BalancedSeas

Delivering Marine Conservation Zones in the South-East

Final Recommendations - Summary

Summer 2011

Balanced Seas was a short-term stakeholder-led collaborative project working to recommend Marine Conservation Zones around south-east England. Marine Conservation Zones will be set up under the Marine and Coastal Access Act of 2009 to protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology.

Regional Stakeholder Group

SECTOR	
Leisure	
diving	Jane Maddocks, BSAC
yachting	Paul Rayner, RYA
canoeing	Kevin East, Canoe England
kite surfing	Jude Merchant, British Kite Surfing Association
recreational sea angling	Tony Hills
Marine Ecology/Conservation	
birds	Alison Giacomelli, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Wildlife Trusts	Jolyon Chesworth, Hampshire Wildlife Trust
marine ecology	Bryony Chapman, Seasearch
marine wildlife	Jean-Luc Solandt, Marine Conservation Society
Statutory Nature Conservation	Amy Ridgeway, Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Statutory Nature Conservation	Lisa Jenner, Natural England
Livelihoods	
ports	Iain Johnston, Major Ports Group (UKMPG) and the British Ports Association (BPA)
shipping	Adrian Lester, Chamber of Shipping
aggregates	Mark Russell, BMAPA
marine leisure industry	Brian Clark, British Marine Federation
inshore and offshore fishing industry	Ted Legg
New Under 10'S Fishing Association	Paul Joy, NUTFA
inshore fishing industry	Paul Gilson
inshore trawling industry	Alan Griggs
shellfisheries	Richard Haward, Shellfish Association of Great Britain
fish producer organisations	Keith Schofield/Bill Brock, SWFPO, NFFO
offshore renewable	Rachel Blackie, EoN (on behalf of BWEA)
charter boats	David Hancock, Professional Boatman's Association
Regulatory	
Public Authority	Kate Potter, Environment Agency
IFCA	Joss Wiggins, Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
IFCA	Justine Jury, Southern Sea Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
IFCA	Robert Clark, Sussex Sea Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
IFCA	Judith Stoutt, Eastern Sea Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Public Authority	Paul Johnson, Marine Management Organisation
Other	
Defence	Susie Norbury, Ministry of Defence
Heritage and Archaeology	Dominique De Moulins, English Heritage
Owners	David Tudor, Crown Estate
Local Authorities	Roger Thomas, Coastal Special Interest Group / East Sussex County Council

Regional Stakeholder Group

In order to make the recommendations for Marine Conservation Zones, four regional projects were set up by Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Balanced Seas covers the inshore and offshore waters of the Eastern Channel and adjacent areas. The other projects cover the south-west (Finding Sanctuary, www.finding–sanctuary.org), the Irish Sea (Irish Sea Conservation Zones, www.irishseaconservation.org.uk) and the North Sea (Net Gain, www.netgainmcz.org). With the completion of the recommendations, the projects are winding down. The Balanced Seas Project reports are accessible via www.balancedseas.org.

A thank you to our stakeholders

This brochure summarises the final recommendations for Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) developed by the Balanced Seas Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) and submitted to Natural England, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the Science Advisory Panel (SAP) on 6 September 2011. It represents an astonishing amount of work over a challenging timescale by a huge number of people.

In less than two years, we held 50 facilitated RSG and Local Group meetings. These involved over 100 active sector representatives who gave many hours of their time – often voluntarily – to attend meetings, provide information, review reports and work with the project team. The project was supported by hundreds of other individuals and organisations who provided their views and contributed to the amassing of one of the largest collections of ecological and socio-economic information and data sources for the seas of south-east England.

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to all those involved. The recommendations broadly meet all the criteria and principles laid out in the Ecological Network Guidance (ENG) and provide a sound basis for taking the process forward. Stakeholders should be proud of their contribution to this new approach to protected area identification.

As the first phase in the process to establish MCZs, the recommendations are indeed only recommendations. The Impact Assessment is still being worked on. Natural England, the SAP and JNCC will all provide their own advice on the recommendations. Next year will see a three month public consultation on those sites that the Minister decides to put forward at that stage.

Please look at the full report available at www.balancedseas.org Do stay involved in the process, through the public consultation and other opportunities as they arise.

