



Overview of the public consultation on two Marine Protected Area proposals in the Irish Sea

**Consultation on the proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker
Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation**

**Consultation on the proposal to classify the Irish Sea Front Special
Protection Area**

23 January – midnight 20 April 2017

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Summary

Thank you for taking the time to consider this consultation paper and for sharing your views on the further development of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in UK waters. This document summarises all important information about the consultations run by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) on:

- the proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker Carbonate Slabs candidate SAC (cSAC)/Site of Community Importance (SCI),
- the proposal to classify the Irish Sea Front potential Special Protection Area (pSPA).

How long are the consultations running?

For both proposals the consultation is open for more than 12 weeks between 23 January 2017 and midnight on the 20 April 2017.

How do I respond and get involved in the consultations?

The easiest way to respond is to go on the respective websites and fill out the consultation response forms provided there (Croker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI: http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Consultation_CrokerCarbonateSlabs_SAC/, Irish Sea Front pSPA: http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Consultation_IrishSeaFront_pSPA/). You can also submit a response via mail or email if preferred.

What documents should I read to answer these questions?

In addition to this overview, a number of documents provide further details on the proposals, the evidence supporting them, potential management options, as well as the expected environmental and socio-economic costs and benefits. Links to all these documents are provided.

How will my response be considered?

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are required to meet obligations under the EC Habitats Directive and the EC Wild Birds Directive respectively, and the decision to classify these sites can only be on the basis of the scientific evidence presented. Where socio-economic issues are highlighted this information can only be used to inform Ministers on the possible impacts of classifying the sites.

Introduction

UK waters are home to some of the most biologically diverse [habitats](#)¹ and [species](#)² in Europe. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are one of the tools that can help us to protect the marine environment, whilst also enabling its [sustainable use](#)³, ensuring it remains healthy and contributes to our society for generations to come.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) is a statutory advisor to government and is responsible for identifying and providing [conservation advice](#)⁴ on MPAs in UK offshore waters (beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast). One of our roles is to advise the Department for Environment, Food and Rural affairs (DEFRA) on the identification of marine [Special Areas of Conservation \(SACs\)](#)⁵ and marine [Special Protection Areas \(SPAs\)](#)⁶ in UK offshore waters, including those around Wales.

Decisions on whether to designate SACs and SPAs in UK offshore waters around Wales are made by the UK Secretary of State, taking into account the advice of the JNCC.

In autumn 2016 the JNCC submitted two proposals for MPAs in the Irish Sea to DEFRA with the aim to enhance the UK-wide networks of existing SACs and SPAs:

- a proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker Carbonate Slabs candidate SAC (cSAC)/Site of Community Importance (SCI),
- the proposal to classify the new Irish Sea Front potential Special Protection Area (pSPA).

UK Ministers have asked the JNCC to carry out public consultations on the amendment to the existing cSAC and on the classification of the pSPA. Responses to both JNCC consultations can be submitted [online](#)⁷, but also via mail or email, as described in the section 'How to make a response to the consultations'.

This document summarises all you need to know about the consultations, including the reason for the consultations and how to respond. It also points towards a number of supporting materials which provide detailed information about the two site proposals, the conservation aims of these proposed protection areas, and how activities might be managed in these areas in the future.

¹ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1529>

² <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1592>

³ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1528>

⁴ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6849>

⁵ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1445>

⁶ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1414>

⁷ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=6453>

Offshore Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

JNCC has been working since 1999 towards identifying potential SACs in UK offshore waters. Since 2002, JNCC has worked to collate geomorphological and biological information on potential sites, refine the process to select areas for habitats, update seabed habitat maps, collect new survey data, and recommend draft areas to Government as suitable for selection as SACs in UK offshore waters. Following submissions of 20 offshore SACs to the European Commission (EC) between 2008 and 2012, the UK considers the SAC network for marine habitats is now substantially complete ([Bayley & Ridgeway 2013](#)⁸). There are currently 100 SACs with marine components, 84 SACs are found in inshore waters (up to 12 nautical miles from the coast), 16 are located in offshore waters (beyond 12 nautical miles) and there are four sites within both inshore and offshore waters.

