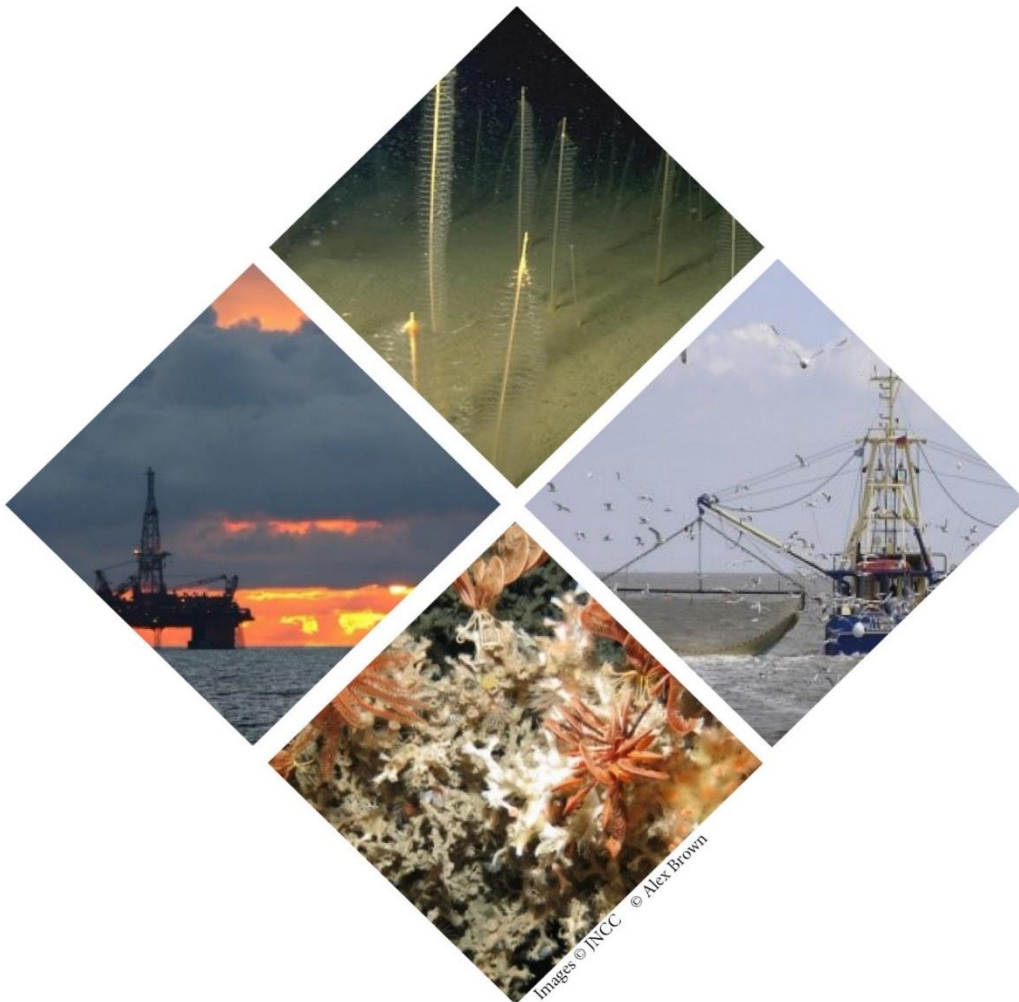


Statements on conservation benefits, condition & conservation measures for The Canyons Marine Conservation Zone

December 2020



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What the conservation advice package includes

The information provided in this document sets out JNCC's current view of the site's condition, the conservation benefits which the site can provide and the measures required to support achievement of the site's conservation objectives. This forms part of JNCC's formal conservation advice package for the site and must be read in conjunction with all parts of the package as listed below:

- [Background Document](#) explaining where to find the advice package, JNCC's role in the provision of conservation advice, how the advice has been prepared, when to refer to it and how to apply it;
- [Conservation Objectives](#) setting out the broad ecological aims for the site;
- Statements on:
 - the site's protected features condition and the General Management Approach;
 - conservation benefits that the site can provide; and
 - conservation measures needed to support achievement of the conservation objectives set for the site (this document);
- [Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives](#) (SACO) providing more detailed and site-specific information on the conservation objectives; and
- [Advice on Operations](#) providing information on those human activities that, if taking place within or near the site, can affect it and present a risk to the achievement of the conservation objectives.

The most up-to-date conservation advice for this site can be downloaded from the conservation advice tab in the [Site Information Centre](#) (SIC) on JNCC's website.

Conservation benefits

By maintaining or achieving favourable condition for the protected features, the site will contribute to delivering:

- Clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse oceans and seas as set out in the Government's [Strategy for contributing to the delivery of delivery of a UK network of marine protected areas](#);
- An ecologically coherent network of MPAs which are well managed under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-east Atlantic

([OSPAR Convention](#)), specifically OSPAR regions: III Celtic Seas and V Wider Atlantic; and

- Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy.

