

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Utopia

Recommended Marine Conservation Zone

January 2015

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

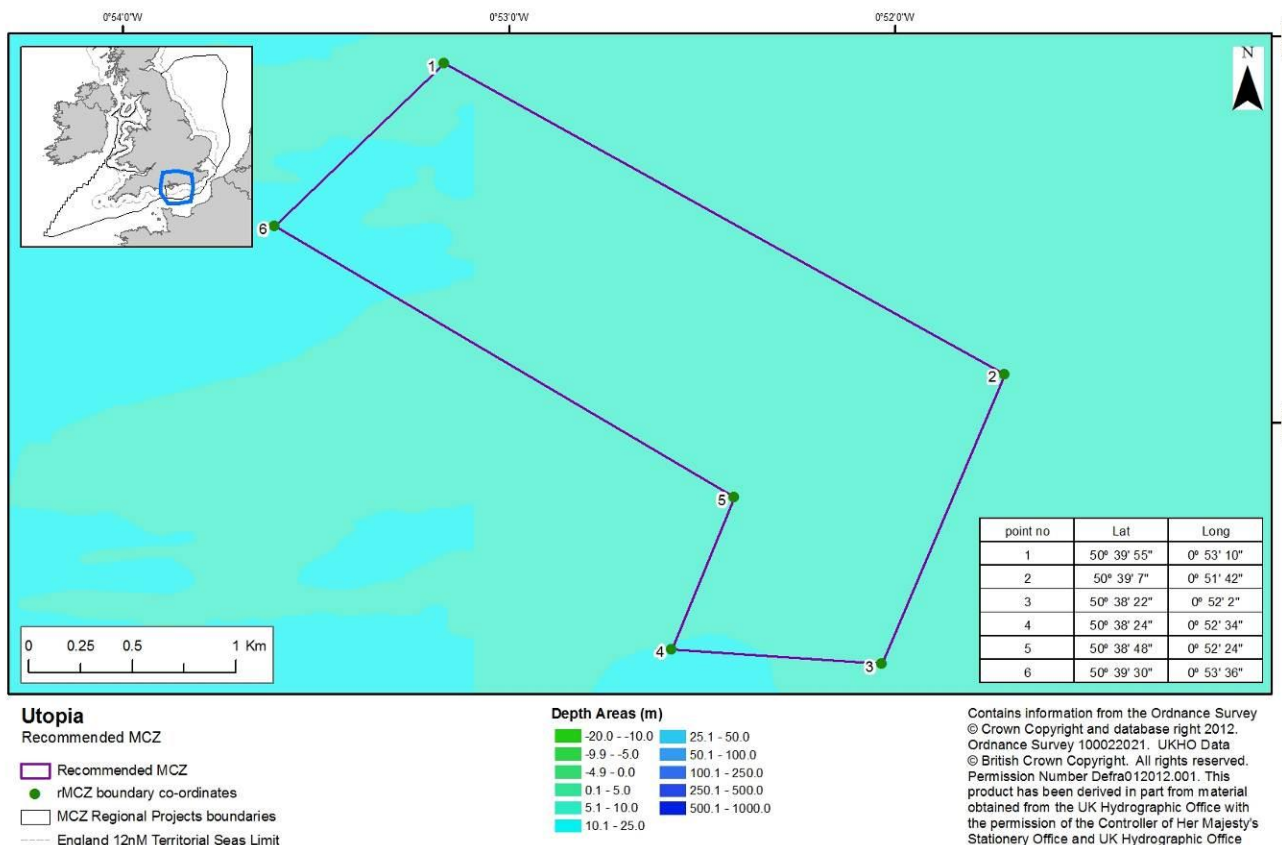


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Where the site is located

Utopia recommended Marine Conservation Zone (rMCZ) is a small inshore site measuring 2.7 km² and is located 20 km east of the Isle of Wight.



How to comment on the consultation

You can comment on this proposal by responding to the [consultation](#) taking place between 30th January and 24th April 2015.