Sue Wells
Project Manager – Balanced Seas

The Balanced Seas final report contains the recommendations in full, including:

- A summary of the process used to identify the recommended sites and draft conservation objectives, and description of how stakeholders have been involved.
- Existing Marine Protected Areas in the project area.
- Site descriptions of the recommended Marine Conservation Zones (rMCZ) and recommended Reference Areas (rRA).
- Analysis of the extent to which the recommendations meet JNCC and Natural England's Ecological Network Guidance (ENG).
- Draft conservation objectives for each site.
- Information on the extent to which stakeholders support the recommended sites, and any issues and concerns.
- Information on the evidence used to support the recommendations.

"An interesting social experiment... But also a rewarding one, in that it has broken down barriers between the sectors and interests that have participated, and I think that everyone has a far better understanding of other interests hopes and fears. This more than anything else is the legacy of the process – getting people from different backgrounds and interest groups to engage and work constructively with one another in response to a common challenge."

Mark Russell, Regional Stakeholder Group Member, aggregates sector, British Marine Aggregate Producers Association (BMAPA)

Sea Grass
Paul Kay

Recommended Marine Conservation Zones for South-East England

The Marine and Coastal Access Act enables the creation of a new type of Marine Protected Area, called a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The purpose of MCZs is to protect nationally important marine wildlife, geology and geomorphology. Sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but the full range of marine wildlife.

There are already a number of Marine Protected Areas in the UK such as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protected Areas. Together with these other Marine Protected Areas, Marine Conservation Zones will deliver the Government's aim for an 'ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas'. This means the Marine Protected Area network will be a collection of sites that work together to provide more benefits than an individual site could on its own.

In the Balanced Seas region, the recommended Marine Protected Areas network is presented as two options, since the RSG have put forward two configurations of one particular site (rMCZ 29 and rMCZ 29.2) where there was divided support amongst sector representatives for recommending only one of the sites. Each option comprises the recommended MCZs and recommended Reference Areas, as well as all existing protected areas (SACs, pSACs, SPAs, SSSIs and Ramsar sites).

A total of 31 sites have been put forward as rMCZs, one of which is a rRA lying within an existing Marine Protected Area. 23 of the rMCZs lie predominantly in inshore waters (i.e. within six nautical miles) with nine falling within major estuarine complexes, and seven lie further offshore.

Recommended Marine Conservation Zones

Map 1	
2	Stour and Orwell
3	Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries
30	Kentish Knock East
Map 2	
5	Thames Estuary
6	Medway Estuary
10	Swale Estuary
Map 3	
7	Thanet Coast
8	Goodwin Sands
9	Offshore Foreland
11.1	Dover to Deal
11.2	Dover to Folkestone
11.4	Folkestone Pomerania
26	Hythe Bay
Map 4	
13.1	Beachy Head East
13.2	Beachy Head West
29 option	East Meridian
29.2 option	East Meridian (Eastern Side)
31	Inner Bank
Map 5	
14	Offshore Brighton
16	Kingmere
17	Offshore Overfalls
19	Norris to Ryde
20	The Needles
21	Wight-Barfleur Extension
22	Bembridge
23	Yarmouth to Cowes
24.2	Fareham Creek
25.1	Pagham Harbour
25.2	Selsey Bill and the Hounds
28	Utopia

"I recognise the huge amount of work the stakeholders have all personally contributed and I believe that this is the right process to produce an outcome which is both credible and workable. I want this process to be part of a wider vision to make our seas healthier for future generations. Through careful management, our seas can continue to be an invaluable sustainable resource of benefit to us all. I want to thank all those who have been involved in this process and look forward to seeing their recommendations later this year."

Richard Benyon, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, visit to Balanced Seas Regional Stakeholder Group 6 July 2011

Plaice
Paul Kay

Statement from Balanced Seas Regional Stakeholder Group

The following statement from the members of the Balanced Seas Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) accompanies the recommendations. The RSG believes these points need to be taken into account by Defra and the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies (SNCBs) as the Marine Conservation Zone process continues:

1. The network of rMCZs for the Balanced Seas region is the best that could have been developed by the stakeholders involved and the project team supporting them, given the considerable constraints on time, data and timely guidance.

