

Scottish MPA project – Frequently asked questions

1. Why are we developing a network?

The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 contain powers and duties for Scottish Ministers to designate a network of MPAs. A network of MPAs will help contribute to Scottish Government's vision for "clean, healthy, safe, biologically diverse marine and coastal environments, managed to meet the long-term needs of both people and nature" and help meet international commitments to establish networks of MPAs under:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity
- the World Summit on Sustainable Development;
- the OSPAR convention;
- the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive

2. Which sites will make up the Scottish MPA network?

The network will be made up of new Nature Conservation MPAs and existing European Marine Sites, as well as and marine components of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Ramsar sites.

Nature Conservation MPAs will protect nationally important biodiversity (species and habitats) and geodiversity (geology and undersea landforms) interests in the seas around Scotland

European Marine Sites:

- o Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) protect habitats and species listed on the EC Habitats Directive.
- o Special Protection Areas (SPAs) protect wild birds listed on the EC Birds Directive.

Marine components of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) protect nationally important habitats, species and geological features and generally fall above the mean low water mark. Where they do extend into the marine environment, SSSIs can be used to protect lagoon or intertidal features.

Ramsar Sites protect wetland habitats used by important migratory bird species.

3. What are Nature Conservation MPAs?

Nature Conservation MPAs are intended to protect nationally important biodiversity (species and habitats) and geodiversity (geology and undersea landforms) interests in the seas around Scotland. They are intended to complement existing site-based measures. The intention is to use Nature Conservation MPAs to 'plug the gaps' whilst causing minimal disruption to use of the seas. There may be some instances where new MPA designations overlap with existing sites to protect different features within the same geographic area.

4. Are any other types of area being considered?

Project partners are still considering how areas set up for other purposes but which might deliver benefits for nature conservation (e.g. areas managed for fisheries) might enhance the network of MPAs in the seas around Scotland.

5. The selection guidelines state that other types of areas (e.g. areas with fisheries restrictions) could make a contribution to the MPA network. Why are these areas being considered?

A number of different types of areas are managed for a range of purposes including for fisheries management, defence and energy. Whilst not set up for nature conservation reasons, some of these areas may provide benefits for biodiversity and geodiversity. For this reason we are considering how these areas might enhance the MPA network, this will involve discussion with custodians of these areas.

6. When are proposals for Nature Conservation MPAs likely to be made?

Work is underway to engage with stakeholders, collate existing data and gather additional data through new survey work. The initial locations of MPAs to make up the network are expected to be identified by end of 2012.

7. What are the selection guidelines?

The guidelines include a vision and principles for the MPA network, and set out the science-led approach to the selection of Nature Conservation MPAs and Demonstration & Research MPAs. They also detail the information that proposals put forward by third parties should include and how those proposals will be assessed.

The guidelines can be found at www.scotland.gov.uk/marinescotland/mpaguidelines.

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8. How were the selection guidelines developed?

The guidelines were produced jointly by Marine Scotland, SNH and JNCC. They used guidance produced by OSPAR on criteria for developing an ecologically coherent network of MPAs as a starting point, together with our experience of implementing SSSIs, SACs and SPAs. During the development of the guidelines discussions were held with representatives of fishing interests, marine renewables and the environmental NGOs.

9. Which features will be included within the MPA network?

The network will include MPA protected features as well as qualifying features of SACs, SPAs, Ramsar sites, and SSSIs. The list of network features will be used for reporting on coverage of the network, monitoring and for wider management.

10. What targets have been set for the inclusion of features within the network?

The Scottish MPA Project does not have any targets on coverage of the sea or features. The size and composition of the network will be driven by the selection guidelines, which include the network principles and criteria.

11. Why are ecological processes not included on the list of MPA search features in the selection guidelines?

Ecological processes are an intrinsic part of large-scale MPA search features. Ecological processes associated with other features are recognised as essential in terms of supporting features within MPAs and will be taken into account in future management.

12. Will there be a formal consultation process on the selection of MPAs?

Yes. The Marine (Scotland) Act and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act include provision for a public consultation on each MPA being considered for designation. This will be a 12-week long process.

13. Is there a network review process?

All MPAs will be subject to a six yearly review cycle. The review will consider the contribution of each site to the network as a whole. This might result in changes to site conservation objectives or management plans. It could also result in the removal of sites or the addition of new ones.

14. What is the purpose of managing MPAs?

Effective management will help ensure that MPAs meet their conservation objectives. Management provisions will depend on the features present and decisions will be made on a site-by-site basis. There will be a presumption of activities continuing within a MPA providing the conservation objectives can be met. However activities which pose a significant risk to a protected feature will require active management.

15. What management options are available?

Experience in managing European Marine Sites suggests management is most useful when there is a complex interaction of different features and activities, combined with a varied mix of stakeholders with an interest in a site. One option for taking forward management of new MPAs is to do it as part of the new marine planning system. Marine Conservation Orders, site managements plans and fisheries and other legislation may also be used.

16. What are conservation objectives?

Conservation objectives should describe what is required to maintain or improve the condition of the site features. They will be paramount to the process of establishing a site management plan.