Why the site is environmentally important

This area has been recommended as an MCZ because of the fragile coral and sponge communities found here as well as the important habitat this and the surrounding sediments provide.

The Utopia reef consists of an area of bedrock and large boulders that host rich communities of sponges, stony corals and anemones. The reef is surrounded by sediment made up mostly of gravel and sand. The animals that live here are mainly large, slow growing species such as branching sponges and ross coral, a type of sea-moss that has hard, crinkly 'petals' that provide hiding places for small fish, crabs and prawns.



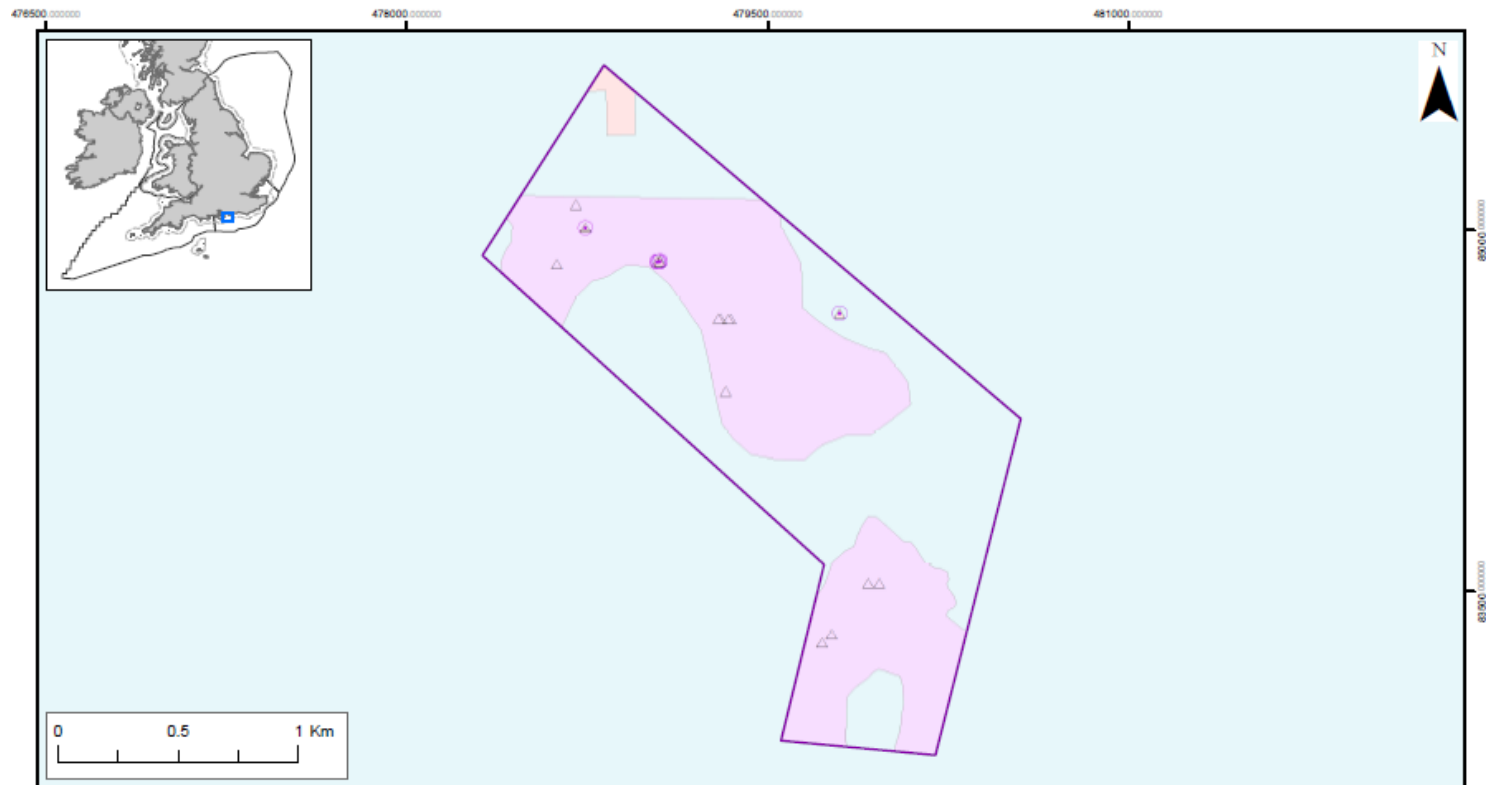
What this site would protect

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 |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Fragile sponge and anthozoan communities | Recover to favourable condition |
| High energy circalittoral rock | |
| Moderate energy circalittoral rock | |
| Subtidal coarse sediment | |
| Subtidal sand | |
| Subtidal mixed sediments | |

Where the features are located

The following map shows the location of the features to be protected. A range of different types of surveys have been used to create this map. More detailed information on the techniques used and the features themselves can be found [here](#).



Utopia recommended MCZ

Features proposed for 2015 designation

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

- Fragile sponge & anthozoan communities on subtidal rocky habitats
- High energy circalittoral rock (A4.1)
- Moderate energy circalittoral rock (A4.2)
- Shaded areas represent habitats mapped according to data originating from surveys and mathematical models
- Groundtruthing sampling points, such as diver survey, grab sampling, drop down video, walk over survey or core sampling

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Features that are not proposed for designation

The following features are not proposed for designation as there is currently insufficient supporting evidence. Inclusion of these features may be considered if scientific evidence becomes available:

- moderate energy infralittoral rock,
- subtidal mud.

Activities that are likely to be affected

Management decisions are taken on a case by case basis by relevant regulators. Management will not automatically mean that economic and recreational activities will be restricted, decisions will be based on the specifics of each case. Restrictions on an activity will depend on the sensitivity of species, habitats and geological/geomorphological features (for which a site is designated) to the activities taking place in that area. More detail is available in the [Impact Assessment](#).

| Sectors or activities likely affected by designation | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Sector | Activity Affected | Best Cost Estimate (£) per year |
| Aggregate extraction | Future development | 4,100 |
| Renewable energy - tidal | Future development | 700 |