2. Any SNCB changes to the network, sites, vulnerability assessment, draft conservation objectives or potential management measures should be communicated back to both regional and local stakeholders who should be given an opportunity to comment. Many of the stakeholder judgments relating to activities and/or sites are based on assumptions and strong caveats as a consequence of time constraints.

3. Stakeholder relationships need to be maintained for the success of any resulting MCZ network. The stakeholder groups have developed a capacity for dialogue, cohesion, focus and sharing of knowledge that has overcome sectoral and parochial positioning which should not be lost.

4. The transition process from regional to national once the projects ending must be clear, so that stakeholders fully understand their future role and the realistic opportunities for influence.

5. Recognising that marine planning is an important process, it must not be viewed as the answer to future stakeholder engagement for the development and implementation of the MCZ network. The MCZ related needs are very much more immediate than the stepped process envisaged for marine planning.

6. Resources for co-ordinating and delivering engagement must be urgently and consistently provided to both the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities and the Marine Management Organisation to ensure on-going stakeholder management in the next stages of MCZ development and the subsequent successful management of designated MCZs.

What will Marine Conservation Zones protect?

Details of the species and habitats to be protected in MCZs are given in the Ecological Network Guidance (ENG). They include:

Broad-scale Habitats
Given the great variety of species and habitats in UK seas, we must use a practical and biologically meaningful method to represent the entire range of habitats within the Marine Protected Area network. This can be done by classifying habitats at a broad-scale in such a way that they represent the finer-scale biodiversity within them. The ENG lists 23 broad-scale habitats, of which 22 occur in the Balanced Seas project area.

Habitats and Species of Conservation Importance
These are species or habitats that are rare or threatened, either because there are very few individuals remaining, or because there are only a limited number of locations in the UK where those species exist. These are called 'Features of Conservation Importance' or FOCI. The ENG lists 25 habitats and 32 species FOCI. Of these 17 species FOCI and 14 habitat FOCI are found in the Balanced Seas project area.

Nursery and spawning grounds for fish, bird foraging areas and other features of conservation importance provide supporting evidence for many of the recommended Marine Conservation Zones.

The Marine Protected Area network as a whole must protect the full range of species and habitats listed, but this does not mean that MCZs must be designated for each of them. Some species may already be protected in existing Marine Protected Areas, and in many cases a single MCZ may contain several features.

Marine Protected Area Network criteria and targets

The ENG includes a number of principles and criteria that the recommended network must meet. The majority of these have been met for the Balanced Seas region. For example:

- **Replication** (number of examples of a feature to be protected – at least two for broad-scale habitats; three to five for species and habitats FOCI): targets met for all broad-scale habitats, 16 out of the 17 habitat FOCI and 12 out of the 14 species FOCI
- **Adequacy** (proportion of area of each broad-scale habitat to be protected): targets met
- **Biogeographic representativity** (protection in both the Southern North Sea and the Eastern English Channel Regional Seas): targets met for all broad-scale habitats
- **Viability** (size of rMCZ): targets met in all but two rMCZs, recognising that in several cases the size of an rMCZ is constrained by the ecological characteristics of the feature being protected, or the geography of the coastline (e.g. estuaries)
- **Geological and geomorphological features** - five of the ten areas listed in the ENG are included

Why do we need to protect marine wildlife?

Marine animals and plants are part of the biological diversity - or biodiversity - of the planet. Marine wildlife is a fundamental part of a healthy environment which is crucial for the functioning of many services we take for granted, such as oxygen, food, medicine, and economic opportunity. The marine environment supplies all of these services and many more, but is often overlooked as it is inaccessible and hidden from view.

There is a wealth of life teeming beneath the surface of estuaries, coastal seas and oceans that we use directly or indirectly every day. Every species, including us, within an ecosystem, contributes to the system as a whole allowing it to continue and thrive. If we weaken the system by reducing its diversity, the more likely it is to collapse, like a house of cards: you can remove a few cards without damage but remove too many and the structure collapses.

