HPMA means that only charter and private boat recreational fishing is possible, but opportunities would be limited due to the need for good weather. 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 suggesting that anchoring occurs within the candidate HPMA.

Activities which may be taking place at nondamaging 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 landbased 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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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at <u>hpma@defra.gov.uk</u>

www.gov.uk/defra

Annex 1: North East of Farnes Deep candidate HPMA map with existing MPAs



Candidate HPMA: North East of Farnes Deep

Candidate HPMA

— - — 6nM limit

12nM limit

Candidate HPMA coordinates

Marine Conservation Zones



10

15

20

30

50

100

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Map Projection: British National Grid Boundary Coordinates Projection: WGS84

Annex 2: Designated features of overlapping MPAs

The MPAs which North East of Farnes Deep candidate HPMA overlap with are designated for the following features:

North East of Farnes Deep MCZ

- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal sand
- Subtidal mixed sediments
- Subtidal mud
- Ocean quahog (Arctica islandica)