

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## Erme Estuary

### Recommended Marine Conservation Zone

June 2018

Consultation on Sites Proposed for Designation in the Third Tranche of Marine Conservation Zones



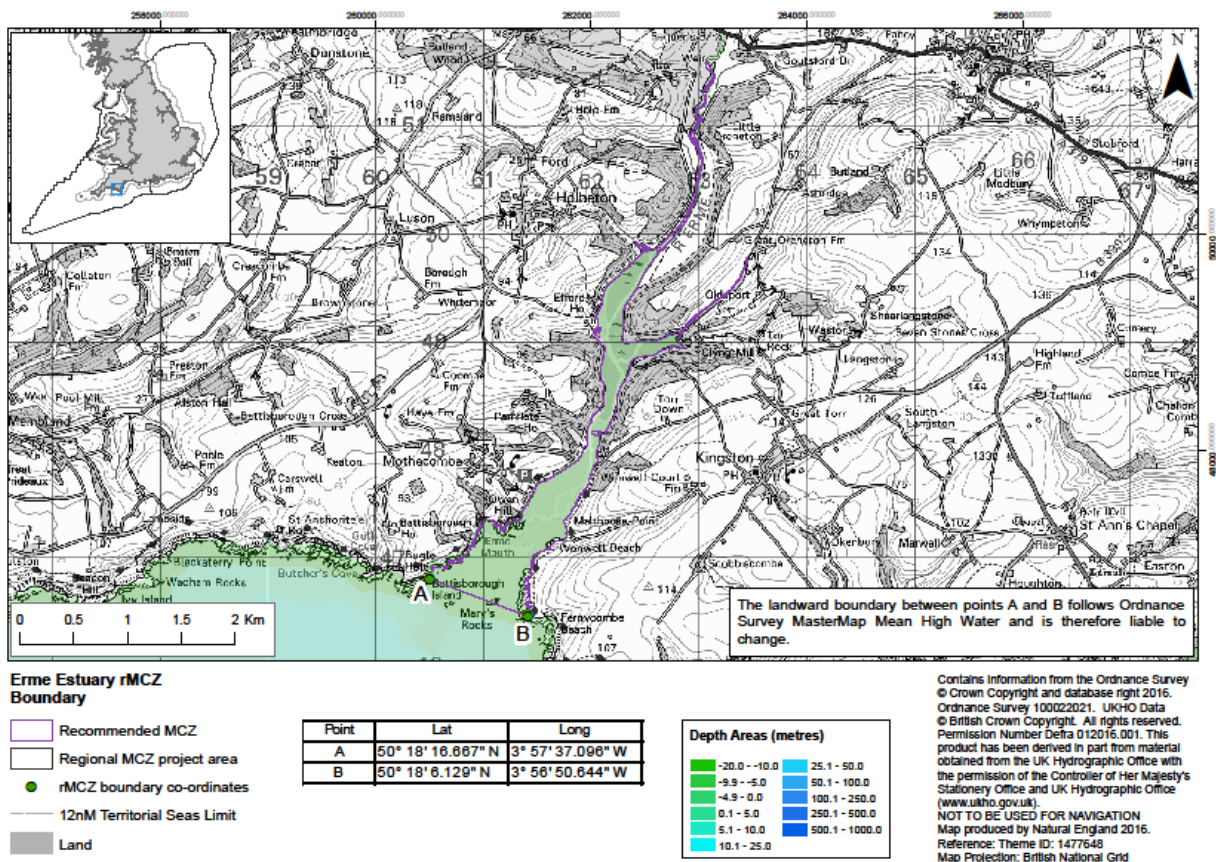
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# Where is the site located?

The Erme Estuary recommended Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is an inshore site that covers an area of approximately 1 km<sup>2</sup>. The Erme is located on the south coast of Devon and opens into the Western Channel and Celtic Sea region. The site covers the whole estuary from the mouth of the river to the limits of the tidal influence near the village of Ermington.

The MCZ falls within the Erme Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and at the mouth of the river it overlaps with the Prawle Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone Site of Community Importance.



# Why is the site environmentally important?

The Erme Estuary contains a wide variety of habitats from rocky shores to intertidal mud flats. These support a large number of important species including several that are rare, such as the tentacled lagoon worm (*Alkmaria romijni*). This small worm lives in a tube made of mud on areas of intertidal mud within the Erme Estuary. It is scarce in the UK and particularly vulnerable to changes in its habitat.



Moderate energy intertidal rock © Crown Copyright

Estuaries play an important role in the environment, creating areas for wading and migratory birds to feed and rest and forming nurseries for juvenile species of fish. The large mudflats and areas of muddy gravel that are exposed at low tide produce films of algae that are foraged upon by many species.

Areas of intertidal rock within the estuary form the feature ‘Estuarine rocky habitats’. These areas were formed when the Erme River valley was flooded by the sea after the last ice age forming a ria.

