



MB0116 – In-depth review of evidence supporting the recommended Marine Conservation Zones

Defra has published the In-depth review of evidence supporting the recommended Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). This work was commissioned following the recommendation from the independent Science Advice Panel that the evidence base for all recommended MCZs and recommended Reference Areas should be subject to an in-depth review of the data used. It will complement the advice provided by JNCC and Natural England on the MCZ evidence base. The outputs and conclusions of the projects will be considered as part of future MCZ evidence assessments and prior to MCZ designation in 2013.

Project objectives and findings

The aim of the project was to deliver a comprehensive review of the evidence underpinning the recommended MCZs and identify any new evidence that can be used. The project only covered ecological features (as listed in the Ecological Network Guidance) and provides opinions on the level of confidence in the data.

The project was undertaken in parallel to the advice provided by JNCC and Natural England on the scientific confidence in the regional MCZ project recommendations and builds on and extends this work. This project was aligned with JNCC and Natural England's advice during the process to ensure that the same data sources could be used as far as possible.

The project identified and collated a large range of relevant ecological data on the features proposed for designation within each of the rMCZs and rRA sites. A series of Site Evidence Reviews were produced detailing the available evidence either obtained or identified.

For the tranche 1 sites Confidence Assessments were undertaken informed by the protocols developed by JNCC and Natural England. The project used the data available to them to map the extent of features and used additional data sources in some instances. As a consequence of the additional data and approach regarding interpretation of the data available to the project, differences in results when compared to the SNCB advice were expected. The project explores some of the reasons for differing results, many of which result from an alternative interpretation of the protocols and types of data that can be incorporated into the Confidence Assessments. Some differences result from errors in the data, which are currently being resolved.

Evidence Used for MCZ Decision Making

Defra used the advice provided by JNCC and Natural England in July 2012 (as amended in December 2012) as the basis for considering which recommended MCZs should be included in our proposals in the consultation launched on 13 December 2012.

Following the public consultation Defra will review any newly available evidence collected to support MCZ decisions and any evidence submitted during the consultation prior to designation of MCZ sites in 2013. This process will be based upon advice from JNCC and Natural England using any new evidence, and will also consider the outputs and conclusions of the in-depth review.

A large amount of data has been collected and compiled for the MCZ project. As highlighted by this study, analysing, organising and undertaking an objective judgement of confidence of the data is a very complex process. We will continue to work with JNCC and Natural England to ensure that the best available evidence is used for final decisions on designation of MCZs.

Defra is actively supporting survey work to fill data gaps in MCZ site proposals, and also recognises efforts of other interested parties to provide data during the MCZ consultation.

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