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Defining Feature Condition Categories for The Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023

JNCC & Natural England

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Summary

This report, produced jointly by JNCC and Natural England, explains how the condition of protected habitats and species within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) will be assessed to meet the Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023. These regulations require that by 2042 at least 70% of protected MPA features must be in favourable condition, with the remainder in recovering condition. To support consistent reporting toward this target, the report defines six condition categories—favourable, recovering, unfavourable, part destroyed, destroyed, and unknown—and outlines how these categories should be applied using evidence from ecological monitoring, management measures, and regulatory decisions.

The report also sets out a structured decision-making process and confidence scoring system to ensure transparency and consistency in assessments. It provides technical definitions for each condition category, explains how existing condition assessments produced by JNCC and Natural England will be used, and clarifies when features can be considered recoverable. Together, this framework will support clear, evidence-based reporting on the health of marine habitats and species and help track national progress toward restoring and protecting the UK's marine environment.

Contents

1. Introduction

A target for the proportion of Marine Protected Area (MPA) 'features' (designated habitats and species) to be in favourable condition by 2042 has now been set in accordance with use of powers granted to the Secretary of State under Section 1 of the Environment Act (2021) (UK Parliament 2021). The regulation, known as the Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 (UK Parliament 2023), sets out that before the end of 31 December 2042 the number of protected features within all relevant Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that are in "favourable condition" is to be not less than 70% of the total number of protected features within relevant MPAs, and with the remainder to be in "recovering condition".

The enforcement of the Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 (UK Parliament 2023), herein referred to as 'the MPA Target', poses two critical challenges that need to be addressed to meet the reporting requirements against the regulation:

1. How do we apply the 'favourable' and 'recovering' condition categories for the purposes of ensuring consistent reporting against the MPA Target alongside other statutory condition reporting?

2. How do we determine recoverability of MPA features in response to appropriate management intervention?

The former question is the focus of this technical information note, whereas the latter is addressed through a complimentary report on MPA feature condition and recoverability analysis (JNCC & Natural England 2026).

This technical Information note sets out technical definitions of the feature condition categories that will be required to support reporting against the MPA Target in a consistent and transparent way. The Schedule of the Regulations lists the protected features which the MPA Target and this technical information note applies to. This note concludes with a section that sets out how JNCC and Natural England will assess our confidence in the assignment of feature condition categories.

2 Approach to Determining Feature Condition Categories

JNCC and Natural England provided advice to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) on the definition of **favourable condition** and **recovering condition** at the time of drafting of the Regulations. These concepts are well understood and are already actively in use to support MPA conservation advice produced by Natural England and JNCC.

The **Appendix** provides a comparative analysis of the definitions of favourable and recovering condition already in use to illustrate their comparability with those adopted directly for the purposes of the Regulations and to support reporting against the MPA Target.

Generally, favourable condition is achieved when the conservation objective for the feature has been met. Favourable refers to when the attributes comprising 'good' condition are all considered to be favourable. This includes considerations such as the extent and distribution of the protected feature within the site, its physical/biological structure and ecological function, and ensuring supporting processes such as water and sediment quality are not falling below favourable limits). Conversely, recovering condition is when the conservation objective for the feature has not yet been met, but that the feature is recovering to favourable condition following the removal of damaging levels of human activities. Further information on what favourable and unfavourable condition means with respect to different designation types in English waters is provided in the Appendix of this information note. This is well reflected in the wording of the Regulations, with regulation 3(3) defining "**favourable condition**" and "**recovering condition**" for the purposes of the MPA target as follows:

Favourable condition with respect to a protected feature in a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) means:

- that the feature, and its supporting habitat where this is included as part of its conservation objective in the relevant MCZ designation order specified in the fourth column of the Schedule, is in favourable condition within the meaning stated for that feature type in that MCZ designation order, or

- where the protected feature is black seabream (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) that the population (whether temporary or otherwise) is free of disturbance of a kind specified for that feature in the relevant MCZ designation order specified in the fourth column of the Schedule and its spawning habitat is in favourable condition within the meaning stated in that MCZ designation order.