The areas of rock form an important habitat providing a hard surface for algae and animals to attach to in an area dominated by sand and mud. At low tide these areas become foraging grounds for birds and crustaceans and at high tide they create shelter for juvenile species of fish.

At the mouth of the river, exposed rocks are pounded by waves and currents washing away sand and mud leaving only bedrock or boulders. Mussels, limpets and barnacles can be found clinging to the rocks with patches of brown and red seaweeds growing in the crevices and on the landward side of the rocks.

## What would this site protect?

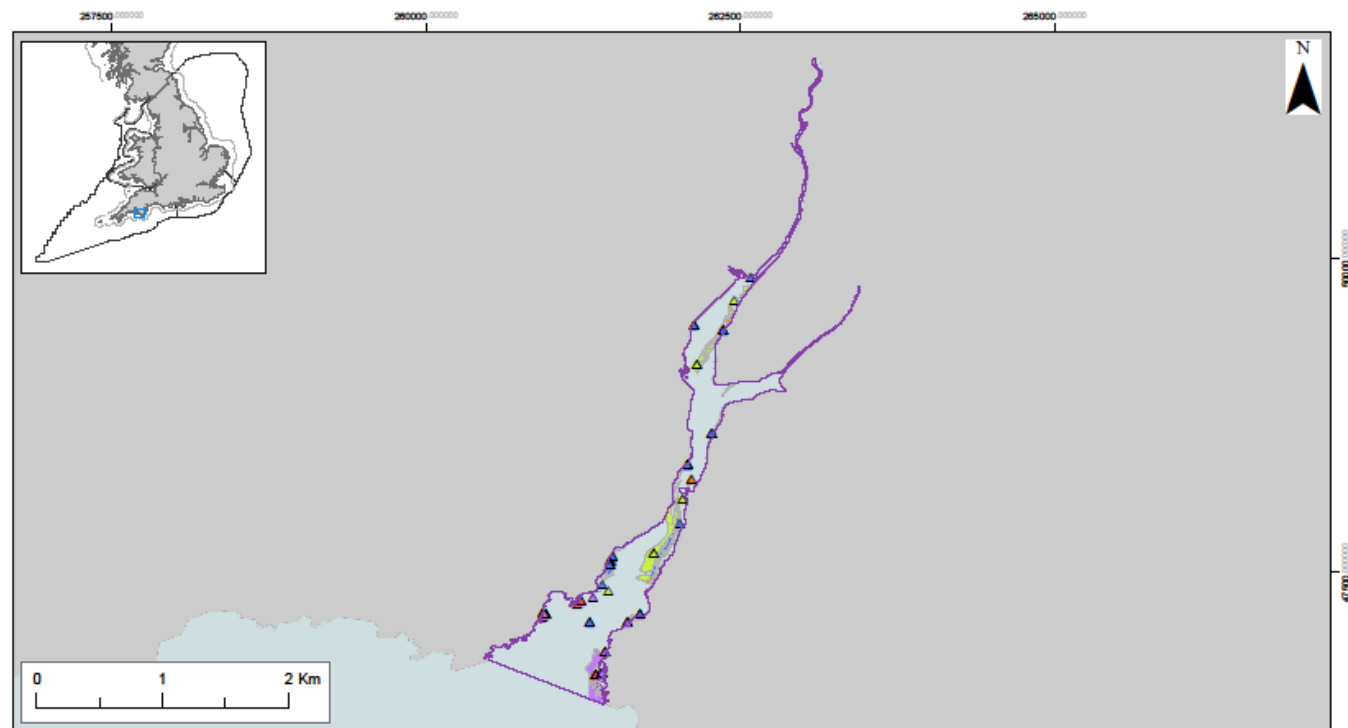
Designation would protect the following features. You can read more about the features this site protects and why they are important [here](#).

Feature	General Management Approach
Estuarine rocky habitats	Maintain in favourable condition
Sheltered muddy gravels	
Tentacled lagoon-worm ( <i>Alkmaria romijni</i> )	
High energy intertidal rock	
Intertidal mixed sediments	
Low energy intertidal rock	
Moderate energy intertidal rock	
Intertidal coarse sediment	Recover to favourable condition



## Where are the features located?

The following maps show the location of the features to be protected within the site. A range of different types of surveys have been used to create these maps. More detailed information on the techniques used can be found [here](#).