Croker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI was submitted to the European Commission (EU) in 2012 seeking protection of the Annex I habitat 'Submarine structures made by leaking gases'. The EU confirmed the site as a 'Site of Community Importance' (SCI) in 2012. This site was previously consulted upon in 2011 and a full impact assessment (IA) was undertaken at that time. Information on the existing candidate Special Area of Conservation is available on the Croker Carbonate Slabs SAC Site Information Centre (www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6530).

Offshore Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

SPAs are protected sites classified under Article 4 of the [EC Birds Directive](#)⁹. Their aim is to protect of rare and vulnerable birds, and migratory birds, in a network of SPAs throughout the European Union.

Since 1999, JNCC has worked closely with UK governments and devolved administrations to advise on the selection of marine SPAs throughout UK waters. There are 102 [SPAs with marine components](#)¹⁰ in the UK, including four wholly marine SPAs and 35 marine extensions to seabird colony SPAs across the UK. In 2016 and 2017, consultations on a number of additional marine SPA proposals took place with the aim to expand the current network of SPAs for waterbirds and seabirds in the marine environment. The latest proposals consisted of 15 pSPAs mainly in waters around Scotland, 11 pSPAs mainly in waters around England, three pSPAs in waters around Wales, and four pSPAs in Waters around Northern Ireland¹¹. Governments are currently considering the outcome of the consultations on these proposals and will subsequently decide whether to classify them.

⁸ Bayley, D. & Ridgeway, A. (2013). Progress towards completion of the UK network of marine Special Areas of Conservation for Annex I qualifying features (v1.1) http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/Comm13P03_v1.1.pdf

⁹ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1373>

¹⁰ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4559>

¹¹ Not all proposals were about new protection areas, some proposed only the inclusion of new bird species into existing SPAs or proposed the extension of the boundary of existing SPAs.

Information on the current proposal on the Irish Sea Front pSPA is available on JNCC's [Irish Sea Front consultation webpage](#)¹².

