



Review and Evaluation of the Marine Protected Area networks in England and Northern Ireland

A report commissioned by the Office for Environmental Protection

Correction Slip

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CORRECTION SLIP

Title: Review and Evaluation of the Marine Protected Area Networks in England and Northern Ireland

Written by Howell Marine Consulting

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Correction 1

Pages 10 & 11

Correction and clarification requested by DAERA on the numbers of marine habitats, species, and geological features in favourable condition.

Original text:

DAERA's Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2024 sets out that 40 out of 46 marine features, equating to 87%, are currently in favourable condition.

Amended text:

DAERA's Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2024 sets out that 40 out of 46 marine habitats, equating to 87%, are currently in favourable condition. With the inclusion of marine species and geological features, 47 out of 56 features, equating to 84%, are in a favourable condition.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 2

Page 15

Correction made to Table 4 due to additional information being made available by DAERA clarifying that, for offshore MPA management in Northern Ireland, DAERA are responsible for fisheries management and the MMO is responsible for all other activities. This clarification has been included in parentheses next to the relevant authority.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 3

Page 16, Section 3.5 Conservation objectives

Original text:

SNCBs are responsible for providing conservation advice and setting conservation objectives, at the time of MPA designation, and assessing the condition of MPAs in their jurisdiction...

Amended text:

SNCBs (DAERA in Northern Ireland) are responsible for providing conservation advice and setting conservation objectives, at the time of MPA designation, and assessing the condition of MPAs in their jurisdiction...

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 4

Pages 20 & 21

Due to additional information made available by DAERA, the following paragraph has been included:

In Northern Ireland, MCZs were designated under the Marine (Northern Ireland) Act 2013 to protect a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species. Geological and geomorphological features were also included. A feature-based approach was used and DAERA identified Areas of Search which were presented to relevant stakeholders. In addition, stakeholders were also given the opportunity to propose potential sites. Following a public consultation on the proposed sites, four MCZs (including a stakeholder proposed one) were designated in 2016 in the Northern Ireland inshore area.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 5

Page 32, Section 4.1.2 Fisheries management in MPAs in Northern Ireland.

The following clarifications were provided by DAERA on some of the details in this section.

Firstly, DAERA introduced the Marine Protected Areas (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 to protect the features of the entirety of Strangford Lough MCZ, not just within a restricted area. Therefore, the “restricted area” text following Strangford Lough MCZ in the list of MPAs has been removed.

Secondly, the addition of a depth limit for pots/creels was included:

Original text:

The Regulations protect MPA features through the prohibition of fishing using demersal fishing gear and the use of pots/creels in some sites.

Amended text:

The Regulations protect MPA features through the prohibition of fishing using demersal fishing gear and the introduction of a depth limit for pots/creels in some sites.

Thirdly, it was recommended that environmental NGOs were included in the list of Co-Fish partners.

Original text:

To support the development of fisheries management measures, Co-Fish: Fisheries and Conservation Partnership – a partnership between DAERA and industry stakeholders – was created in 2022.

Amended text:

To support the development of fisheries management measures, Co-Fish: Fisheries and Conservation Partnership – a partnership between DAERA, industry stakeholders, and environmental NGOs (Northern Ireland Marine Task Force, Ulster Wildlife, and RSPB) – was created in 2022.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 6

Page 36, Section 4.2.2 MNLAs in Northern Ireland

Correction provided by DAERA

Original text:

A list of MNLAs for Northern Ireland is provided in the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Amended text:

A list of MNLAs for Northern Ireland is provided in the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011 (as amended).

Original text:

The management of MNLAs has been delivered through the implementation of byelaws, for example, in the Strangford Lough MPA, which prohibits anchoring, mooring and diving within the MPA.

Amended text:

The management of MNLAs has been delivered through the implementation of byelaws. For example, in the Strangford Lough MPA, anchoring, mooring and diving is prohibited within a specified 'restricted zone' of the MPA.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 7

Page 38, Section 4.3.2 Marine Licensing

Addition information provided by DAERA to clarify the influence of the draft marine plan on decision making. The following text has been added to the report:

Although there is not a formal marine plan in place in Northern Ireland, the draft marine plan, published for consultation in 2018, is a material consideration alongside the UK MPS and has been used to inform decision making since 2018.

Date of correction: 08/12/2025

Correction 8

Page 40, Section 4.3.2.2 Marine Licensing in Northern Ireland

DAERA provided clarifications on the relevant authorities for activities that occur between MLWS and MHWS.