"The seas around the south-east host a huge diversity of habitats and species, many more than people might realise when just stood on the shore. I enjoy getting out there and discovering it, visiting new places, diving in new sites and seeing first hand what lies beneath the waves. The chance to use this information to help protect our seas, through processes such as Balanced Seas, is very satisfying."

Jolyon Chesworth, Regional Stakeholder Group member (wildlife sector) and Wildlife Trusts South East Marine Conservation Manager

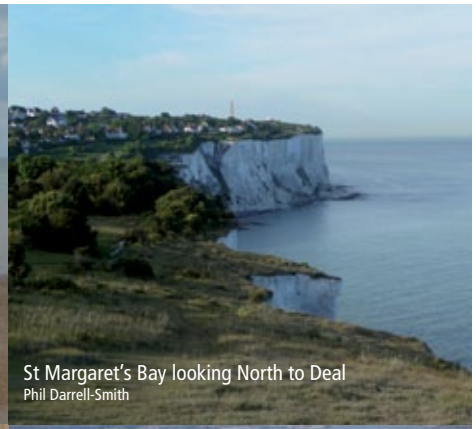
Stalked Jellyfish, Bembridge,
Jolyon Chesworth

What will a Marine Conservation Zone mean to me?

The management required in MCZs will be identified on a site-by-site basis, in consultation with the users of the area. Activities in an MCZ will only be restricted if they damage or disturb the designated species or habitats. Many activities will be able to continue. There will be no blanket bans except in the smaller Reference Areas. (see adjacent page for details).

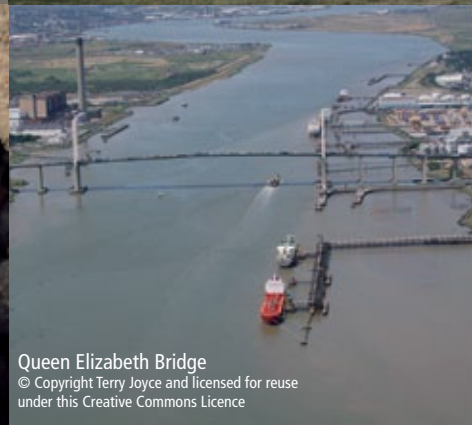
The RSG and Local Groups have identified some potential management options that are documented as part of the recommendation for each site. Relevant public authorities, such as the Marine Management Organisation, the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, the Environment Agency, Local Authorities and port and harbour authorities have provided advice. These bodies will take this process forward, once decisions have been made about which sites will be designated. They have noted a strong preference to use Voluntary Codes of Conduct and other user agreements, rather than regulatory measures.

The Street, Whitstable
Phil Darrell-Smith



St Margaret's Bay looking North to Deal
Phil Darrell-Smith

Sabellaria and Actinothoe anemone at Folkestone Hole - Dave Wood, Wildlife Trusts



Queen Elizabeth Bridge

Recommended Reference Areas for South-East England

Reference Areas will be a different kind of MCZ managed so that the features within it that are protected will eventually acquire an 'unimpacted' or "reference" condition as close to a natural state as possible. The aim is that the condition of MCZs can then be compared to them, helping to show how well the protection measures within MCZs are working. Reference Areas are generally smaller than MCZs, ranging from 500x500m for most species and habitat FOCI, to 5 x 5 km for the broad-scale habitats.

No extractive or depositional activities would be allowed within Reference Areas. Other potentially disturbing or damaging activities would be permitted as long as measures are put in place to manage them and mitigate their impact. For example, watersports such as swimming and sailing, transit of vessels and maintenance and operation of existing structures would be able to continue if appropriately managed.

The Balanced Seas RSG has recommended 25 Reference Areas (rRAs). A Reference Area may lie within a larger MCZ or other marine protected area, or be designated as a standalone MCZ. 24 of the Balanced Seas rRAs are within rMCZs and one (St Catherine's Point West) is within an existing Marine Protected Area.