| UK commercial fishing | Potting, set netting, bottom trawling. | 100 |
| Archaeological heritage | Future investigations of site | Unquantified |
| Oil and gas | Future development | Unquantified at site level |
| National defence | Use of training site | Unquantified at site level |
| Best estimate total cost | | 4,900 |

Aggregates

There are three licensed aggregate extraction production areas within 1 km of the site.

New licence applications will need to take into account the impact on the features in this site. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for future licence applications are likely to incur additional costs.

Renewable energy

There is potential for future developments that generate electricity using the tidal energy resource in this site as it overlaps with the East of Isle of Wight Area of Potential.

If this site were used for renewable energy, 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.

UK commercial fishing

The majority of fishing within the site is from small vessels based in Portsmouth/Gosport, Selsey and Bembridge. The following gears are known to be used within the site:

- potting - high level of activity,
- set netting - low level of activity,
- bottom trawling - low level of activity, which does not overlap the main rock features.

Certain commercial fishing restrictions are already in existence. Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) byelaws prohibit the use of scallop dredges within 3 nautical miles of the coast, and oyster dredges throughout the Sussex IFCA District.

Archaeological heritage

One archaeological feature has been recorded in this site.

There is likely to be an increase in the cost for carrying out EIAs for future licence applications within this site. Following designation, these will need to consider the effect of the activity on the features designated at this site.

Oil and gas

There is potential for future oil and gas exploration and production in this site as it overlaps licenced blocks in the 26th or 27th Seaward Licencing Rounds. If the site were developed for oil and gas extraction, it 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 this uncertainty about whether any development will take place on this site, costs for the oil and gas sector have not been quantified at site level.

National defence

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 though additional planning during operations and training.

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 proposed for designation at their current levels of intensity:

- mid water trawls,
- transit of ships,
- the following recreational activities -
 - angling,
 - boating,
- potential overlap with National Grid France – England Electricity Interconnector.

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 Natural England, please visit

<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5803843768025088?category=6742552893980672>

For further information, please contact Defra on

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