Original text:

However, where activities occur between MLWS and MHWS, and may be subject to decisions made under the terrestrial planning framework, the Department for Infrastructure would be the relevant authority in Northern Ireland under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Amended text:

However, where activities occur between MLWS and MHWS, and may be subject to decisions made under the terrestrial planning framework, local councils, or the Department for Infrastructure for strategic development projects, would be the relevant authority in Northern Ireland under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 9

Page 41

DAERA recommended the removal of the reference to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended) act as this piece of legislation is only relevant for nationally protected species, not European Protected Species.

Original text:

In Northern Ireland, a Wildlife licence is designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended).

Amended text:

In Northern Ireland, a Wildlife licence is designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended).

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 10

Page 61, Section 4.6 Reflections on MPA management

Original text:

However, although all MPAs are provided some form of protection through planning and licensing, many MPAs still do not have management measures in place (e.g., Stages 3 and 4 of England's MPA byelaws, and Strangford Lough Management Plan in Northern Ireland).

Amended text:

However, although all MPAs are provided some form of protection through planning and licensing, many MPAs still do not have formal management measures in place (e.g., Stages 3 and 4 of England's MPA byelaws, and Strangford Lough Management Plan in Northern Ireland).

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 11

Page 63, 'Planning and Licensing' section.

Amendment requested by DAERA for the text to include the role the draft marine plan plays in decision making.

Original text:

Without a Northern Ireland Marine Plan, DAERA are required to look to the high-level guidance within the UK MPS to inform decision making, which may not provide the same level of detail as the marine plan.

Amended text:

However, the draft marine plan is a material consideration alongside the high-level guidance within the UK MPS that DAERA have used to inform decision making since 2018.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 12

Page 73, Section 5.3 Potential weakness in the legislation for MPA condition reporting

DAERA requested for the text to include a note stating that the Environmental Targets (MPA) Regulations 2023, referenced in the first paragraph of this section, do not apply to Northern Ireland. An additional footnote has been included to address this.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 13

Page 89, 'Inclusion of ecological coherence criteria in the UK MCZ designation process' section.

DAERA requested that the following text and reference be included at the end of the second paragraph of this section:

In 2014, DAERA published the Strategy for Marine Protected Areas in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region to explain the approach to inshore marine nature conservation and how this will contribute to meeting national and international targets.

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 14

Page 90

Due to additional information made available by DAERA, the following changes have been made.

Original text:

The Guidance provided regional stakeholder groups with specific guidelines on how to identify sites that would protect the range of marine biodiversity within their MCZ Region. This approach was validated using independent review: JNCC and NE commissioned new research on adequacy¹, viability², and connectivity³ to establish the basis for ecological coherence. This was further externally peer-reviewed by international scientists.⁴

Amended text:

The Ecological Network Guidance identified the 23 broad-scale habitat features (taken from Level 3 of the EUNIS habitat type classification scheme⁵) that should be protected within MPAs in each Regional MCZ Project⁶ area to 'represent the range of features present'. Additional features of conservation importance (FOCI), habitats that are rare, threatened or declining, were also provided. For Northern Ireland's waters, the existing conservation lists were amalgamated to identify marine features of nature conservation importance. From this, the PMF habitats, PMF limited/low mobility species, and PMF highly mobile species lists were developed to be included as Proposed MCZ features (pMCZ). Those species which are PMFs but were excluded from MCZ designation (for a range of reasons, including absence or identified as non-native) are outlined in the Department of Environment report 'Marine Conservation Zones in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region, Justification Report for Selection of Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (pMCZ) Features'.⁷

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

¹ Rondinini, C. 2010. A review of methodologies that could be used to formulate ecologically meaningful targets for marine habitat coverage within the UK MPA network. JNCC Report No. 438. (Note 2010 here, 2011 in JNCC & NE, 2012).

² Hill, J., et al. 2010. Meeting the MPA Network Principle of Viability: Feature specific recommendations for species and habitats of conservation importance. NE Commissioned Reports, Number 043.

³ Roberts, C.M., et al. 2010. Guidance on the size and spacing of Marine Protected Areas in England. NECR037, Sheffield: NE, 2010.

⁴ JNCC & NE. 2012. [Marine Conservation Zone Project: JNCC and NE's advice to Defra on recommended Marine Conservation Zones](#)

⁵ European Environment Agency: [EUNIS habitat classification](#)

⁶ Defra: [MCZs: Consultation on proposals for designation in 2013](#)

⁷ Department of Environment: [Marine Conservation Zones in the Northern Ireland Region](#)

Correction 15

Pages 92 & 93

Due to additional information made available by DAERA, the following changes have been made.

Original text:

The majority of FOCI were represented and replicated across the MPA network, however, a small number of features did not meet the benchmarks set by the network criteria, with shortfalls relating to replication or the amount of habitat afforded protection.

