

Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt

Marine Protected Area

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Home to slow-growing deep-sea sponge aggregations

Sponge communities



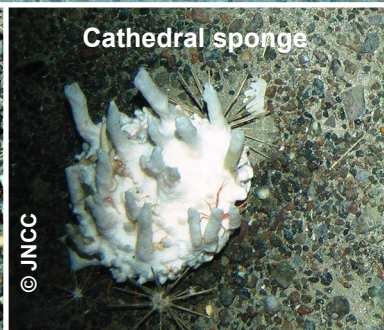
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Greenland halibut



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Cathedral sponge



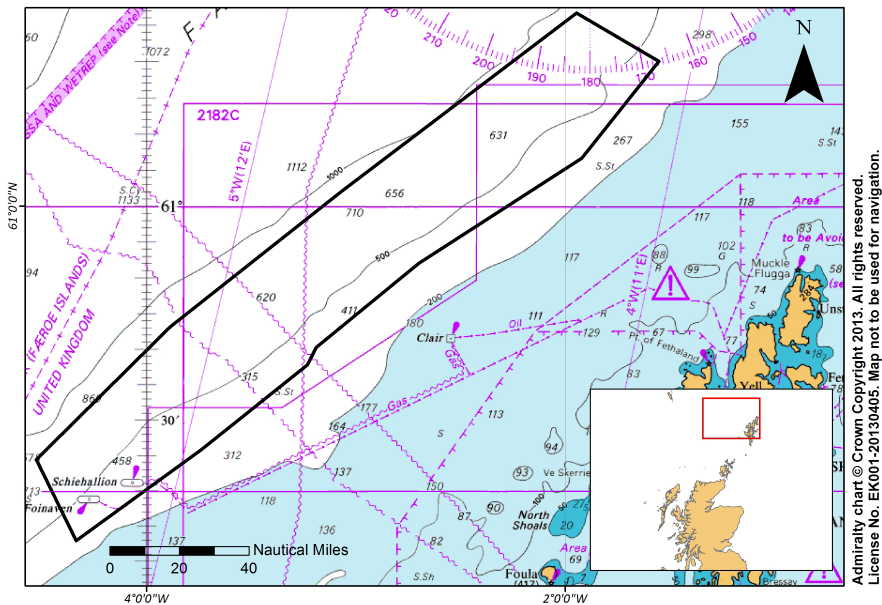
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Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt

Marine Protected Area (MPA)

The Faroe-Shetland Channel is a huge rift basin that separates the Scottish and the Faroese continental shelves to the north of Scotland. The Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt MPA lies on the Scottish side of the channel.

Warmer North Atlantic water flowing over sub-zero deep water from the Norwegian Sea supports a wider diversity of sea life in the area, including fields of slow-growing deep-sea sponges known as “Ostebund” or “cheese-bottoms” by local fishermen owing to their appearance. The sponges provide shelter for a range of small sea life and an elevated perch for animals such as brittlestars that filter food from the passing water currents.



Boundary of the Faroe Shetland Sponge Belt MPA

Location: 60° 51.354' N 3° 04.677' W

Area: 5,278 km²



Sponge aggregations are hotspots of diversity

Protected Features & Conservation Objectives

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

The seabed within the Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt MPA is characterised by iceberg scars in the seabed caused by the scouring action of icebergs during past ice ages. Over time these scars have been partially filled with sediments, creating a mosaic of habitats which are home to animals such as squat lobsters and burrowing heart urchins. The MPA includes protection for a special type of deep-sea sponge aggregation known as ‘boreal ostur’.

Within the MPA, the seabed descends into the deep sea and the changing environmental conditions with depth create zones that support different types of animal communities. For example, the offshore subtidal sand and gravel habitats are home to the ocean quahog, a large and slow growing clam which can live up to 400 years and is one of the oldest living animals on Earth.

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



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Ocean quahog are one of the oldest living creatures on Earth



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