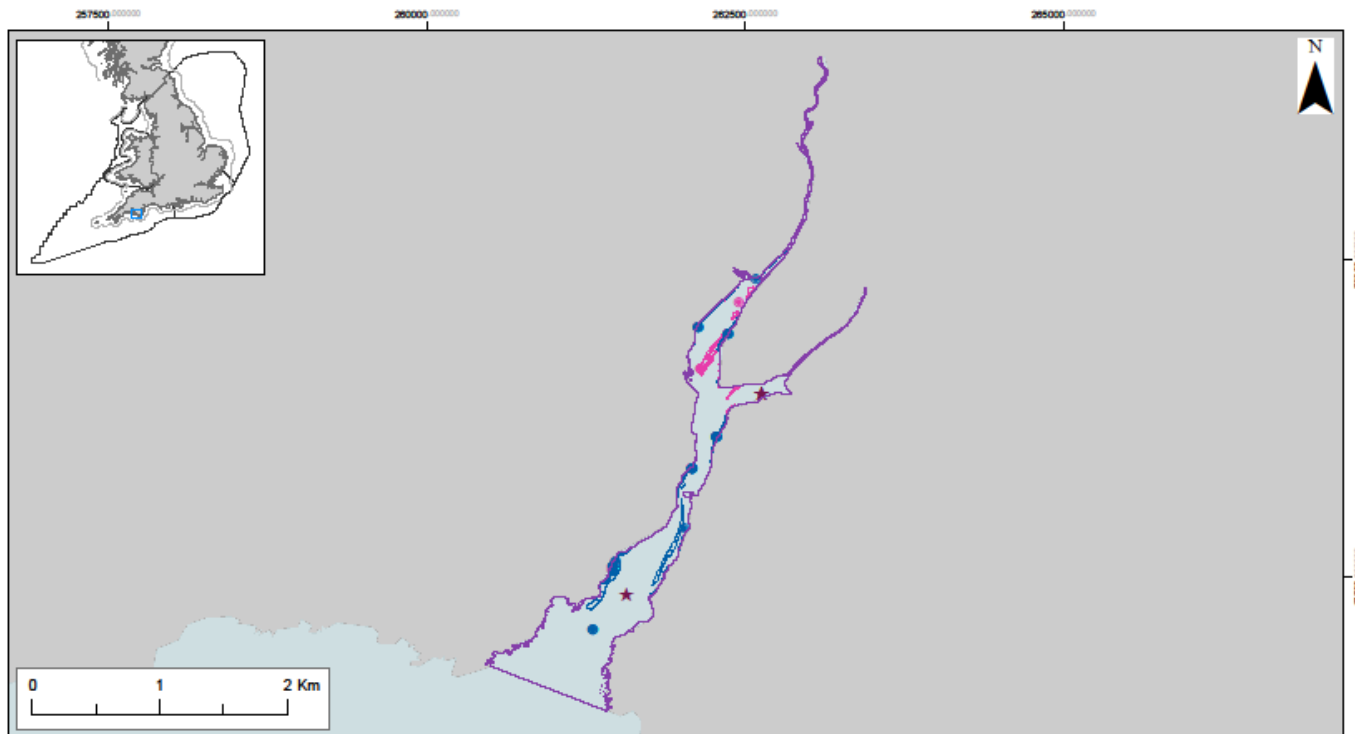
### Erme Estuary rMCZ Broad Scale Habitats

- Recommended MCZ
- Regional MCZ Project Area
- 12nM Territorial Seas Limit
- Sea
- Land

### Features recommended for designation

- High energy intertidal rock (A1.1)
- Moderate energy intertidal rock (A1.2)
- Low energy intertidal rock (A1.3)
- Intertidal coarse sediment (A2.1)
- Intertidal mixed sediments (A2.4)
- Groundtruthing sampling points, such as diver survey, grab sampling, drop down video, walk over survey or core sampling
- Shaded areas represent habitats mapped according to data originating from surveys and mathematical models

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 Map Projection: British National Grid



**Erme Estuary rMCZ**  
**Features of Conservation Importance**

- Recommended MCZ
- Regional MCZ Project Area
- 12nM Territorial Seas Limit
- Sea
- Land

**Features recommended for designation**

- ★ Tentacled lagoon-worm (*Alkmaria romijni*)
- Estuarine rocky habitats
- Sheltered muddy gravels
- Estuarine rocky habitats
- Sheltered muddy gravels

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## Which activities are likely to be affected?

Management decisions are taken on a case by case basis by relevant regulators. If an activity is identified as requiring management this does not necessarily mean that it will need to be significantly restricted. Decisions will be based on the specifics of each case and any restrictions will depend on the sensitivity of the species, habitats or geological/geomorphological features to be protected to the activity taking place. More detail is available in the Impact Assessment.

There is a very low level of human activity within the Erme Estuary and no activities currently taking place in the site are likely to be impacted by designation.

## Which activities are not likely to be affected?

These activities are known to take place at this site but at their current levels of intensity the best available evidence indicates they are not likely to be damaging the features to be protected:

- Cables - power and telecommunication cables currently intersect the site
- Coastal development and flood and erosion risk management schemes
- Coastal infrastructure
- Non-commercial fisheries
- Recreation

## Additional information

To read the advice provided by Natural England, please visit

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6079955233931264>

To read the advice provided by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, please visit

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7119>

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