*All broad-scale habitats, Northern Ireland Priority Marine Feature (PMF) species, and all but one Northern Ireland PMF habitats are represented in MPAs at least once; native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) beds were the only gap in network representativity. Although one of the 24 broad-scale habitats is not yet replicated in the Northern Ireland MPA network (low energy circalittoral rock), broad habitat types were considered well connected. Of the 12 subtidal broad-scale habitats assessed, shortfalls in the area of habitat protected were found for four habitats:*

- *Moderate energy circalittoral rock*
- *Low energy circalittoral rock*
- *Sublittoral coarse sediment*
- *Sublittoral mud*

Six of the 22 PMF habitats and 19 of the 93 PMF species are not replicated in the network.

During the 2019-2024 reporting period, DAERA commissioned scientific projects to address evidence gaps for features, such as native oyster and common skate, but no additional designations or amendments to existing designations were made. Evidence gathering continues and consideration will be given to potential designations in the next reporting period. DAERA reported in 2024 that an updated MPA strategy will be published in 2025, which will set out a detailed action plan (Table 13).

Amended text:

The majority of FOCI were represented and replicated across the MPA network, however, a small number of features did not meet the benchmarks set by the network criteria, with shortfalls relating to replication or the amount of habitat afforded protection rather than representation.²³⁸

Twenty-four broad-scale habitats are represented with 23 replicated but some gaps in area protected are noted. Overall, broad habitat types are considered well-connected in the Northern Ireland MPA network.²³⁸ Low energy circalittoral rock is the only broad-scale habitat not replicated. Of the 12 subtidal broad-scale habitats assessed, shortfalls in the area of habitat protected were found for four habitats:

- *Moderate energy circalittoral rock*
- *Low energy circalittoral rock*
- *Sublittoral coarse sediment*
- *Sublittoral mud*

*All but one of the Northern Ireland PMF/pMCZ habitats are represented in MPAs at least once, but six are not replicated in the network. Native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) beds were the only gap in network representativity. Ninety-three PMF/pMCZ species, are represented at least once in the MPA network, but 19 are not replicated. These gaps could potentially be addressed in the Northern Ireland inshore region.*

During the 2019-2024 reporting period, DAERA commissioned scientific projects to address evidence gaps for features, such as native oyster and common skate, but no additional designations or amendments to existing designations were made. Evidence gathering continues and consideration will be given to potential designations in the next reporting period. In 2024, DAERA held a public consultation on the NI Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Strategy Review, which laid out a draft action plan (Table 13). The plan is currently being reviewed, informed by the consultation.⁸

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

Correction 16

Page 93

The title of Table 13 has been updated.

Original text:

Table 13: 2025 Action plan steps to be addressed in the DAERA MPA Strategy

Amended text:

Table 13: 2025 Draft action plan steps to be addressed in the DAERA Northern Ireland MPA Strategy Review

Date of correction: 28/11/2025

⁸ Pers comms DAERA

Title: Review and Evaluation of the Marine Protected Area Networks in England and Northern Ireland – Non-technical Summary

Written by Howell Marine Consulting

Published by Office for Environmental Protection on 24 April 2025

Correction 1

Page 2, 'MPA Management' section.

Amendments made due to additional information being made available by DAERA clarifying that, for offshore MPA management in Northern Ireland, DAERA are responsible for fisheries management and the MMO is responsible for all other activities. The following line has been added:

In Northern Ireland, the Department for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for all inshore activities and fisheries in offshore waters; the MMO manages all other offshore activities.

Date of correction: 08/12/2025

Correction 2

Page 3, Section 3.1 Reflections on MPA Management

Addition of the word 'formal' to first bullet point.

Original text:

Although the MPA networks in England and Northern Ireland are well established, many MPAs are still without management measures. Therefore, although the percentage area of England and Northern Ireland's seas covered by MPAs exceeds the 30% target, it cannot be said that they have effective management in place.

Amended text

Although the MPA networks in England and Northern Ireland are well established, many MPAs are still without formal management measures. Therefore, although the percentage area of England and Northern Ireland's seas covered by MPAs exceeds the 30% target, it cannot be said that they have effective management in place.

Date of correction: 08/12/2025

Correction 3

Page 3, '3.1 Reflections on MPA Management'

Amendment to fourth bullet point to clarify that DAERA is not responsible for management of all marine activities in offshore waters.

Original text:



The single-body approach to MPA management in Northern Ireland, where DAERA is responsible for managing all marine activities in inshore and offshore (jointly with MMO) waters, enables greater oversight of marine activities and can result in more efficient and aligned decision making.

Amended text:

The single-body approach to MPA management in Northern Ireland, where DAERA is responsible for managing all marine activities in inshore and jointly with MMO for offshore waters, enables greater oversight of marine activities and can result in more efficient and aligned decision making.

Date of correction: 08/12/2025