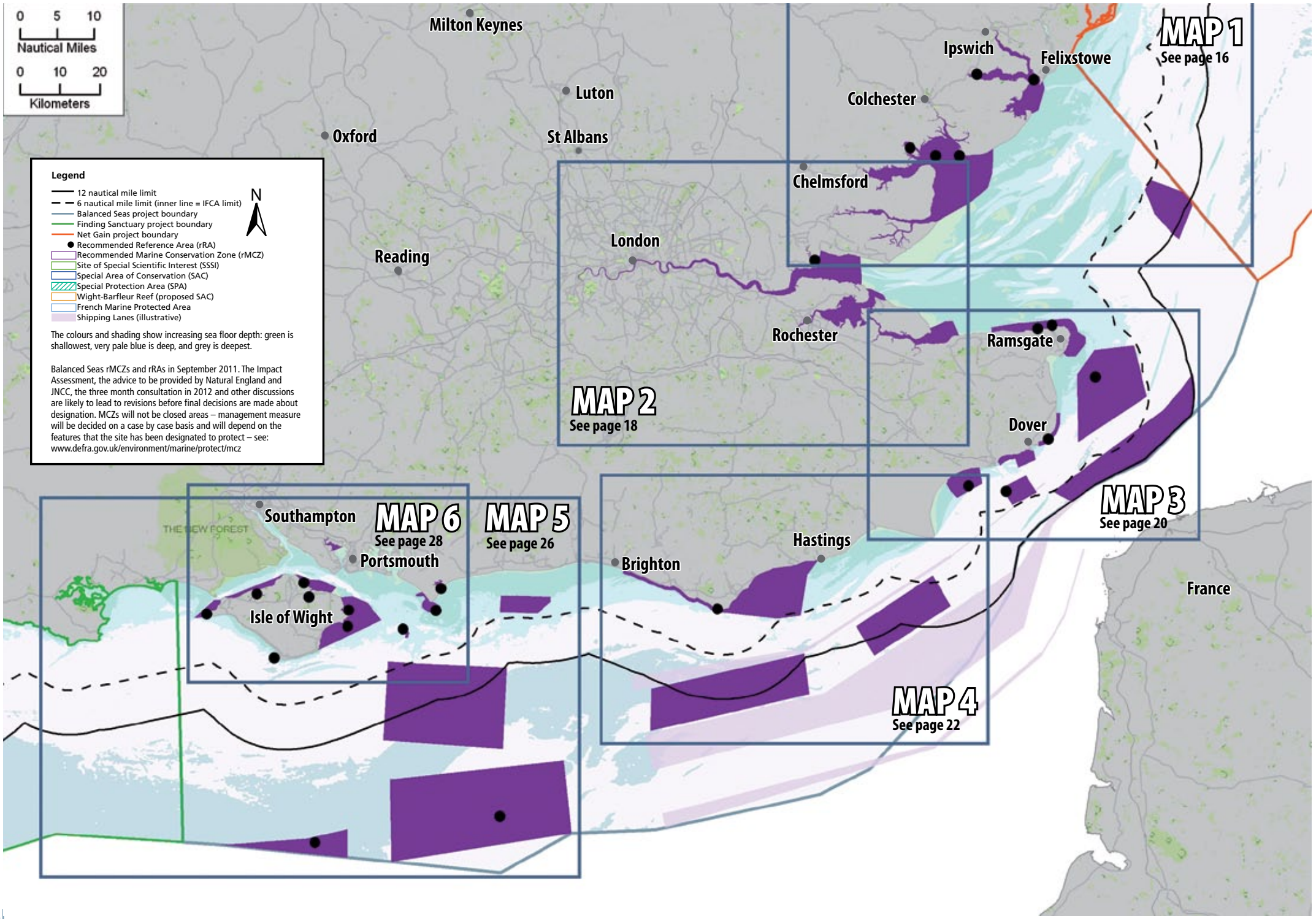
Each ENG feature (see page 8) should have at least one viable Reference Area. A single Reference Area may include more than one feature. 42 of the 45 ENG features found within the Balanced Seas project area occur within the 25 rRAs.

In the Balanced Seas region, the distribution of features is such that in some cases there are very limited options for choosing the locations of rRAs. Some of the recommendations that are appropriate on ecological grounds will need very careful assessment of their socio-economic implications before decisions are made about designation.