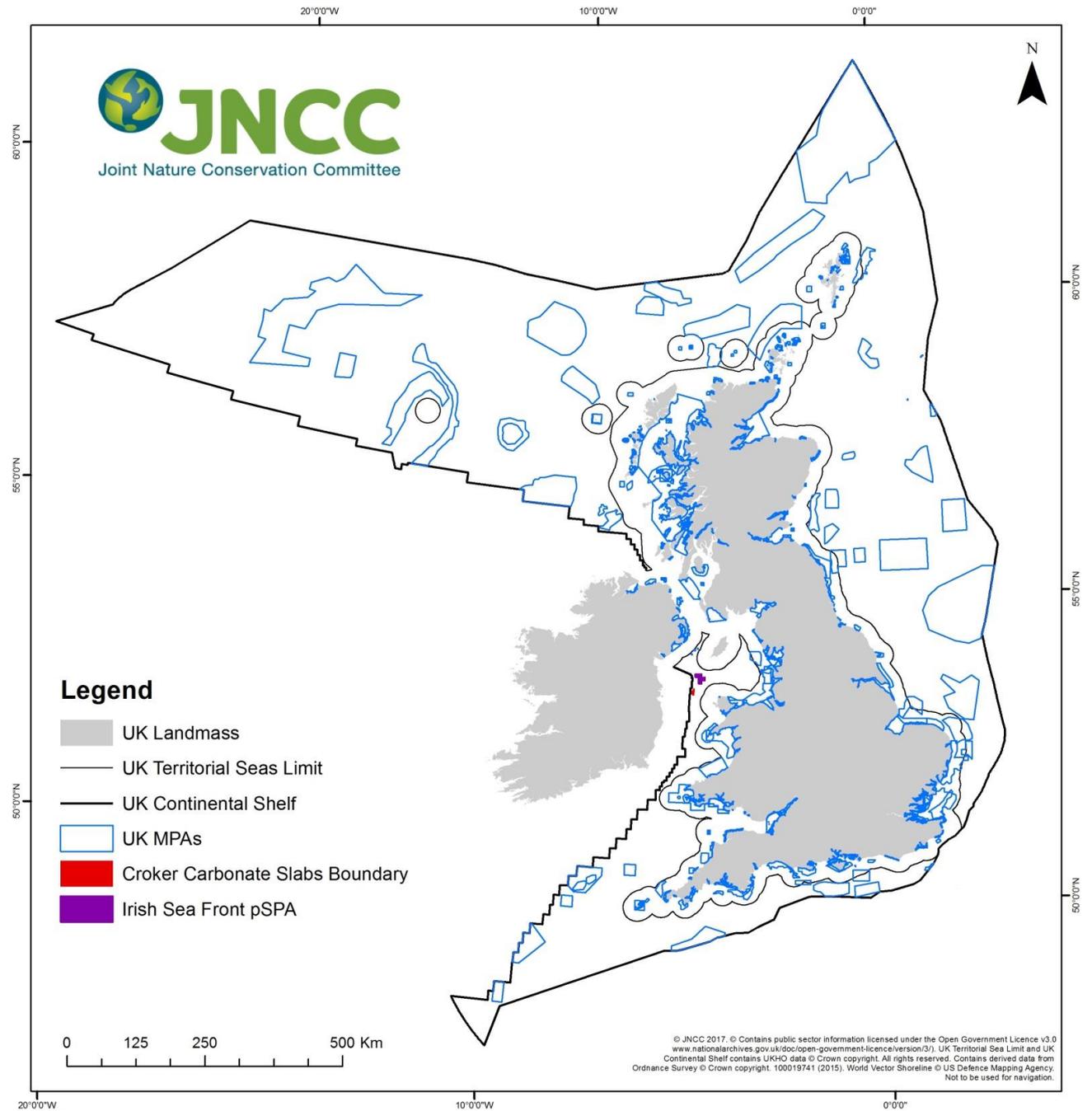


Figure 1: Map showing designated UK MPAs and the areas of focus for this present consultation

¹² <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4565>

How to respond to the consultation

What is the purpose of the consultation?

The two consultations are seeking your views on

- the scientific cases for the SAC and SPA proposals,
- the draft documents covering Conservation Advice on the proposals, including the conservation objectives, and possible Management Options, and Advice on Operations, and on
- the assessments of likely economic impacts should the proposals become protected sites.

After the end of the consultation period JNCC will report to UK Government on the representations we receive. In preparing our reports to the UK Government, JNCC will take into consideration all representations received. **Please note that subsequent decisions by the Secretary of State on whether to extend the boundary of the SAC or classify the SPA may only take into account relevant scientific information and must be based on application of relevant guidelines and criteria. Where socio-economic issues are highlighted during the consultation this information can only be used to inform Ministers on the possible impacts of classifying the sites.**

How long is the consultation?

The consultation period for both consultations will be between the **23 January 2017 and 20 April 2017 (midnight)**.

Who can respond to this consultation?

These are public consultations to which any individual or organisation may respond.

How do I respond and get involved in the consultation?

Croker Carbonate Slabs SAC

Responses to the consultation on the proposed boundary amendment of Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation can be submitted online at:

http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Consultation_CrokerCarbonateSlabs_SAC/

If you are unable to submit a response online (see Annex A for the consultation questions), responses can also be submitted by e-mail or post to:

offshoreMPAs@jncc.gov.uk

JNCC, Marine SAC consultation
Monkstone House
City Road
Peterborough
PE1 1JY

Irish Sea Front pSPA

Responses to the consultation on the proposed classification of the Irish Sea Front pSPA can be submitted online at:

http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Consultation_IrishSeaFront_pSPA/

If you are unable to submit a response online (see Annex B for the consultation questions), responses can also be submitted by e-mail or post to:

seabirds@jncc.gov.uk

JNCC, Marine SPA consultation
Inverdee House
Baxter Street
Aberdeen
AB11 9QA

What documents should I read before answering these questions?

