

North-east Faroe- Shetland Channel

Marine Protected Area

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Protecting marine
life at sub-zero
temperatures

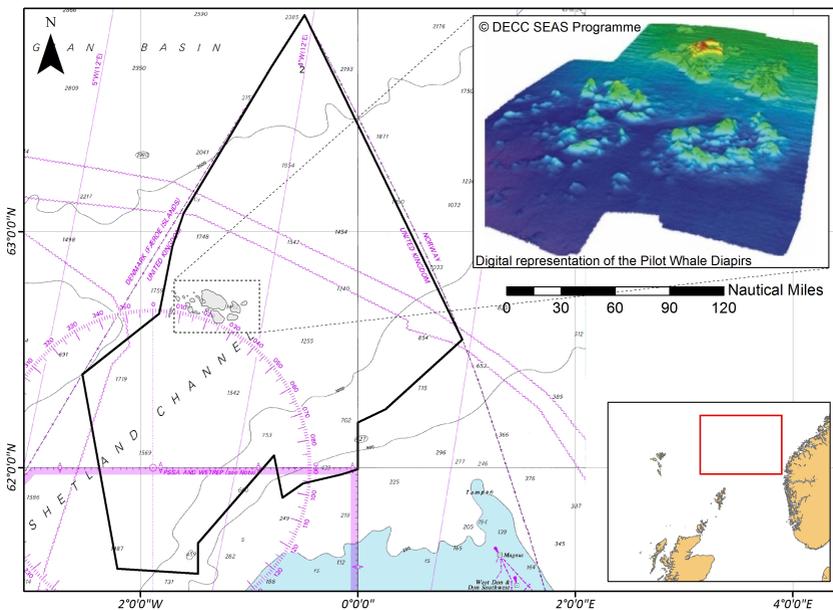


North-east Faroe-Shetland Channel

Marine Protected Area (MPA)

Located to the far north-east of Scotland, this MPA covers a large part of the north-eastern reaches of the Faroe-Shetland Channel in Scottish waters. The habitats are strongly influenced by the significant range of environmental conditions present, from the upper continental slope to the depths of the channel, and include a dynamic mixing zone where warmer Atlantic waters flow over cooler Arctic waters.

The continental slope plays an important role in funnelling ocean currents that bring valuable food and nutrients to the region, which in turn support a wide diversity of life. The channel is believed to be a corridor for migrating marine mammals, including fin whales ('razorback') and sperm whales.



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Boundary of the North-east Faroe-Shetland Channel MPA with inset image showing the Pilot Whales Diapirs geological features

Location: 62° 35.915' N 0° 51.749' W

Area: 23,682 km²



Deep sea sponges can take decades to reach full size

Protected Features & Conservation Objectives

The aim is to **conserve the deep-sea sponge aggregations, offshore deep-sea muds, offshore subtidal sands and gravels**, and an area of the Faroe-Shetland Channel **continental slope** within the MPA. Quaternary of Scotland, Submarine Mass Movement, Marine Geomorphology of the Scottish Deep Ocean Seabed and Cenozoic Structures of the Atlantic Margin geodiversity features will also be conserved.

The MPA includes several different features of geological importance, including the Pilot Whale Diapirs. The Diapirs are a series of deep-water mounds which measure 2 to 3 km across and rise to more than 70m above the surrounding seafloor. The Pilot Whale Diapirs are unusual in that they are the only known example found in UK waters that breach the seabed surface.

At depths of 400-600m, the combination of seabed type and plentiful supply of nutrients are ideal for the establishment of deep-sea sponges. Up to 50 sponge species can be found within the sponge fields, many of which are different to those found in the surrounding areas. Below 800m, the muddy seabed is home to those species that can tolerate the cooler Arctic-influenced waters, such as deep sea worms.

Further Information

Further information on Nature Conservation MPAs, the wider network and protected areas management is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork

For Nature Conservation MPA site documents and more information about the fascinating range of marine life found in Scotland's seas, please visit

www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/scottishmpas - for offshore waters

www.snh.gov.uk/mpas - for territorial waters



The Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

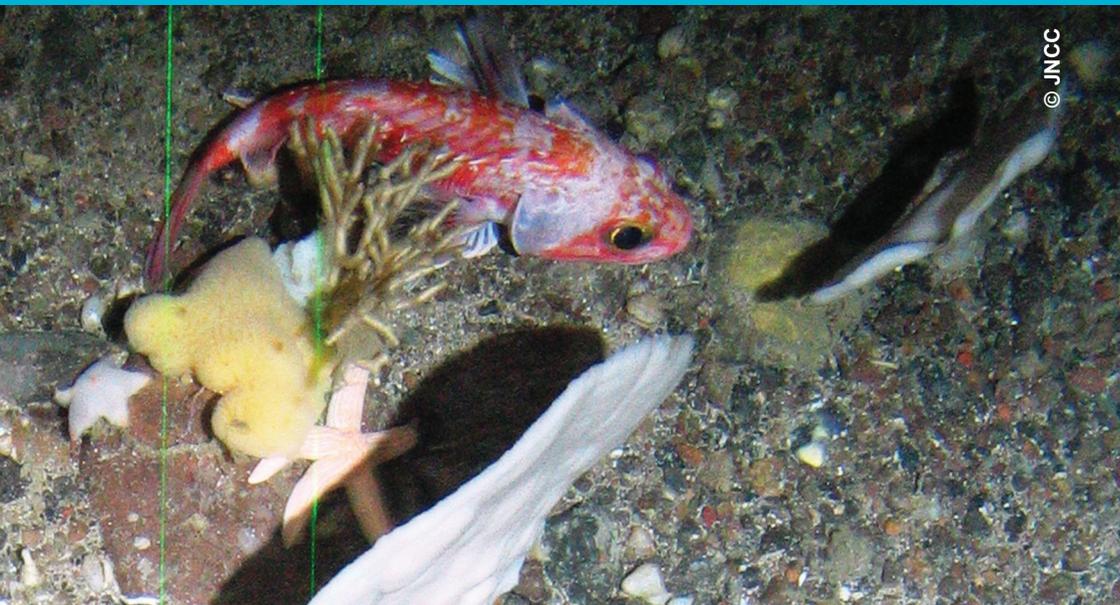
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 **JNCC**
Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Deep sea sponge fields are hotspots of diversity



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