This site has been designated to protect the broad-scale habitat Deep-sea bed and the habitat Features of Conservation Importance (FOCI) Cold-water coral reefs, Coral gardens and Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities. The site contains two large canyons; the Explorer Canyon to the north and the Dangaard Canyon to the south. On the northernmost wall of the Explorer Canyon is a patch of live cold-water coral reef (*Lophelia pertusa*) and patches of Coral gardens, features that are both on the OSPAR list of Threatened and / or Declining Species and Habitats. This is the only known example of living cold-water coral reef recorded within England's seas making it unique in these waters. Patches of Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities, also a feature on the OSPAR list of Threatened and / or Declining Species and Habitats, can be found alongside small areas of Coral gardens at the western wall of the Explorer Canyon along the edge of The Canyons boundary. Within the Deep-sea bed feature, Deep-sea rock, Deep-sea mud and Deep-sea bioherm habitats have been recorded with high confidence. Other deep-sea sedimentary habitats are also likely to comprise part of this Deep-sea bed feature, but have not been confirmed.

This site provides conservation benefits to the wider marine environment and society by affording protection to Deep-sea bed, Cold-water coral reefs, Coral gardens and Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities and their associated biological communities and consequently the provision of the following ecosystem services:

- Nutrition: by providing a habitat for a variety of fauna, enhancing the availability of prey for commercially important fish species;
- Bird and whale watching: by providing a habitat for a variety of fauna, enhancing the availability of prey for seabirds and marine mammals; and
- Climate regulation: by providing a long-term sink for carbon.
- Provision of recruits: by supplying recruits with the potential of long distance dispersal which can help to support new or maintain existing coral habitats.
- Provision of biochemical and biotechnological products: Chemicals extracted from corals have been shown to have applications in the pharmaceutical industry.

Further detail on ecosystem services the features can provide is available in the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) under structure and function.

Managing activities that affect the protected features of the site to maintain them at or recover them to, favourable condition, will support the site’s provision of the benefits and delivery of obligations listed above.

Site Condition

Table 1 below sets out JNCC’s view on the overall condition of the site’s protected features based on our understanding of the feature. Please contact [JNCC](#) for further information if required. In summary, a feature is considered to be in unfavourable condition either where evidence indicates it needs to be recovered or where recovery is not considered to be possible through human intervention. Conversely, a feature is considered to be in favourable condition where evidence indicates it is not being adversely affected.

Table 1. JNCC’s view on the condition of the protected features in the site.

Protected feature	View of condition and General Management Approach (GMA)
A6 Deep-sea bed	The feature is in unfavourable condition. The GMA is to recover the feature to favourable condition
Cold-water coral reefs	The feature is in unfavourable condition. The GMA is to recover the feature to favourable condition
Coral gardens	The feature is in unfavourable condition. The GMA is to recover the feature to favourable condition
Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities	The feature is in favourable condition. The GMA is to Maintain in favourable condition

The conservation measures listed below set out JNCC’s view as to which, if any, human activities may require additional management to maintain or recover the features within the site

Conservation measures

As set out in Table 1 above, Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities need to be maintained in favourable condition. The remaining habitat features of Conservation Importance (Cold-water coral reefs and Coral gardens) and the Broad-scale habitat (Deep-sea bed) need to be recovered to favourable condition.

Using evidence available about the site and information contained within the Advice on Operations for this site (hyperlink is provided in the box at the top of this document), we consider that the activities listed below are capable of significantly affecting the qualifying features of the site. These activities should be managed to recover the Deep-sea bed, Cold-water coral reefs, Coral gardens and maintain Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities by minimising the impact of associated pressures from:

- Mobile demersal fishing
- Static demersal fishing

Management of the site should be informed by the sensitivity of protected features to pressures associated with human activities. The Advice on Operations provides an initial assessment of whether a proposed plan or project (or ongoing activity) may have an impact on a protected feature in the site. The Advice on Operations identifies pressures associated with the most commonly occurring marine activities, and provides a detailed assessment of feature sensitivity to these pressures. A human activity is considered capable of affecting a feature where the feature is known to be sensitive to associated pressures. The sensitivity assessments provided in the Advice on Operations workbook and the guidance within, should be used at an early stage of a plan or project when considering potential impacts of an activity.

The simple presence of such human activities would not necessarily significantly affect the site were they to occur. Advice on Operations should be used in conjunction with the specific details of a proposed plan or project (e.g. indirect and/or additive impacts, activity duration, time of year, scale etc.) and the Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACO) to develop assessments of impacts to features within the site. You may also find the information available in the Activities and Management tab of the site's [Site Information Centre](#) useful.