In addition to this overview, the following documents provide further details on the proposals, the evidence supporting them, potential management options, as well as the expected environmental and socio-economic costs and benefits.

Crocker Carbonate Slabs cSAC

For the consultation on the Crocker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI boundary amendment, all information about the proposal is provided at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/marineconsult>.

But we would like to draw your attention to these documents which are also provided on the webpage:

- the [Boundary Amendment Document¹](#), which sets out the scientific case for this boundary amendment,
- the [Pre Impact Assessment Screening and Record Document²](#) which provides a brief assessment of the potential economic impacts of the boundary amendment, and
- the [Selection Assessment Document³](#) and [Conservation Objective and Advice on Operations⁴](#) for the site.

Further Information on Crocker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI is available in the online Site Information Centre at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6530>.

¹ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/CCSSAC_BoundaryAmendment_Document.pdf

² http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/CCSSAC_Screening_Document.pdf

³ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/CCSSAC_Selection_Assessment_Document.pdf

⁴ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/CCSSAC_ConservationObjectives_AdviceonOperations.pdf

Irish Sea Front pSPA

For the consultation on the Irish Sea Front pSPA, all information about the proposal is provided at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4565>.

But we would like to draw your attention to the following documents that are also available via the webpage:

- the [Departmental Brief](#)¹, which sets out the scientific case for this SPA proposal,
- the [Conservation Objectives and Advice to Support Management](#)², which outline the conservation aim of the SPA proposal,
- the [Management Options](#)³, which describe how activities at the area could potentially be managed, and
- the [Irish Sea Front Screening document](#)⁴, which provides a brief assessment of the likely economic impacts of the classification of the SPA proposal.

For more information on the existing network of marine SPAs please visit <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4559>.

¹ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Departmental_Brief_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

² http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Conservation_Objectives_and_Reg_18_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

³ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Management_Options_paper_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

⁴ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Screening_document_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

Confidentiality

According to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, all information contained in any consultation responses may be subject to publication or disclosure. At the end of the consultation period copies of the responses we receive may be made publicly available, or the information they contain may be published on our website in a summary of responses. If you wish to request that information given in response to the consultation be kept confidential, this will only be possible if it is consistent with freedom of information obligations.

A report collating all representations made during the formal consultation period, together with any recommendations to be taken as a result of this consultation, will be provided to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State will consider this report before amending the site boundary.

Data Protection

Any personal information you provide to JNCC will be used and stored in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. We will use your information only for the purposes of this consultation, as described above.'

The two proposals

Below are brief summaries of the cSAC boundary amendment and the pSPA site proposal. If you would like to get more background information, e.g. about the data that were used to support the proposals, please refer to the respective website links provided below or go direct to the supporting documentation which is listed under ‘

What documents should I read before answering these questions?’.

Croker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI

Designated feature: Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gases

Current size of the cSAC/SCI: 66km²

Size of the cSAC/SCI with proposed amendment to the boundary: 108km²

The Croker Carbonate Slabs is an area in the mid-Irish Sea, approximately 30km west of Anglesey, where the Annex I feature “submarine structures made by leaking gases” was identified. The seabed surface is composed of extensive areas of exposed methane-derived authigenic carbonate (MDAC). The seabed habitats created by these MDAC structures are distinctive, supporting a diverse range of marine species that are absent from the surrounding seabed that is characterised by coarse sediment. MDAC is formed when calcite precipitates and infill’s the pore spaces between the sand grains, creating a layer or crust that can form carbonate ‘pavements’ and ‘chimneys’; significant hard ground compared to the surrounding sediment.

Croker carbonate slabs cSAC was submitted to the European Commission (EU) in 2012 for the protection of the Annex I habitat ‘Submarine structures made by leaking gases’. The EU confirmed the site as a ‘Site of Community Importance’ (SCI) in 2012. The original boundary was drawn to include over 800 ha of the Annex I feature “submarine structures made by leaking gases”.

