



BalancedSeas

Delivering Marine Conservation Zones in the South-East

The Balanced Seas project – a new approach to marine protected areas

Balanced Seas is one of four regional projects in England set up to lead the process to identify future Marine Conservation Zones. These are a new type of marine protected area to be established under the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

Marine Conservation Zones will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology. They will contribute to the Government's aim of 'an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas'.

Balanced Seas covers an area of about 18,700 km², including inshore and offshore UK waters of the Eastern Channel and adjacent areas. It extends from just north of the Suffolk/Essex border, to the Hampshire/Dorset border in the south-west, and includes the Thames Estuary and the Solent. It is a partnership project with the University of Kent, Kent County Council, Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

The three other projects cover the North Sea (Net Gain), the Irish Sea (ISCZ) and the south-west (Finding Sanctuary). The split into regional areas makes it easier for people to get involved and to have regional ownership of and independence in the process. The four regional projects work closely together to make sure their approaches are consistent.

How will the Marine Conservation Zones be identified and recommended?

Marine Conservation Zones will be identified and recommended by a Regional Stakeholder Group, assisted by an independent facilitator and the Project team. The Regional Stakeholder Group for the south-east will include representatives of all the main sectors with an interest in the marine environment.

The Regional Stakeholder Group will be responsible for developing recommendations for the locations, boundaries and conservation objectives of Marine Conservation Zones in the project area. The recommendations will be based on nationally agreed criteria and principles that will be used to guide the selection of sites, and that will be made available later this year.

Three Local Advisory Forums, based on suggestions received at county level meetings in November 2009, will be set up to support the work of the Regional Stakeholder Group, provide information and suggestions, and review recommendations. This will ensure that local issues are taken into consideration and that a wide range of stakeholders can comment on and feed input into the recommendations.

The Project team will ensure that the Regional Stakeholder Group and Local Advisory Forums have access to the best available scientific information and local knowledge, and that all involved understand the process and the principles and criteria to be used.

The recommendations will be reviewed by the national MPA Scientific Advisory Panel, which will also provide independent scientific knowledge and advice throughout the process and ensure that the recommendations from all four projects are scientifically coherent.

Timetable

Starting March 2010

- Information and data will be collected from a wide range of sources, including national datasets on habitats, species, and physical characteristics of the marine environment. Data on inshore fisheries and recreational activities will be collected through a programme of interviews and questionnaires. Data collection will continue until at least autumn 2010.
- The information collected will be mapped by the Project team to show physical and ecological features and current uses throughout the project area.
- The Regional Stakeholder Group and three Local Advisory Forums will be established.

Starting April 2010

- The maps and other relevant information will be put together into a 'Regional Profile' that will be progressively updated and revised using information from all those involved in the process.
- The Regional Stakeholder Group will develop recommendations through a series of facilitated meetings and discussions, with feedback and input from the Local Advisory Forums.

Starting April 2011

- The final report will be prepared by the Project Team and Regional Stakeholder Group for submission to Natural England and Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) by 1 June 2011

Late 2011

- JNCC and Natural England will submit the recommendations of all four projects to the Minister

For further information about Balanced Seas contact:

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