

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Mud Hole

**Candidate Marine Conservation Zone not
proposed for designation in the second tranche**

January 2015

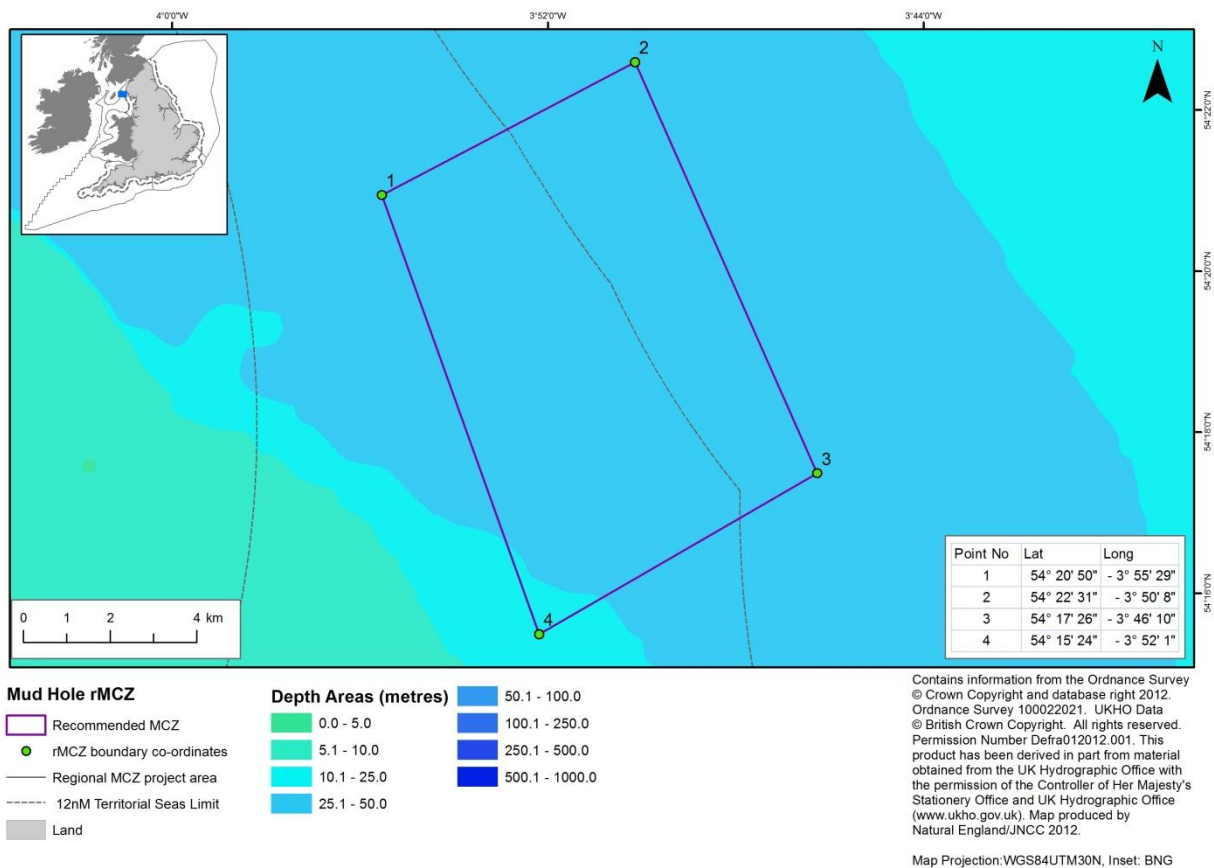
**Consultation on Sites Proposed for Designation in the Second Tranche
of Marine Conservation Zones**

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Where this site is located

The Mud Hole candidate marine conservation zone (cMCZ) is an offshore site (straddling the 12 nautical mile (nm) boundary) approximately 24 km off the coast of northwest England. It has an area measuring 73 km² and a depth range of 50–100 metres.



Why this site was identified as a candidate for the second tranche

The site was recommended to fill gaps in the network for subtidal mud, mud habitats in deep water and for sea-pens and burrowing megafauna communities.

These muddy habitats form part of the eastern Irish Sea mud patch, an area that is geographically isolated from the deep water mud habitat in the western Irish Sea. The mud is of high commercial interest as it provides a habitat to nephrops which live in shallow burrows below the sediment.

Features considered for designation

The features considered for designation in this site were:

- subtidal mud,
- mud habitats in deep water,
- sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities.

Effects of designation

If the cMCZ was to be designated in its current form, the following activities would likely be affected by management. This information will be updated if a revised site proposal is recommended for designation at a later date.

Sector	Best Cost Estimate (£) per year	Details
UK commercial fishing	4,700	There are a number of vessels known to fish within the area, which is an important nephrops fishery for the Northern Ireland fleet. These vessels primarily use bottom trawls to target nephrops, however the following gear types are also in use targeting a variety of species: dredges, pots and traps, hooks and lines, and nets.
Non-UK commercial fishing	Unquantified	Non-UK fishing vessels from Belgium and the Republic of Ireland use otter trawls and beam trawls to fish within the site.
Oil and gas	Unquantified at site level	This cMCZ overlaps with an area that has potential for future oil and gas exploration and production. If the site were developed for oil and gas extraction, developers would need to take into account the impact of the development on the features in the site. This would increase the cost of the licence application. As a result of uncertainty about whether any development will take place, costs for the oil and gas sector have not been quantified at site level.
Aggregates	0	There is a strategic resource area near the site. Future applications for use of the strategic resource area are uncertain. The costs to possible future applicants of assessing the effects of development on the features designated within the site have not therefore been monetised in the best estimate of costs to the Aggregate industry.
National defence	Unquantified	The Ministry of Defence is known to make use of the site for training activities. We expect this activity to be able to continue. Activity which is harmful to features can be avoided through additional planning during operations and training.
Best estimate total cost	4,700	

Activities that are unlikely to be affected

These activities are known to take place at this site but are not likely to be damaging to the features identified at their current levels of intensity:

- recreational activities,
- transit of ships.

Why this candidate site is not being proposed for designation in the second tranche

This site is located with an important fishing ground and designation could have a significant impact on the fishing sector, particularly in Northern Ireland. The fishing sector is in the process of developing alternative site proposals for protecting subtidal mud habitats in this region. We will consider all available options in the third tranche.

Further consideration

Further work is being carried out with the fishing industry and other interested parties to review options to protect subtidal mud in the region, with the aim that suitable sites will be considered in the third tranche.

Additional Information

To read the full consultation document, or respond to the consultation, please visit

<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/tranche2mczs>

To read the advice provided by JNCC, please visit

<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6658>

For further information, please contact Defra on

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PB 14289