The proposed boundary (Figure 2) extends the existing boundary to the North East, North West and South West around a recently identified area of Annex I habitat known as MDAC¹³ (approximately 55km²). This additional area of habitat was identified during a 2012 and a 2013 joint JNCC and Cefas MCZ verification surveys (Defra, 2013¹⁴). The proposed boundary encompasses a large area of MDAC to the East and South West of the current

¹³ Methane-derived authigenic carbonate forms when methane is released from the seabed and reacts with water. Further information on Annex I Submarine structures made by leaking gages is available here: www.jncc.gov.uk/page-1453

¹⁴ Defra 2013. MB0120: Coordination of the Defra MCZ data collection programme 2011/12 - North St George’s Channel rMCZ Post-survey Site Report.

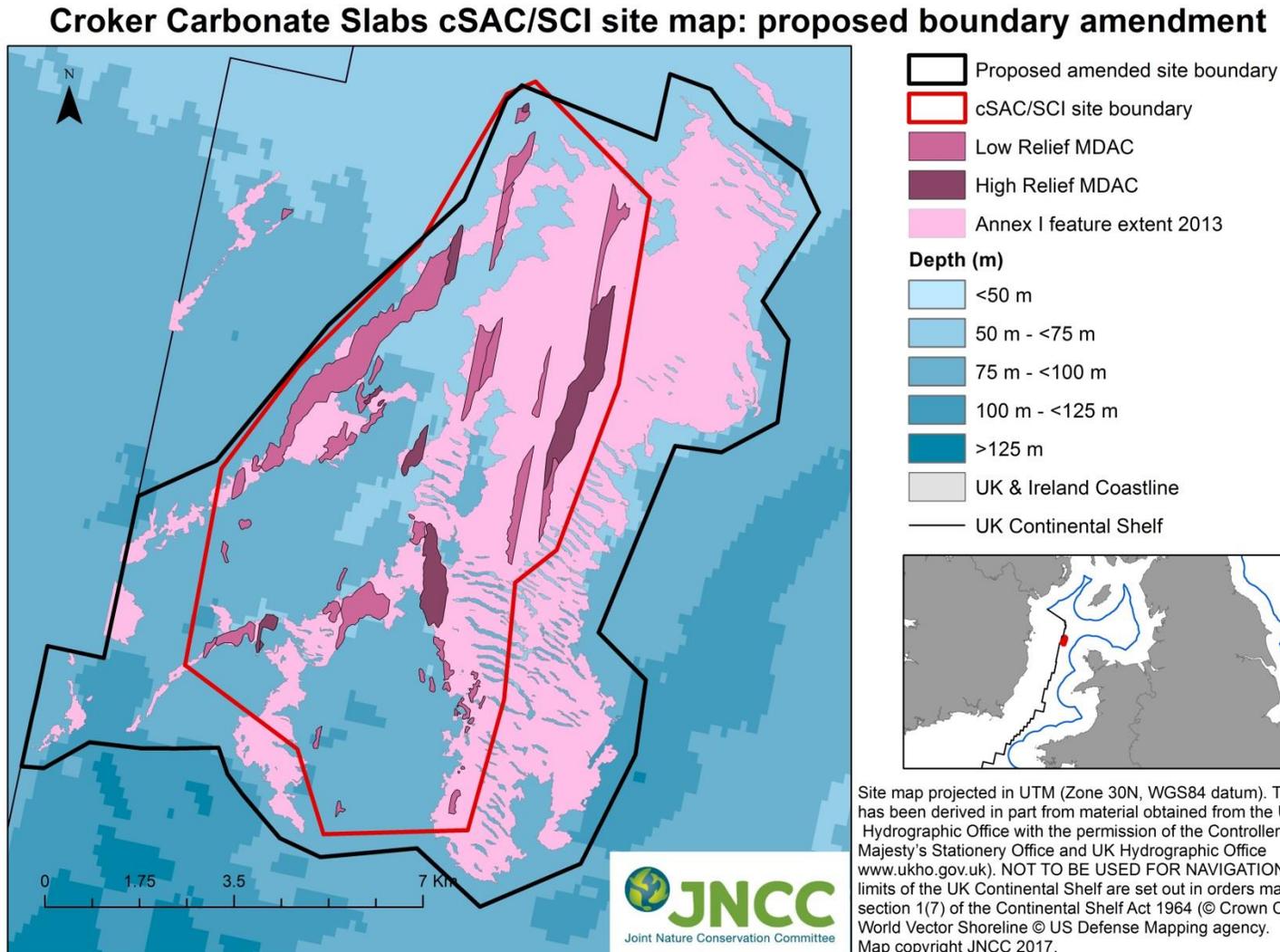
site boundary. The proposed boundary includes a buffer zone of up to 300m around the known extent of MDAC following the guidance published by JNCC¹⁵.