Note: The Regulations clarify that a relevant impact does not include the presence of an invasive non-native species in the relevant MPA or its vicinity if the species is present to such an extent that it would not be reasonably practicable to implement measures to try to remove or manage any adverse impact its presence is placing on the protected feature. Natural England and JNCC will need to consider if the presence of an invasive non-native species in the relevant MPA or its vicinity is having an impact upon a designated feature and if so that it is present to such an extent that it would not be reasonably practicable to implement measures to try to remove or manage any adverse impact its presence is placing on the protected feature. Further work is being undertaken to define 'reasonably practicable' and will be published in due course.

With respect to a protected feature in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) which is a marine habitat or type of marine habitat, means:

- that its extent and distribution is stable or increasing, and

- the structures and functions, and natural supporting processes on which it relies, are such as to ensure that it remains in a condition which is healthy and not deteriorating.

With respect to a protected feature in a SAC which is a species of marine fauna or flora, means:

- that the quality and quantity and distribution of its supporting habitat, the quality of the natural supporting processes on which it relies, the availability of prey and the composition of its population in terms of distribution and size are such as to ensure that the population is maintained in numbers which enable it to thrive, and

- where the protected feature is grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus)*, harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), or harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) it is free of human disturbance of a kind likely to have a significant effect on its use of the site.

With respect to a protected feature in a Special Protection Area (SPA), means:

- that the extent and distribution of its supporting habitat is stable or increasing,

- the structures, functions and quality of its supporting habitat including its natural supporting processes are such as to ensure that its supporting habitat remains in a condition which is healthy and not deteriorating,

- the distribution and size of its population (whether temporary or otherwise) are such as to ensure that it is maintained in numbers which enable it to thrive, and

- its population (whether temporary or otherwise) is free of human disturbance of a kind likely to have a significant effect on the survival of its members, or their ability to breed or rear their young." (UK Parliament 2023).

Recovering condition with respect to a protected feature in a relevant MPA means that the feature is not in favourable condition, but the measures necessary to remove or manage all relevant impacts on that feature have been implemented.

Regulation 3(6) defines a "relevant impact" as an impact which—

(a) adversely affects the feature,

(b) arises from human activities specific to the relevant MPA or its vicinity, and

(c) considering any measures which have already been implemented, if it were not removed or managed would prevent the feature from ever being in favourable condition. But a relevant impact does not include the presence of an invasive non-native species in the relevant MPA or its vicinity if the species is present to such an extent that it would not be reasonably practicable to implement measures to try to remove or manage any adverse impact its presence is placing on the protected feature. (UK Parliament 2023)

It is JNCC and Natural England's opinion that there may be instances where it is not appropriate to conclude that a feature is in either favourable or recovering condition and therefore several other feature condition outcomes may be more appropriate. Figure 1 presents JNCC and Natural England's view of the spectrum of MPA feature condition categories that may be appropriate when assessing progress towards the MPA target.

Figure 1. MPA feature condition categories for the purposes of assessing progress towards the MPA target.

3 Technical Definitions of Feature Condition Categories

The sub-sections that follow provide a technical definition for each feature condition category listed in Figure 1 and fictitious examples to support their application. The fictitious examples presented refer to the theoretical recovery potential of features. These have been taken from a complimentary report prepared by JNCC and Natural England (JNCC & Natural England 2026). JNCC and Natural England will follow a decision-tree based approach when assigning feature condition categories as shown in Figure 2.

