

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## Helford Estuary

### Recommended Marine Conservation Zone

June 2018

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



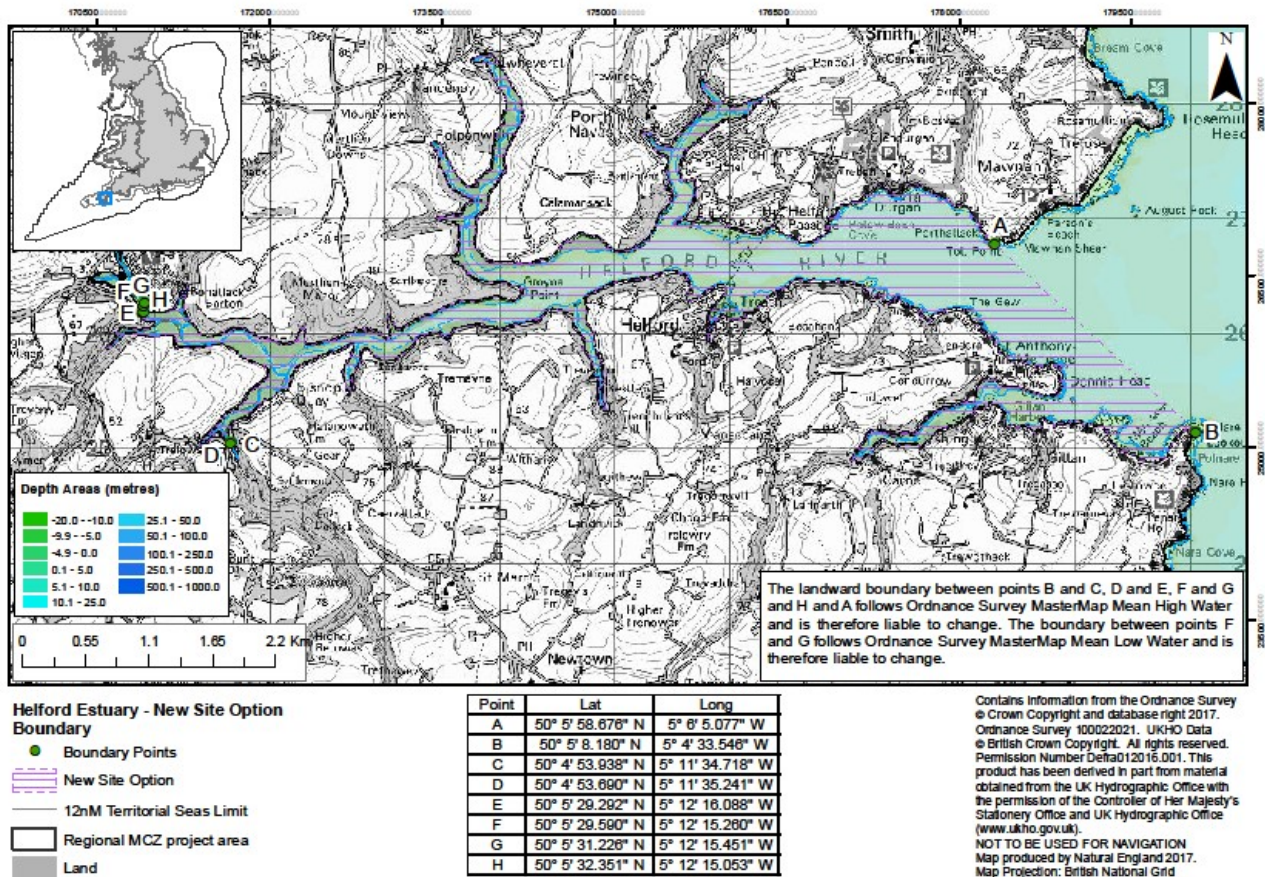
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# Where is the site located?

The Helford Estuary recommended Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) is an inshore site that covers an area of approximately 6 km<sup>2</sup>. The proposed boundary follows the boundary of the Fal and Helford Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within the estuary but is set at mean high water to take account of the intertidal habitat that native oysters use, whereas the SAC boundary is set at mean low water.



# Why is the site environmentally important?

The Helford ria system (drowned river valley) receives low freshwater input and therefore contains a notable range of fully marine habitats with a high diversity of species across the majority of the site. These habitats are highly influenced by the degree of exposure of the site which varies greatly from sheltered mudflats in the upper reaches to more exposed rocky coastal areas around the mouth of the Helford.

The majority of the shores of the Helford are fringed by sheltered intertidal sandflats and mudflats which are recognised for their important sediment dwelling species and communities. These mudflats and sandflats support a wide range of invertebrate and bird communities, which make a vital contribution to the structure and function of the site.

Native oysters can be found in shallow water (usually less than about 10 m deep) on mixed sediments. They are a sessile, filter-feeding bivalve mollusc associated with highly productive estuarine and shallow coastal water habitats. Native oysters are listed by the Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR<sup>1</sup>) as a threatened and/or declining species, as well as being a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species<sup>2</sup>.



## What would this site protect?

Designation would protect the following feature. You can read more about the feature this site protects and why it is important [here](#).

Feature	General Management Approach
Native oyster ( <i>Ostrea edulis</i> )	Recover to favourable condition

<sup>1</sup> The OSPAR Convention is the current legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

<sup>2</sup> Further information on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan can be found at: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155>



## Where are the features located?

Native oyster is a commercially sensitive species and for this reason maps to show the location of this feature are not provided. A range of different types of surveys have been used to identify the location of native oyster within the site and more detailed information on the techniques used can be found [here](#).

## 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.

Sectors and activities likely to be affected by designation		
Sector	Activity Affected	Best Cost Estimate (£) per year
Aquaculture	Oyster farming	Unquantified
<b>Best estimate total cost</b>		Unquantified

## Aquaculture

An aquaculture business farming Pacific oysters operated within this site until March 2017. Whilst it operated, the business held an exemption to the Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) byelaw that bans the use of bottom-towed fishing gear throughout the Fal and Helford SAC. The landowner is expected to lease the site for aquaculture again in the future, but this time for farming native oysters. Any new operator would need to apply for an exemption to the Cornwall IFCA byelaw and may need to meet certain management and monitoring conditions to ensure the protection of the native oyster feature within the site. The exact conditions will depend on the type of activities to be carried out and the sensitivity of native oysters to these. For this reason it is not possible to quantify potential costs at this stage.

## 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 infrastructure
- Commercial and recreational fishing
- Commercial shipping
- Ports and harbours
- 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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