

## Marine Conservation Society media statement 28.02.2023

### **New Highly Protected Marine Areas need to stretch further**

Today, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023, the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) have announced three new Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs); Allonby Bay (Irish Sea), Dolphin Head (The Channel) and north-east of Farnes Deep (northern North Sea).

The [Marine Conservation Society](#) welcomes the announcement of the establishment of HPMAs in English waters. Protecting these sites will enable nature to fully recover by removing all harmful activities including fishing, construction and dredging, creating a haven for marine life.

However, these sites represent less than 0.5% of English seas, and the latest announcement needs to go further in responding to the climate and nature crises. Two of the originally proposed five sites have been dropped from designation.

**Dr Jean-Luc Solandt, Principal Specialist, Marine Protected Areas at the Marine Conservation Society** said, "Our marine habitats must be given the opportunity to recover and provide the maximum benefits to us – including biodiversity restoration, carbon storage and supporting fisheries recovery. The UK Government cannot continue to under achieve and must show much greater ambition and initiative to build a network of HPMAs – or No Take Zones – covering at least 10% of English seas by 2030 to allow our seas to thrive."

The proposed sites at Lindisfarne and Inner Silver Pit South have not been designated, with Defra citing 'socio-economic impacts' as the reason. This shows the need for meaningful stakeholder engagement and consultation when designating HPMAs. Local communities must be involved.

In addition, the full range of benefits that we could get from our marine environment need to be properly valued – including biodiversity, carbon storage, food, energy and flood defence. The Office for National Statistics has estimated that the UK's marine natural capital assets are worth £211bn. To maximise the incredible benefits that we can get from our seas, they must be protected to recover and flourish.

Designation of the three new sites is a positive step in protecting our seas, however, the UK Government must deliver on statements made on the world stage and drive action at home towards a healthier, more productive ocean.

The Marine Conservation Society continues working with UK Government and others, including coastal communities, to achieve at least 10% of English seas as HPMAs by 2030, and there is precedent in the UK – the Scottish Government has already committed to designating at least 10% of Scotland's marine area as HPMAs by 2026.

Ends

## **Notes to editors**

In 2010, through Aichi Target 11, parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) agreed to protect 10% of their waters by 2020. On paper, the UK Government has established MPAs in approximately 42% of English waters. Most of what has been designated previously (SPAs, SACs and MCZs) is, however, only partially protected- with potentially damaging activities still able to continue within the boundary of the designations.

It should be noted that if the area protected for mobile species (sea birds, marine mammals) is removed from the total, the proportion of English seas protected for seabed habitats falls to approximately 25%.

Current research indicates 30% of a nation's waters should be protected, England is not meeting this target, particularly when it is realised that the 10% CBD target was based on a scientific understanding that the designation would provide full protection i.e. no extractive or destructive activities such as fishing with bottom towed gear, dredging, placement of structures, etc. would be allowed in order to protect marine natural resources provided by habitats and species.

HPMAs represent a positive step towards what are internationally known as fully protected MPAs, but the initially proposed sites represented less than 0.5% of English Waters.

In Scotland, the Marine Conservation Society are currently helping harness public support for the Scottish Government commitment to designate at least 10% of Scotland's waters as HPMAs by 2026, a world-leading commitment. <https://scotlink.eaction.online/oceanrecovery>

Full Defra press release: [Highly Protected Marine Areas to be designated in English waters - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/highly-protected-marine-areas-to-be-designated-in-english-waters)

Reference: [Marine accounts, natural capital, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/indicators/indicatorsdetail/mar01)

The [Marine Conservation Society](https://www.marineconservation.org/) is the UK's leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with government, industry and education, to take action to restore and protect the marine environment.

## **Press Contact**

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