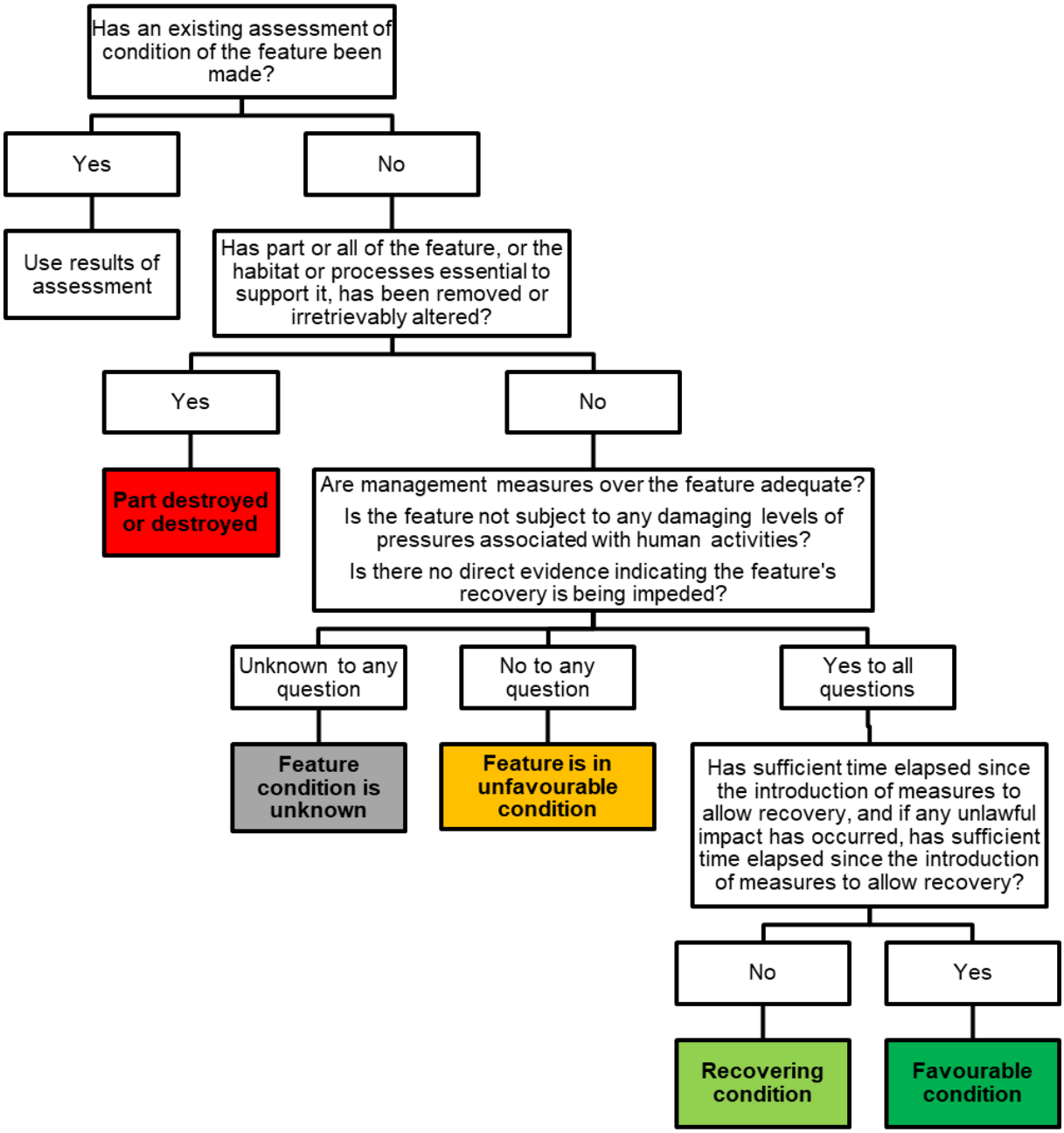

Figure 2. A decision-tree based approach to assigning feature condition categories.

3.1 Favourable Condition

Technical definition

Natural England and JNCC will assess a feature as being in favourable condition when we consider that:

- All required management measures are in place and are:
    - adequate to enable recovery; and
    - Sufficient time has passed since the introduction of those measures for the feature to recover.

and

- The feature is not subject to any damaging levels of pressures associated with human activities

or

- There is direct evidence indicating either that the feature is in a healthy state or if impacted by invasive non-natives species, it would not be reasonably practicable to try to remove it or manage any resulting adverse impact from its presence.

In practice, this means that:

- Fisheries management measures have been implemented that are considered by JNCC and/or Natural England to be appropriate to support maintenance of the protected feature in a favourable condition. This assumes compliance with bylaws and is pending the absence of direct evidence to suggest something to the contrary.

- The marine licencing process secures sufficient modification to, or rejection of, any applications to which JNCC and/or Natural England objects to on conservation grounds. For a protected feature to be classed as being in favourable condition for the purposes of reporting against the MPA Target, as of January 2023 there can be no examples of plans or projects going ahead following an objection by NE/JNCC, without modification to address the objection.

Fictitious examples of favourable condition

1. An example of high energy intertidal rock is designated within an MCZ in the southwest of England. Whilst the theoretical recoverability potential of high energy intertidal rock is over 25 years, condition assessments undertaken by Natural England staff informed using direct evidence gathered from multiple surveys over several years support that 96% of the extent of the feature within the site is in favourable condition. If no prosecutions for damage to the feature occur and fishing boat Vessel Monitoring Systems data indicates high levels of compliance with the fisheries management measures of the site, then the feature would be in favourable condition.

