



BalancedSeas

Delivering Marine Conservation Zones in the South-East



Photo: Solent Forum

Working with **watersports enthusiasts** to plan Marine Conservation Zones for a healthy, sustainable marine environment in the South-East.



Photo: Jim Greenfield

We all rely heavily on our seas for food, energy, transportation, construction and recreation, yet only 2% of the UK marine environment is currently protected to ensure this essential resource is safeguarded into the future.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) will be designed to protect underwater habitats, species and special geological features that are found in UK waters. Together with existing conservation sites that protect internationally important wildlife, MCZs will form a network of Marine Protected Areas that help to ensure our rich marine biodiversity is not damaged or unsustainably exploited.

In order to effectively protect sensitive marine wildlife and habitats, management of MCZs may have to restrict some marine activities, particularly those that cause damage.

The challenge is to secure environmental protection, while minimising the impacts on people whose livelihoods are supported by, or who enjoy, sea-based activities.

Unlike existing conservation sites, the legislation supporting MCZs allows social and economic factors to be taken into account in the designation process.

The process will engage sea users from the beginning, to ensure that highly valued areas of the sea are given due consideration.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

MPAs are areas of the marine environment that have a formal regulation in place to protect their environmental or cultural resources.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act came into force in November 2009, creating a new type of MPA called a Marine Conservation Zone which, together with other existing MPAs (e.g. Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas), will deliver the Government's international commitment to establish an 'ecologically coherent network of MPAs'.

*One of four regional projects, the **Balanced Seas** project area covers about 18,700 km² of UK waters in and around the Eastern Channel from just north of the Suffolk/Essex border at the River Deben, to the Hampshire/Dorset border in the South-West, including the Thames Estuary and the Solent.*

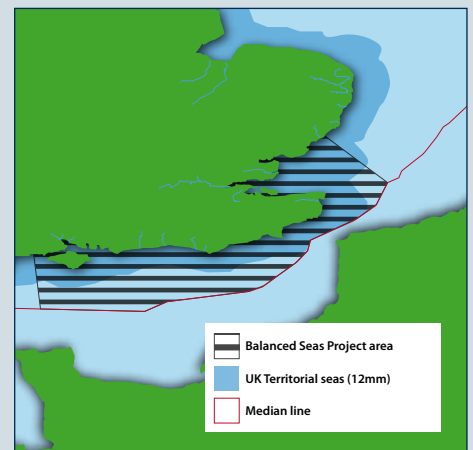




Photo: BritainView



Photo: BritainView



Photo: BritainView, Daniel Bosworth

How can watersports enthusiasts help shape the MPA network?

In order to minimise the potential impacts of MCZs on people's lives, we need to build a comprehensive picture of how the sea is used.

The South-East offers amazing opportunities for those who enjoy water sports. The Balanced Seas project area contains the Thames, one of the country's busiest estuaries, and the beautiful Sussex Coast that boasts popular kite-surfing, windsurfing, canoeing and kayaking sites. The Solent is world famous for its yachting, but is also popular for dingy sailing, power boating, rowing and waterskiing.

Watersports enthusiasts can play a vital role in developing recommendations for the most suitable location of MCZs by sharing their unique and extensive knowledge of the sea areas they use. This will ensure that MCZs have the minimum possible impact on heavily used recreational areas, while maximising their purpose of marine conservation.

Using questionnaires and charts, we will map where and when marine activities take place and how important those areas are to those who use them.

Your involvement will be invaluable in this challenging task, since the more these sea-user maps truly reflect the most important interests of the recreational sector, the more useful they will be in identifying where MCZs might be located.

You may already have an idea of sites that you want to see protected or just want to make sure we know about your activities and how important your area is to you and your community.

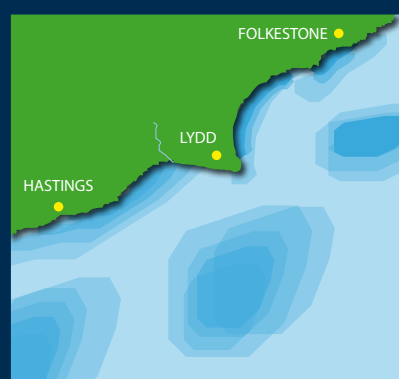
Whatever information and ideas you have, we would like to record them and they will be combined with information from other recreational sea-users and used to shape the MPA network.

An illustrative example of what the maps will look like



Response from a single participant

This map illustrates what the response of a single participant might look like, once added to a Geographic Information System (GIS). A GIS is a tool for looking at patterns in spatial data. Lines / areas represent stakeholders' activity or ecological information.



Response from multiple participants

This map shows multiple sea user responses displayed as a combined result. The areas with the darkest shading are those that are used most frequently, based on responses from the interviews.



Photo: Britanonview / Rod Edwards



How will the information be collected?

- 1 One of our Balanced Seas Liaison Officers will arrange an informal interview at a location and time convenient for you and will ask you some basic information about you and your activities.
- 2 During the interview they will take you through a simple questionnaire that will gather key information about you or your association's activities. They will also answer any questions that you may have about the Balanced Seas MCZ project.
- 3 Once you have shown the Liaison Officer where your activities take place, areas that are important to you will be drawn directly onto digital maps. There will also be an opportunity to record sites that you believe need protection and your reasons why.
- 4 We will ask your permission as to how we use your information in the future and you will be asked whether or not you wish to be kept informed of our work.
- 5 Having removed your personal details, we will take your anonymised information and combine it with other sea users to produce a map for each activity type that can be used to plan MCZs.
- 6 There will be opportunities for you to validate these combined maps to make sure they accurately reflect the information you have given us.

Find out more

To find out more about the project, please visit our website at www.balancedseas.org or contact a Liaison Officer.

Liaison Officer contact details

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Balanced Seas is a partnership project with the University of Kent, Kent County Council, Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.