



BalancedSeas

Delivering Marine Conservation Zones in the South-East

Balanced Seas Briefing Paper – August 2010

Introduction

Balanced Seas is a project working with those who use the sea for their livelihood or leisure, to develop recommendations for Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in the seas around south-east England. It is one of four regional projects in England established by Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Kent County Council and University of Kent are additional partners for Balanced Seas.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)

The Marine and Coastal Access Act enables the creation of a new type of Marine Protected Area, called a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The purpose of MCZs is to protect nationally important marine wildlife, geology and geomorphology. Sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but the full range of marine wildlife.

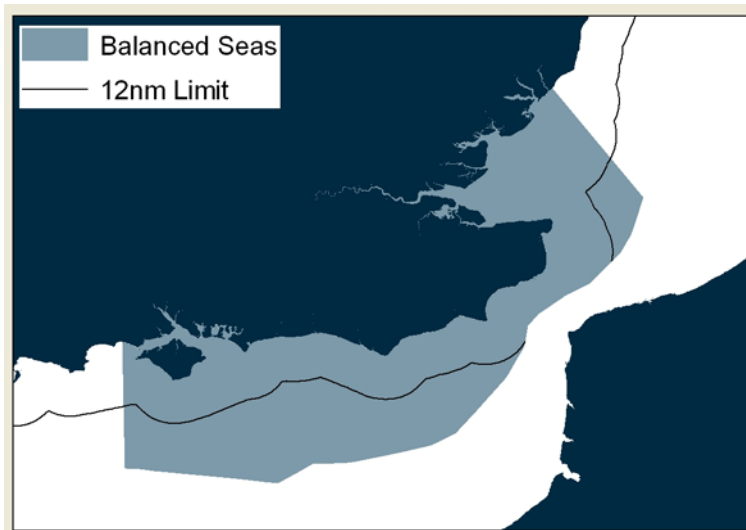
The protection levels required within MCZs will be decided on a site-by-site basis. Some areas will be highly protected and will be known as reference areas. In many MCZs most activities will remain permitted, depending on the level of protection most appropriate to the species or habitats being protected.

What about existing Marine Protected Areas?

There are already a number of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the south-east, including European Marine Sites called Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs). Together with these other MPAs, MCZs will deliver the Government's aim for an 'ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas'. This means the MPA network will be a collection of sites that work together to provide more benefits than an individual site could on its own.

European Marine Sites are identified on a purely scientific basis and Balanced Seas has no influence on their location. The location of existing and future European Marine Sites, and the conservation benefits that they bring to the overall MPA network, will however be taken into account when making decisions about where to place MCZs.

The Balanced Seas project area



The Balanced Seas project area covers the sea surrounding England's south-east coast, from just north of the Suffolk border around to the Hampshire/ Dorset border, and out to the median line.

Finding Sanctuary covers seas in the south west, Net Gain covers the North Sea and the Irish Sea Conservation Zones project covers the north west.

How will MCZs be identified?

The Balanced Seas **Regional Stakeholder Group** (RSG) is responsible for recommending the boundaries and conservation objectives for MCZs in the south-east. The RSG has wide cross-sectoral representation, including commercial fishing, tourism, recreational sea angling, diving, nature conservation interests, enforcement and renewable energy. Non-UK stakeholders will also be represented where appropriate.

The recommendations are being developed through a series of meetings. Throughout the planning process, each member of the RSG will be working on behalf of the interests of their sector. At the same time, the recommendations that are made must meet the principles, criteria and conservation targets for the UK MPA network that have been set out in the **Ecological Network Guidance**, a document prepared by Natural England and JNCC. The national **Science Advisory Panel** provides scientific support to the RSG and ensures that the recommendations from all four regional MCZ projects meet the Guidance.

Three **Local Groups** act as advisory bodies for the RSG and provide a crucial opportunity for the wider stakeholder community to contribute to the RSG's work. The Local Groups are made up of representatives from organisations that have a regional, sub-regional or local perspective.

Gathering information from stakeholders

To be able to make informed decisions on where MCZs should be placed, the RSG needs as much information as possible, not only on the location of habitats and species, but also on how the sea is used for both commercial and recreational purposes. This will help to ensure that impacts to stakeholders are minimised.

The Project Team is collating ecological and socio-economic data from many sources into a Regional Profile. For some sectors, notably inshore fisheries and recreational activities, centralised information is not available. The Project Team is therefore collecting information on these sectors in two ways:

- The Project Liaison Officers are interviewing sea users to gather information on the spatial extent and socio-economic importance of their activities.
- An online mapping tool, the Interactive Map (www.mczmapping.org), allows people to visualise the data we have gathered so far and to contribute their own information.

Progress to date

The first draft of the Regional Profile was prepared in June 2010 and is now under revision, with a growing body of information being assembled.

At the end of June, the RSG submitted its first progress report to the Science Advisory Panel, describing the work that had been undertaken at its first two meetings, with input from the first meetings of the Local Groups.

Since then each Local Group and the RSG have met to review the feedback from the Science Advisory Panel. Reports of all meetings and the first progress report to the Science Advisory Panel are available on the Balanced Seas website.

Timeline

The second progress report to the Science Advisory Panel is due at the end of October. The RSG will meet twice before then to revise the work undertaken so far and develop some preliminary ideas for MCZs. The deadline for data contributions through the Interactive Map is September 2010, and for interviews the end of October 2010.

A third progress report is due at the end of February 2011. The Local Groups will meet again in November to review and comment on the second progress report and provide further input. The RSG will then meet a number of times to prepare the third report.

Final recommendations will be submitted to Natural England and JNCC on 1 June 2011. The collated recommendations from all four regional projects will be submitted to Defra in October 2011 by Natural England and Defra. A public consultation on the final recommendations will take place in late 2011 or early 2012, and the aim is for designation of the MCZs to take place in 2012.

What does this mean for me?

The activities allowed within MCZs will vary depending on the features for which the MCZ is designated and the level of protection they require. This means that activities will not be restricted unless they damage the feature designated. The process being used allows stakeholders to contribute their opinions and information about which areas of the sea are important for particular activities. Sea users are encouraged to get involved in the project, and there are various ways to do this:

- You can go online and look at the MCZ **Interactive Map** (www.mczmapping.org) where you can see information about the seas in the south east and register to add information about the places you visit.
- Contact your **sector representative** on the Regional Stakeholder Group or one of the Local Groups if you think you have data or ideas that might be useful. More information about the RSG and the Local Groups, including details of who represents your sector and how to contact them, can be found on the website.
- Commercial fishermen and recreational users, including centres, schools or clubs, can also contact one of our Liaison Officers to arrange a face-to-face **mapping interview**, or to request further information.
- Sign up to **receive updates** and information about the project by emailing balancedseas@kent.ac.uk.

For more information about Balanced Seas please visit our website www.balancedseas.org where you will find the meeting reports from both the RSG and Local Group meetings and further details about the project.