2. An example of subtidal sand is designated within an MCZ in the northwest of England. The theoretical recoverability potential of this feature is within two years. Management measures considered necessary to achieve the conservation objective of the feature were put in place on 10 January 2020. This means that the

feature should have recovered to favourable condition by 11 January 2022. If no prosecutions for damage to the feature occur and that fishing boat Vessel Monitoring Systems data indicates high levels of compliance with the fisheries management measures of the site, then the feature would be in favourable condition, pending the absence of direct evidence to suggest something to the contrary.

3. An example of subtidal mixed sediment is designated in the English Channel. The theoretical recoverability potential is between two and five years and management measures considered necessary to achieve the conservation objectives of the feature have been in place for over a decade. Condition assessments undertaken by Natural England staff using evidence from multiple surveys gathered over several years state that the feature is in unfavourable condition because of impacts from the presence of the slipper limpet *Crepidula fornicata*; an invasive non-native species. However, because Natural England have assessed that *C. fornicata* is present to such an extent that it would not be reasonably practicable to implement measures to try to remove the species or manage any adverse impact its presence is causing to the feature, it is assessed instead to be in favourable condition for the purposes of reporting against the MPA Target.

3.2 Recovering Condition

Technical definition

Natural England and JNCC will assess a feature as being in recovering condition when we consider that:

- All required management measures are in place and are:
    - adequate to enable recovery; but
    - insufficient time has passed since the introduction of those measures for the feature to recover.

and

- The feature is not subject to any damaging levels of pressures associated with human activities

and

- There is no direct evidence indicating the feature's recovery is being impeded.

Only if JNCC and Natural England are satisfied that all the measures have been implemented will this condition category be advised, as opposed to an unfavourable condition category rating.

In practice, this means that:

- Fisheries management measures have been implemented that are considered by JNCC and/or Natural England to be appropriate to support recovery of the protected feature from an unfavourable condition. This assumes compliance with bylaws and is pending the absence of direct evidence to suggest something to the contrary.

- The marine licencing process secures sufficient modification to or rejection of any applications to which JNCC and/or Natural England objects to on conservation grounds. For a protected feature to be classed as being in recovering condition, as of January 2023, there can be no examples of plans or projects going ahead following an objection by NE/JNCC without modification to address the objection.

Fictitious examples of recovering condition

1. An example of Pied avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) is designated within a SPA in the southwest of England. The theoretical recoverability potential of this feature is between six and 12 years. All the management measures considered necessary to achieve the conservation objective of the feature were put in place by 31 March 2024. As long as no prosecutions for damage to the feature occur, that fishing boat Vessel Monitoring Systems data indicates high levels of compliance with the fisheries management measures of the site and there is no direct evidence to suggest otherwise, the feature would be expected to be in recovering condition by MPA target interim reporting in 2028, but favourable in time for overall target reporting in 2042.

2. Annex I Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time are designated within an SAC in the Irish Sea. The theoretical recoverability potential of this feature is between 10 and 25 years. All the management measures considered necessary to achieve the conservation objective of the feature were put in place on 31 October 2024. As long as no prosecutions for damage to the feature occur from January 2023, and fishing boat Vessel Monitoring Systems data indicates high levels of compliance with the fisheries management measures of the site and there is no direct evidence to suggest otherwise, the feature would be expected to be in recovering condition for reporting against both the interim target in 2028 and overall target reporting in 2042.

3. A population of short snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*) is designated within a MCZ in the English Channel. The theoretical recoverability potential of this feature is between six and 12 years. Condition assessments undertaken by Natural England staff using evidence from multiple surveys gathered over several years conclude that the feature is in unfavourable but recovering condition. If no prosecutions for damage to the feature have occurred since January 2023 and there is no direct evidence to suggest otherwise, then the feature will be in recovering condition for reporting against the interim target in 2028.

