

Guidance on what represents a UK MPA Network Feature afforded protection by existing sites

This guidance has been provided to the Country Agencies to assist the submission of data on MPAs and features as part of the UK MPA Stocktake data submission process.

This document should be read in conjunction with the 'Types of protection for features in existing MPAs' guidance (Annex 3) and should generally only be applied to those features considered as being afforded associated protection. The term 'represents' is used in this guidance to encompass a broad range of characteristics which are assessed to determine whether a feature within a site is a reasonable example (i.e. represents the characteristics) of that feature in a UK context. In the context of this guidance the term 'represents' differs slightly (in definition and scale) from the principle of 'representativity' used to ensure a range of features characteristic of UK waters are included in the protected area network as a whole. This guidance ensures that only good examples of features can become counted as contributions to the MPA network.

Associated protection is whereby the habitat or species has become the focus of management only because it is integral to another habitat feature that is the direct focus of protection (requiring a translation from the listed feature to the associated network feature). For example, a subtidal sand habitat may be listed, resulting in management and monitoring that also focuses on associated features such as ocean quahog. In this case the ocean quahog is considered a UK MPA Network Feature (with associated protection) but, as it was not assessed as a principal feature of designation, it cannot be assumed that this population can represent the feature (is viable, of sufficient quality etc.) and so it must be considered against this guidance.

In the cases where a habitat or species feature is directly protected (i.e. listed in designation order/guidance, has a specific conservation objective and therefore is (or will be) managed and/or monitored), the assumption is that it must represent that feature, being of sufficient quality to qualify for protection in the first place, and therefore there is no need to use this guidance. For example, where listed features and network features are equivalent such as subtidal sand (network feature) occurring in a sandbank (listed feature), explicit protection is in place and so the feature can be assumed to represent an example.

In exceptional cases it may be necessary to consult this guidance for the network features identified within large-scale physiographic Annex I features. These network features fall under the 'explicitly listed' protection type ([Annex 3](#)) because they are encompassed within the Conservation Objectives of the physiographic Annex features, but nonetheless they could potentially only have a very small extent or population within the Annex feature and therefore require assessment to confirm that they represent that network feature.

It was agreed between JNCC and the Country Agencies that descriptive guidance on how a feature within a site may 'represent' a UK MPA Network Feature would be valuable. This should enable each agency to apply their expert judgement when assessing potential examples of features, yet still attempt to achieve a level of consistency between the decisions made across the UK. In this instance what represents an example of a feature may incorporate the assessment of a range of its characteristics including viability, quality, adequacy, naturalness, condition, life history and ecological traits.

Expert judgement and decisions to flag habitats/species that are present and correlated with the listed habitat but are *not* considered to represent these features should be clearly

documented on a feature by feature basis to ensure that an accurate and detailed audit trail is associated with the data to document how the standardised list was generated. Judgements used need to be documented so all decisions can be included in the database to provide a historic audit trail. Those features not considered to represent examples will still be contained within the data provided to JNCC for the UK stocktake work as they still contribute to the total area of this feature afforded protection by the network and so will be included within adequacy calculations/statistics but will be omitted from representativity/replication statistics for the network.

Guidance on what represents a habitat feature

Descriptive guidance which may be considered by Country Agencies when determining if a feature of an MPA is a represents an example may include:

- The ecological significance of the example of the feature, for example, does it have high natural biological diversity (of species within a habitat and of habitats in an area)
- Is there a high level of naturalness?
- Is the feature fragmented?
- What proportion of the habitat patch is present within the site?
- What knowledge is available on the habitat quality or relative diversity?
- Restoration potential of the habitat.

Country Agencies can interpret these guidelines at their own discretion.

Guidance on what represents a species feature

Descriptive guidance which may be considered by Country Agencies when determining what represents an example of a population for a given species feature may include:

- What data is available on the size of species feature populations within the site?
- To what degree is the species feature present within the site fragmented?
- What is its distribution and density of the species feature within the site, compared to outside?
- What knowledge is available on the level at which species feature population size can be considered 'viable'? Is the population structure of the species in the site as we would expect given what we know about the feature?
- Given what is known regarding the ecological variation of the feature, could the example be considered typical?
- Are the habitats supporting the species of adequate size and quality to sustain it in the location?
- What is known about the longevity of the species feature within the location?
- Where is the example located in terms of the geographic range of the species (e.g. at the edge or in the middle of the species' range)? What constitutes a viable example of a species may vary with location.
- What is the mobility of the species?

Country Agencies can interpret these guidelines at their own discretion.