

## The Swale Estuary Marine Conservation Zone

*This document sets out why this site is important, the features protected and general management information.*

**17 January 2016**



Intertidal sand and muddy sand: Sandy seashore © Amy Ridgeway JNCC

### Overview

This site becomes a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) in January 2016. This means that specific features within this area are protected and, where necessary, regulators will manage marine activities.

### Where is the site

The Swale Estuary MCZ is an inshore site. The site covers the Swale Estuary from the point at which it meets the Medway Estuary, south of the Isle of Sheppey, and extends towards the end of The Street at Whitstable. This site covers an area of 51 km<sup>2</sup>.

### Why it's important

MCZs, together with other types of marine protected areas, will form the UK contribution to an international network of protected sites in the north east Atlantic. The network will help to deliver the government's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas. MCZs protect typical, rare or declining habitats and species found in our seas.

This site is considered to be highly biodiverse, and is important as a spawning and nursery ground for various fish species. The main channel of the Swale Estuary contains several important seabed habitats, such as sand and sediments. Coarse sediment here is home to animals such as bristleworms, sand mason worms, small shrimp-like animals, burrowing anemones, and cockles. Sand on the seabed may, as first glance, appear desert like, but close inspection can reveal fish camouflaged on the surface of the sand, and worms living within it. Protecting these habitats will complement the protected areas in the shallower waters of the estuary, which are protected under different legislation as both a Site of Special Scientific Interest and as a Special Protection Area. Wetlands here are also protected under the international Ramsar convention.

Designation of this site as a Marine Conservation Zone protects the following features. You can find detailed explanations of each feature at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>.

Protected features	General management approach
Estuarine rocky habitats	Maintain in favourable condition
Low energy intertidal rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mixed sediments	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal coarse sediment	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal sand and muddy sand	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal coarse sediment	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal mixed sediments	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal sand	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal mud	Maintain in favourable condition

## Management of the site

Now that this site has been designated, some activities may need additional management. Activities and the management measures used to regulate them may need to change if new evidence becomes available.

Most marine activity is already regulated by the relevant regulatory bodies. There are existing byelaws, national laws and European Regulations which regulators use to manage fishing, coastal development, recreation and pollution. These also apply in MCZs.

Regulators will manage each site according to the features and activities in, or near, a specific area. Management measures will be implemented at sites most at risk of damage first, regulating only those activities which have a detrimental impact on the designated features. Any management measures that are required for MCZs will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Management in MCZs can take several different forms, from using existing licensing framework, specific byelaws and orders or an EU Regulation for a site. There has to be public consultation on permanent byelaws and orders. For activities that already need a marine licence, regulators consider the MCZ in their decision as soon as the site is consulted on. Find out more about marine licensing in MCZs at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-mczs-and-marine-licensing>.

## Regulators

This table lists the authorities responsible for MCZs and the activities they manage.

Lead regulator	What it manages
<b>Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs)</b> <a href="http://www.association-ifca.org.uk">http://www.association-ifca.org.uk</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fisheries in the inshore area (0-6 nautical miles (nm)) including commercial fisheries and recreational sea angling</li> </ul>
<b>Marine Management Organisation (MMO)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/marine-management-organisation</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fisheries in the 6-12nm area</li> <li>Fisheries: enforcement of national and EU legislation</li> <li>Licensable activities such as dredging and disposal of dredged material, removal of gravel below mean high water springs, subsea cables (up to 12nm), construction (including renewables below 100MW generating capacity, ports and coastal protection)</li> <li>Harbour Orders and Harbour Empowerment Orders</li> <li>Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 and safety zones for offshore renewable energy installations consents</li> <li>Enforcement of licensable activity and other consents (including deemed marine licences)</li> <li>Development of marine plans</li> <li>Activities requiring a wildlife licence</li> </ul>
<b>Environment Agency (EA)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fisheries for migratory and freshwater fish</li> <li>Coastal protection and flood management</li> <li>Water quality</li> <li>Permitted discharges from terrestrial sources</li> </ul>
<b>Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oil and gas related activities</li> <li>Renewable energy related activities</li> </ul>
<b>Harbour Authorities and local planning authorities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for the port and coastal waters within their jurisdiction</li> <li>Local authorities manage activities at the coast. These include coastal recreation, tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection and planning on coasts and estuaries. For further information contact your local authority or IFCA</li> </ul>
<b>Department for Transport (DfT)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ports, shipping, harbours, ship pollution and offshore safety</li> </ul>
<b>Natural England (NE)</b> <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england">https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public access</li> </ul>

## Further information

Read about government policy on MCZs at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/marine-environment>

See Natural England's advice on MCZs at:

<http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/4594304593952768>



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