3.3 Unfavourable Condition

Technical definition

Natural England and JNCC will assess a feature as being in unfavourable condition when we consider that the management measures are inadequate to enable recovery, but that any impact is not considered to be permanent. Natural England and JNCC will assess management measures as being inadequate from the point at which the Regulations came into force when:

- we have objected to consenting of a plan or project in isolation and that plan or project has still gone ahead irrespective of our advice,

or

- we have objected repeatedly to plans or projects in-combination, or

- we do not consider that fisheries management measures implemented are sufficient to achieve the conservation objectives of the feature,

or

- there has been a deviation from a consent or non-compliance with measures which we assess has been damaging to the feature.

In effect the feature would be in unfavourable condition but not recovering (i.e. it is in either a declining or unchanged unfavourable condition). The difference here between unfavourable and part destroyed or destroyed is that recovery is still considered possible, if suitable management input is made.

Fictitious examples of unfavourable condition

1. An area of seapens and burrowing megafauna is designated within an MCZ in the Southern North Sea. JNCC and Natural England advise that the full extent of the feature within the site should be protected from bottom-contacting fishing gear to stand the best chance of achieving the conservation objective of the feature but resulting management measures only support a seasonal closure to parts of the extent of the feature within the site from bottom-contacting fishing gears. Moreover, a consent has been granted for several pipelines to be laid through the extent of the feature within the site that includes significant amount of rock dumping, despite JNCC objecting to the proposed operation on conservation grounds. Whilst the impacts described in this example are not considered permanent, JNCC would conclude that the management measures in place are inadequate and thus the feature would be in unfavourable condition.

2. An area of subtidal coarse sediment is designated within an MCZ in the Irish Sea. Several licences for aggregate extraction have been granted that partially overlap with the MCZ, but JNCC concluded through their review of the associated Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed developments that this would be unlikely to have a significant impact on achieving the conservation objective of the feature. Subsequently, an application variation has been received that proposes a significant expansion of the original proposed operation into areas of subtidal coarse sediment within the MCZ. Despite JNCC objecting on conservation grounds, the application variation was approved. Whilst the impacts described in this example are not considered permanent, JNCC would conclude that the management measures in place are inadequate and thus the feature would be in unfavourable condition.

3.4 Part Destroyed

Technical definition

Natural England and JNCC will assess a designated feature as being part destroyed if there is no hope of reinstatement because part of the feature, or the habitat or processes essential to support it, have been removed or irretrievably altered (JNCC 2003). Destruction is considered permanent and no management can improve their condition.

Fictitious example of part destroyed

1. An example of subtidal sand habitat is designated within an MCZ in the southern North Sea. JNCC has assessed the feature to be impacted by the introduction of hard substrate which is resulting in a change of the habitat to another type,

effectively resulting in a loss of feature extent. Despite having a relatively quick recovery time (the theoretical recoverability potential of this feature is within two years), the loss is irretrievable. This is because it is highly uncertain that the hard substrate would be removed to allow recovery to take place. The feature is assessed to be partially destroyed because parts of it are considered irretrievably lost.

3.5 Destroyed

Technical definition

Natural England and JNCC will assess a designated feature as being destroyed if there is no hope of reinstatement because all the feature, or the habitat or processes essential to support it, has been removed or irretrievably altered (JNCC 2003). Destruction is considered permanent and no management can improve their condition.

Fictitious example of destroyed

1. An example of Annex I submarine structures made by leaking gases is designated in the offshore area. This is a relatively small example which is not actively accreting. Having been repeatedly subjected to abrasion, JNCC has assessed the feature to be destroyed because the structures which were present and which partly defined the feature have been removed. This destruction is irretrievable because the structures cannot grow back.

3.6 Unknown Condition

Technical definition

JNCC and Natural England will report where we are unable to provide a view on the condition of a feature where there is insufficient evidence to support an assessment (e.g. compliance with management measures).

4 Sources of Existing Assessments of Condition

JNCC and Natural England draw upon a broad range of evidence types to support protected feature condition assessments. These can be categorised as two predominant evidence types:

- Direct – for example, data collected from within an MPA, whether that is time-series based ecological monitoring of protected features or third party ecological data collected to support characterisation surveys or monitoring of impacts from consented developments.

- Indirect (or proxy) – for example, ecological monitoring data, collected for example from an MPA with a similar combination of protected features/management regime or our understanding of activities taking place and capacity to impact a protected feature.

