

Natural England Board

Meeting 8
12 December 2007



Paper No: **NEB PU08 07**

Title: **Natural England's Draft Policy on Marine Protected Areas**

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1. Purpose

1.1. This paper presents a draft policy on Marine Protected Areas for Natural England.

2. Recommendation

2.1. It is recommended that the Board agree this draft policy.

3. Context

3.1. Strategic Direction identifies as a key target the establishment of a coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) by 2012. This objective is expected to be endorsed in the forthcoming Marine Bill. The recommended position has been discussed by Board Outcome Group 1. The position proposed is in line with the evidence base and builds upon international best practice, and should be viewed in conjunction with our work on the sustainable use of the wider seas.

3.2. The policy drivers for establishing a network of MPAs in the UK include:

- the Convention on Biological Diversity ("by 2012 ...a global network of comprehensive, representative, effectively managed national and regional protected area systems");
- the World Summit on Sustainable Development ("to establish marine protected areas consistent with international law and based on scientific information, including representative networks, by 2012 "); and
- the OSPAR regional seas convention (to establish by 2010 "an ecologically coherent network of well managed marine protected areas").

3.3. Statutory mechanisms already exist for the designation of MPAs in UK waters. These are: Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, and Marine Nature Reserves under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. The forthcoming Marine Bill will provide a mechanism to designate a network of additional MPAs¹ for nationally and internationally important habitats and species not covered by

¹ Termed MCZs (Marine Conservation Zones)

these existing mechanisms, and also to allow greater levels of protection depending on the specific conservation objectives.

4. Principles

4.1. England's seas are some of the most highly productive in the world, and yet a growing series of scientific and Government reports indicate a significant decline in the quality of our marine environment. Damaging human activities have progressively led to:

- destruction of seafloor habitat and the removal of irreplaceable features;
- associated decreases in the diversity and abundance of marine species;
- marked decreases in the average size of fish; and
- impairment of the reproductive potential of some marine species.

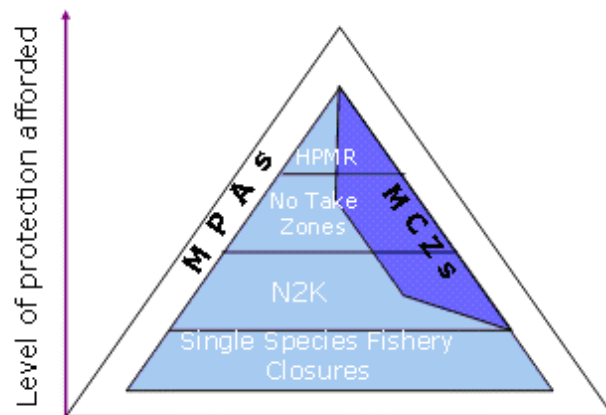
4.2. In light of this, the draft Policy is based on the following principles:

- existing designations have contributed towards improving the health of some marine areas;
- they provide limited levels of protection and there are significant gaps in their coverage;
- an ecologically coherent MPA network is required to allow adequate space for biological communities and habitats to recover from exploitation, to maintain healthy ecosystems and to support the sustainable use of marine resources in the wider environment;
- representative examples of all marine biodiversity should be protected;
- MPAs need to be large enough to encompass the home ranges of the majority of species of interest, or be connected along larval dispersal pathways.

5. Natural England's Draft Policy

- Natural England believes that a well managed MPA network is fundamental to the recovery and conservation of both biodiversity and ecological processes, and will make an essential contribution to sustaining wider marine ecosystem health. An MPA network is essential to ensure that healthy ecosystems have the capacity and resilience to adapt to ongoing climate change.
- Natural England believes that there will be benefits to the intrinsic biodiversity and the range of goods and services that the marine environment provides, through providing this level of protection to the wider marine ecosystem.
- Natural England believes that MPAs can also provide opportunities for people to experience and enjoy a healthy marine environment and ultimately instil a sense of stewardship.

- The network will contribute to the protection of national and international rare and threatened habitats and species, as well as protecting the full range of biodiversity.
- Highly Protected Marine Reserves should be part of the MPA 'family'; they are essential for long-term monitoring, benchmarking, and to act as control areas that remain unaffected by direct human activities.
- Natural England believes that stakeholders should be involved throughout the process of MPA selection and management. Their involvement is key to securing effective ownership, integrating socio-economic interests and facilitating subsequent management and enforcement.
- For the network and individual MPAs to deliver their objectives, this will require clear conservation objectives, and comprehensive monitoring of activities and site condition; the results of which may require subsequent changes in management practice.
- Natural England believes that for the MPA network to be effective it needs to be representative, replicated, connected, permanent and of sufficient size to meet the ecological requirements of species. Decision-making should be based on the best available information, but where such information is lacking, the network should be designed and managed using the precautionary approach, taking into account successful policies and practices adopted elsewhere.



Schematic depicting the MPA “family”.

Our existing suite of MPAs are predominantly Natura 2000 sites (SACs & SPAs). In the future Marine Conservation Zones (to be implemented by the Marine Bill) will bring new sites and potentially additional levels of protection to existing Natura 2000 sites where they overlap.

- MPA = Marine Protected Areas
- MCZ = Marine Conservation Zones
- HPMR = Highly Protected Marine Reserves
- N2K = Natura Two Thousand
(SACs = Special Areas of Conservation)
(SPAs = Special Protected Areas)