Draft Conservation Objective:

Using recent information, JNCC are now advising a change in the sites' Conservation Objective, from 'Maintain in favourable condition' to 'Maintain in/Restore to favourable condition'. The availability of updated Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) fisheries activities data (2009-2015) indicates that the feature has been exposed to pressures to which it is sensitive. The VMS data indicates that otter trawling has taken place within the existing site boundary and the area within the proposed site boundary. The presence of the activity even at low levels risks damage to or deterioration of the feature and the use of bottom contacting gear should be controlled as soon as possible to minimise risk of future damage/deterioration. Reference to restoration relates to the biological communities found on the substrate, provided the structure of the MDAC itself is not lost. Restoration of the MDAC feature itself may be possible if the substrate is still actively accreting. A precautionary approach has been applied as fishing activity is occurring over the extent of the feature.

¹⁵ UK guidance on defining boundaries for marine SACs for Annex I habitat can be found here: http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SACHabBoundaryGuidance_2012Update.pdf

Figure 2: proposed boundary amendment of Croker Carbonate Slabs cSAC/SCI showing our current knowledge of the feature extent



Irish Sea Front pSPA

The Irish Sea Front pSPA lies in the Irish Sea, to the southwest of the Isle of Man and to the northwest of Anglesey (Figure 3). Based on an analysis of data from the [European Seabirds at Sea \(ESAS\) database](#)¹⁶, the JNCC identified the pSPA as an important area for Manx shearwater during the breeding season ([JNCC Report 461](#)¹⁷). The pSPA qualifies under Article 4.2 of the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) by regularly supporting a population of European importance of the migratory species Manx shearwater, foraging at sea during the breeding season.

Proposed qualifying features: Manx shearwater during the breeding season.

Size of the pSPA: 180 km²

Draft Conservation Objective:

To avoid significant deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, subject to natural change, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained in the long term and it makes an appropriate contribution to achieving the aims of the Birds Directive for each of the qualifying species.

This contribution would be achieved through delivering the following objectives for each of the sites qualifying features:

- A. Avoid significant mortality, injury and disturbance of the qualifying features, so that the distribution of the species and ability to use the site are maintained in the long-term;
- B. Maintain the habitats and food resources of the qualifying features in favourable condition.
- C. Ensure access to the site from linked breeding colonies

For more information about the Irish Sea Front pSPA please visit <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4565>.