Where available, Natural England and JNCC will use existing assessments of condition to identify features which are in each condition category. For sites assessed by JNCC the process outlined in Annex 3 of OSPAR Guidance Note - Reporting on the Status of MPA Management (OSPAR Commission 2021) or its successor will be followed. For sites assessed by Natural England the process outlined in Natural England Technical Information Note 178, Assessment of the Condition of Features in Marine Protected Areas (Natural England 2020) or its successor will be followed.

4.1 Use of Condition Assessments Undertaken by Natural England

Natural England's condition assessments (Natural England 2020) give a percentage of designated feature in each condition category rather than one overall condition category. For a designated feature the percentage area of favourable needs to meet the value set out in the structure and function requirements as set out in Natural England Favourable Conservation Status definitions for the feature for it to be classed as being in favourable condition. The sum of percentage areas of favourable and unfavourable recovering need to add up to the value set out in structure and function requirements (as set out in Natural England Favourable Conservation Status definitions) for the feature be classed as being in recovering condition. If the sum of favourable and unfavourable recovering do not add up to that set out in the Favourable Conservation Status definition, then the feature is classed as being in unfavourable condition and therefore fails to meet the target set in The Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 and the associated EIP target.

For example, the Favourable Conservation Status for Reefs (Johnston & Mousley 2021) gives a percentage of the favourable area for each type of reef which would need to meet the structure and function requirements (Table 1). The percentage is higher for those reef habitats that have been identified as a Habitat Feature of Conservation Interest (Natural England & JNCC 2010).

Table 1. Percentage of the favourable area each type of reef would need to meet the structure and function requirements.

Reef type	Percentage of favourable area needing to meet the structure and function requirements
Geogenic reef within Protected Sites not identified as a Habitat Feature of Conservation Interest or particularly rare or sensitive to damage	95%
Geogenic reef identified as a Habitat Feature of Conservation Interest	100%
Biogenic reef	100%

5 Assigning Confidence

JNCC and Natural England draw upon a broad range of evidence types to support feature condition assessments. These can be categorised as one of two predominant evidence types:

- **Direct evidence** – ecological data collected from within an MPA; whether that is time-series based ecological monitoring of protected features, or third-party ecological data collected to support (e.g. characterisation surveys or monitoring of impacts from consented developments).

- **Indirect (or proxy) evidence** - ecological monitoring data collected from an MPA with a similar combination of protected features/management regime, or our understanding of activities taking place and the sensitivity of features to pressures associated with those activities.

JNCC and Natural England's assessments against the MPA target will be accompanied by a confidence score, which will reflect the level of underpinning evidence:

- Where the predominant evidence-base underpinning a feature condition assessment is derived from direct evidence sources, a **high** confidence score will be assigned.

- Where the predominant evidence-base underpinning a feature condition assessment is derived from ecological monitoring data collected from an MPA with a similar combination of protected features/management regime, a **medium** confidence score will be assigned.

- Where the predominant evidence-base underpinning a feature condition assessment is derived from our understanding of the activities taking place and the sensitivity of features to pressures associated with those activities, a **low** confidence score will be assigned.

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Appendix

Table 2. The differences between definitions of favourable and recovering condition.

Condition Category	The Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 (UK Parliament 2003)	JNCC Common Standards Monitoring 2004 (JNCC 2003)	Assessment of the Condition of Features in Marine Protected Areas. Technical Information Note 178. (Natural England 2020)	Marine Conservation Zone Project: Conservation Objective Guidance Version 2 (Natural England & JNCC 2011)	Favourable Conservation Statements	OSPAR Reporting on the status of MPA Management
Favourable	MCZ features: • The feature, and its supporting habitat where this is included as part of its conservation objective, is in favourable condition within the meaning stated for that feature type in that MCZ designation order, or • (bb) where the protected feature is black seabream (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) that the population (whether temporary or otherwise) is free of disturbance of a kind specified for that feature in the relevant MCZ designation order and its spawning habitat is in favourable condition within the meaning stated in that MCZ designation order. SAC marine habitats: • its extent and distribution is stable or increasing, and • the structures and functions, and natural supporting processes on which it relies, are such as to ensure that it remains in a condition which is healthy and not deteriorating. • SAC species of marine fauna or flora: • The quality and quantity and distribution of its supporting habitat, the quality of the natural supporting processes on which it relies, the availability of prey and the composition of its population in terms of distribution and size are such as to ensure that the population is maintained in numbers which enable it to thrive, and where the protected feature is grey seal (*Phoca vitulina*), harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), or harbour seal (*Halichoerus grypus*) it is free of human disturbance of a kind likely	**Favourable – maintained:** an interest feature should be recorded as maintained when its conservation objectives were being met at the previous assessment and are still being met. **Favourable – recovered: a**n interest feature can be recorded as having recovered if it has regained favourable condition, having been recorded as unfavourable on the previous assessment.	The feature is adequately conserved, as all evidence analysed through attribute assessments result in the principal attributes for the feature meeting their targets. The SACO sets the minimum targets for the feature and there may also still be scope for the further (voluntary) enhancement of the features, beyond the requirements of the directive.	If a feature is not currently vulnerable to damage it is likely to be in favourable condition. A feature is vulnerable when it is exposed to a pressure (from human activity) to which it is sensitive.	A definition of favourable conservation status sets a minimum threshold. Above the threshold, features are in favourable conservation status, and they are thriving throughout their natural range and are expected to continue to thrive in the future. Natural England interprets favourable conservation status as the situation in which a habitat or species is thriving throughout its natural range and is expected to continue to thrive into the future. For habitats, favourable conservation status means: • Maintaining viable examples of a habitat across the range of different climatic, geographic, physical and process conditions in which it is naturally present, and to conserve the biological diversity (species, genetics, ecosystem interactions) associated with the habitat. • There is sufficient area, pattern and quality of habitat across its natural range to support dependent associated species. • The achievement of favourable conservation status for habitats will be reflected in the achievement of favourable conservation status for the associated species. • Securing optimal conditions for the habitat (including its inherent diversity of species and ecosystem interactions) through the restoration of natural ecosystem function (or at least as far as this is possible). The contribution from an individual site	[At site level] all protected features are improving in condition, and some protected features may have met their conservation objectives. OR All protected features have reached their conservation objectives.

Condition Category	The Environmental Targets (Marine Protected Areas) Regulations 2023 (UK Parliament 2003)	JNCC Common Standards Monitoring 2004 (JNCC 2003)	Assessment of the Condition of Features in Marine Protected Areas. Technical Information Note 178. (Natural England 2020)	Marine Conservation Zone Project: Conservation Objective Guidance Version 2 (Natural England & JNCC 2011)	Favourable Conservation Statements	OSPAR Reporting on the status of MPA Management
Favourable	to have a significant effect on its use of the site. SPA Features: • The extent and distribution of its supporting habitat is stable or increasing. • The structures, functions and quality of its supporting habitat including its natural supporting processes are such as to ensure that its supporting habitat remains in a condition which is healthy and not deteriorating. • The distribution and size of its population (whether temporary or otherwise) are such as to ensure that it is maintained in numbers which enable it to thrive, and • Its population (whether temporary or otherwise) is free of human disturbance of a kind likely to have a significant effect on the survival of its members, or their ability to breed or rear their young.				will thus be dynamic in terms of its condition and its composition at any one point in time as it responds to the functioning of natural processes. For species, favourable conservation status means: • More than avoiding extinction or conserving one viable population. • Securing the underlying inherent diversity (genetic and phenotypic) of a species by maintaining thriving populations across its natural range, as far as possible by the restoration of natural ecosystem function. • The contribution from individual sites may be dynamic in terms of the occurrence of species at any one point in time.	
Unfavourable - recovering	“Recovering condition” means that the feature is not in favourable condition but the measures necessary to remove or manage all relevant impacts on that feature have been implemented.	An interest feature can be recorded as *recovering* after damage [to the feature] if it has begun to show, or is continuing to show, a trend towards favourable condition.	Where the criteria for favourable have not been met, as such the feature is considered in part or whole to be unfavourable, but where management is in place as agreed through competent authorities and it is seen to be making progress towards the recovery of the feature. It is the expert judgement of the assessor that a recovery will occur in due course.	If a feature is currently vulnerable to damage it is unlikely to be in favourable condition. A feature is vulnerable when it is exposed to a pressure (from human activity) to which it is sensitive.	Below the threshold habitats and species are in unfavourable conservation status.	[At site level] some protected features are improving in condition or have reached their conservation objectives. Other protected features are static, and/or declining in condition, or their condition is unknown.