¹⁶ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4469>

¹⁷ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6268>

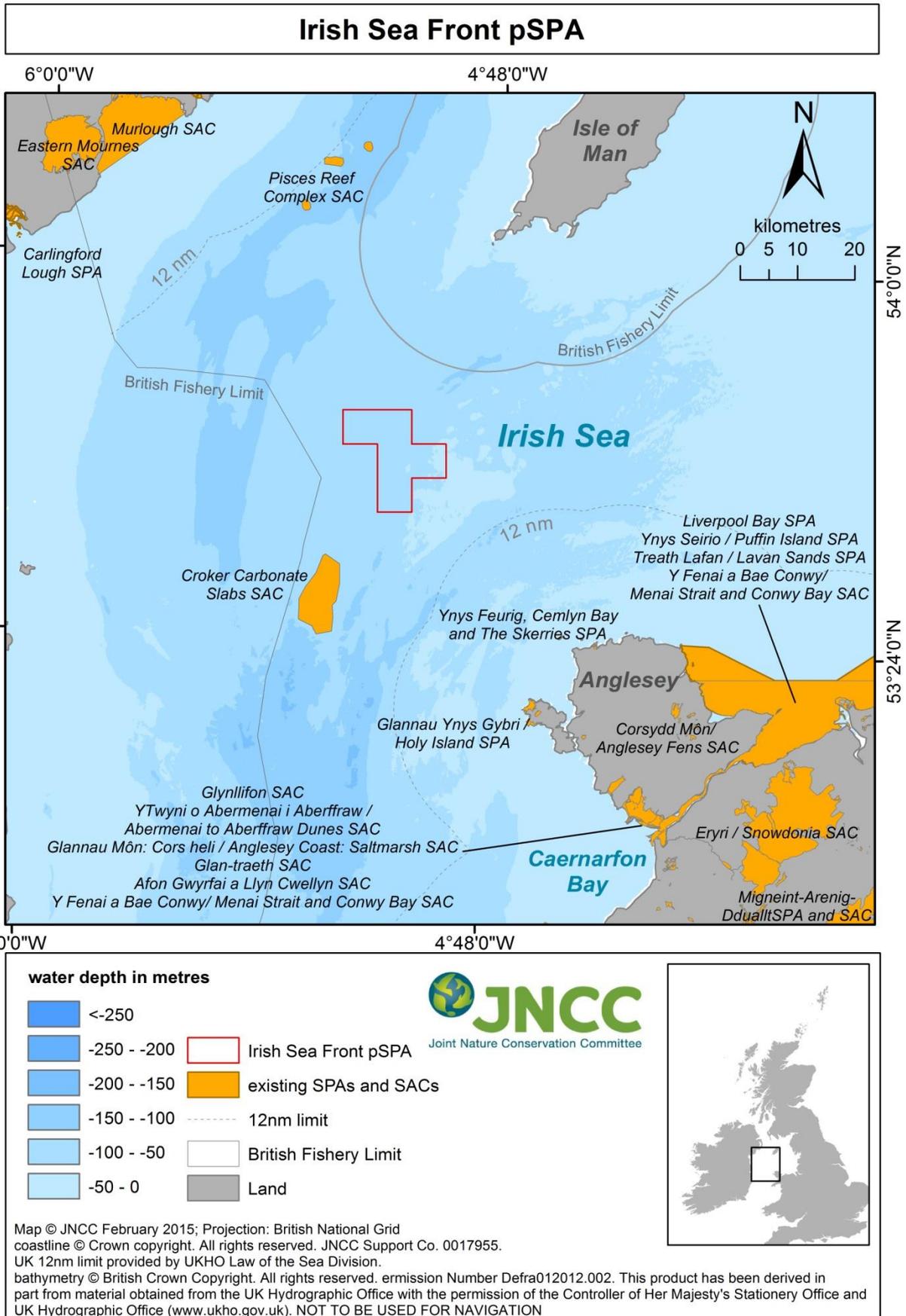


Figure 3. Location of the Irish Sea Front pSPA, showing the proposed site boundary.

Contact

If you have any questions on the consultation process or need clarification on any of the associated information, please contact JNCC at the addresses below.

Email:

offshoreMPAs@jncc.gov.uk

and

seabirds@jncc.gov.uk

If you have a complaint about the consultation processes, please use the contact details above in the first instance. If you are unable to resolve the issue with the Project Manager then please follow our official [JNCC Complaints procedure](#).

Annex A: Consultation questions on the proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation

Introduction

Welcome to the public consultation on the proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation (SAC). JNCC are carrying out this consultation on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The aim of the consultation is to receive views and information regarding the proposed amendment to the boundary of Croker Carbonate Slabs SAC.

For more information on the consultation, please have a look at the [Consultation Summary document](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Consultation_Summary_document.pdf). (http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Consultation_Summary_document.pdf)

For more information on the proposal please visit the JNCC SAC consultation webpages (<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/marineconsult>).

How we will use your information: *

All responses to this consultation, including the names of respondents, will be considered public.

With the exception of contact information and other personal details, consultation responses and the names of respondents will be made publicly available if required.

We will not share any details beyond your response and your organisation's name.

Please ensure you do not mention other individuals by name, or include any personal information within the body of your response.

We may also share any responses that we receive with other statutory nature conservation bodies, UK and devolved Governments in order to help ensure a coordinated approach to this consultation.

Any personal information you provide to JNCC will be used and stored in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

1) Do you support the suggested amendment to the boundary for Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation?	
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Yes/No/Undecided	
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2) Do you agree that the <u>scientific evidence</u> presented (Boundary Amendment Document) justifies the boundary amendment of Croker Carbonate Slabs Special Area of Conservation?	
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Yes/No/Undecided	
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3) Do you have any information additional to that included in the consultation documentation about the extent of Annex I habitats within the amended site boundary that you would like to share with JNCC?	
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Yes/No/Undecided	
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4) Are there any other significant activities at the site that the Impact Assessment screening has not identified?

Yes/No/Undecided	
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5) Are there any other aspects of the IA screening on which you would like to comment or where you are able to provide further information?

Yes/No/Undecided	
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Annex B: Consultation questions on the proposed amendment to the boundary of the proposed classification of the Irish Sea Front pSPA

Introduction

Welcome to the public consultation on the proposed classification of the Irish Sea Front potential Special Protection Area (pSPA). JNCC are carrying out this consultation on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

The aim of the pSPA is to protect one of the most important offshore foraging areas for Manx shearwaters (*Puffinus puffinus*) during the breeding season.

For more information on the consultation, please have a look at [the Consultation Summary document](#)¹⁸.

For more information on the proposal, including the links to all important documents, please visit the [Irish Sea Front Consultation webpage](#)¹⁹.

How we will use your information: *

All responses to this consultation, including the names of respondents, will be considered public.

With the exception of contact information and other personal details, consultation responses and the names of respondents will be made publicly available if required.

We will not share any details beyond your response and your or your organisation's name.

Please ensure you do not mention other individuals by name, or include any personal information within the body of your response.

We may also share any responses that we receive with other statutory nature conservation bodies, UK and devolved Governments in order to help ensure a coordinated approach to this consultation.

Any personal information you provide to JNCC will be used and stored in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Q1 Do you support the classification of the Irish Sea Front potential Special Protection Area?	
Yes/No/Undecided	

Q2. Do you agree that the <u>scientific evidence</u> presented (Departmental Brief ²⁰) for the Irish Sea Front pSPA supports and justifies the case for its classification?
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¹⁸ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Consultation_Summary_document.pdf

¹⁹ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4565>

²⁰ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Departmental_Brief_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

Yes/No/Undecided	
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<p>Q3. Do you have any comments on the Conservation aim as described in the Draft Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations²¹ and the different Management Options²² considered for the pSPA? If your comments relate to a specific activity or industry please select from the list below or refer to it in the comments box.</p>	
Yes/No/Undecided	

<p>Q4 Do you have any comments on the potential socio-economic impact of a classification as assessed in the Screening document²³ for the pSPA. If your comments relate to a specific activity or industry please select from the list below or refer to it in the comments box.</p>	
Yes/No/Undecided	

²¹ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Conservation_Objectives_and_Reg_18_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

²² http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Management_Options_paper_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

²³ http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/SAS_Screening_document_Irish_Sea_Front.pdf

Annex C: Consultation code of practice

The following code of practice has been adopted for this consultation. We will endeavour to:

1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
2. Be clear about what the proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
3. Ensure that the consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
5. Monitor JNCC's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
6. Ensure the consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out an Impact Assessment if appropriate.

**Consultation on the amendment to the site boundary for Croker Carbonate Slabs
Special Area of Conservation
Consultation on the proposal for the Irish Sea Front Special Protection Area
2017**

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The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) is the statutory adviser to Government on UK and international nature conservation, on behalf of Natural Resources Wales, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage. Its high-quality scientific expertise and evidence delivers innovative solutions to realise the value of nature.

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