Recommended Reference Areas

Map 1	
1	Colne Point
2	South Mersea
22	North Mistley
23	Abbotts Hall Farm
24	Harwich Haven
Map 2	
3	Holehaven Creek
Map 3	
4	Westgate Promontory
5	Turner Contemporary
6	Goodwin Knoll
7	South Foreland Lighthouse
8	Hythe Flats
25	Flying Fortress
Map 4	
9	Belle Tout to Beachy Head Lighthouse
Map 5	
10	Dolphin Head
11	Church Norton Spit
12	Mixon Hole (Northern Slope)
13	North Utopia
14	Wight-Barfleur
15	Tyne Ledges
16	Wootton Old Mill Pond
17	King's Quay
18	St Catherine's Point West
19	Newtown Harbour
20	Stalked Jellyfish (within Alum Bay)
21	Culver Spit

RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS IN THE BALANCED SEAS PROJECT AREA (SEPTEMBER 2011)



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Map 1. South Suffolk and Essex

The coastline in the north of the project area is indented with estuaries, and the offshore waters are generally shallow. The Greater Thames Estuary rarely exceeds 10 metres in depth – drowned river valleys, filled with gravels and other sediments, extend out to sea marking the ancient course of the Thames. There are also large sandbanks and sandwaves, which are shaped by strong tidal currents some of which are exposed at low tide.

The Margate and Long Sands SAC, the Greater Thames Estuary SPA and some estuarine MPAs cover a large area but do not protect some of the key marine wildlife here. rMCZs have thus been proposed for the two estuarine complexes: the Blackwater, Colne, Roach and Crouch; and the Stour and Orwell. The former is famous for Native Oyster populations and is also the only place in the south-east where the tiny Lagoon Sea Slug occurs. An rMCZ here would be aimed at achieving sustainable management of the oyster fishery and to improve the attractiveness and health of this popular recreational area. The Kentish Knock area has been proposed to protect subtidal sand, one of the main habitat types in the Balanced Seas region.

Colne Estuary
Sue Wells

Map 2. Thames and North Kent

The seabed of the large estuaries of the Thames, Medway and Swale is composed of shells, pebbles, sands and muds. The Thames Estuary rMCZ stretches from the mouth of the river upstream to Richmond, where there is still a strong tidal influence. Different species and habitats would be protected along its length, including one of the largest populations of the rare Tentacled Lagoon Worm near Greenhithe, and nursery areas for smelt and eel further upstream.

Both the Thames and the Medway have immense economic importance for the ports sector and, if designated, would be managed in close collaboration with the Port of London Authority and Medway Ports. The Swale is a quiet, peaceful area, once vitally important for oyster and mussel fisheries. An MCZ here would provide another tool to help recover the health of this species rich area, benefiting the livelihoods of the landowners and oyster fisheries that depend on this area.

Map 3. East Kent

At Thanet, the coastline changes and chalk cliffs begin to dominate. Over 60% of Britain's chalk coastline is found in south-east England. Underwater, the chalk provides a hard surface for plants and animals to attach to, but is soft enough to provide a home for many burrowing animals. The Thanet cliffs are mirrored underwater by subtidal chalk ledges that provide homes for many species including two rare Stalked Jellyfish.

The seabed then starts to descend more steeply near shore, and the Dover Straits are 20-50 m deep. From Deal to Folkestone, the chalk ledges form an almost continuous reef, with gullies and boulders, much like coral reefs in tropical seas. This habitat supports rare species including Rossworm, which forms its own reef on top of the chalk, and dense aggregations of Blue Mussels at Copt Point. The offshore extension of rMCZ 11.2 covers an unusual rocky greensand area.

To the east, there are numerous offshore sandbanks, including the famous Goodwin Sands rMCZ 8, scattered with historic wrecks, and providing a haul out area for seals and an important bird feeding area. Offshore Foreland rMCZ 9, lying further east on the median line with France and Belgium, would also protect sand, as well as rocky habitat.

The two rMCZs in the western part lie over very unusual habitats. rMCZ 11.4 Folkestone Pomerania has large holes on the seabed, about 20 ft deep, the edges and slopes of the which are covered with an unusual community of fragile sponges and sea anemones; at the base of the holes, slow-growing Ross Corals and other animals are found on large boulders.

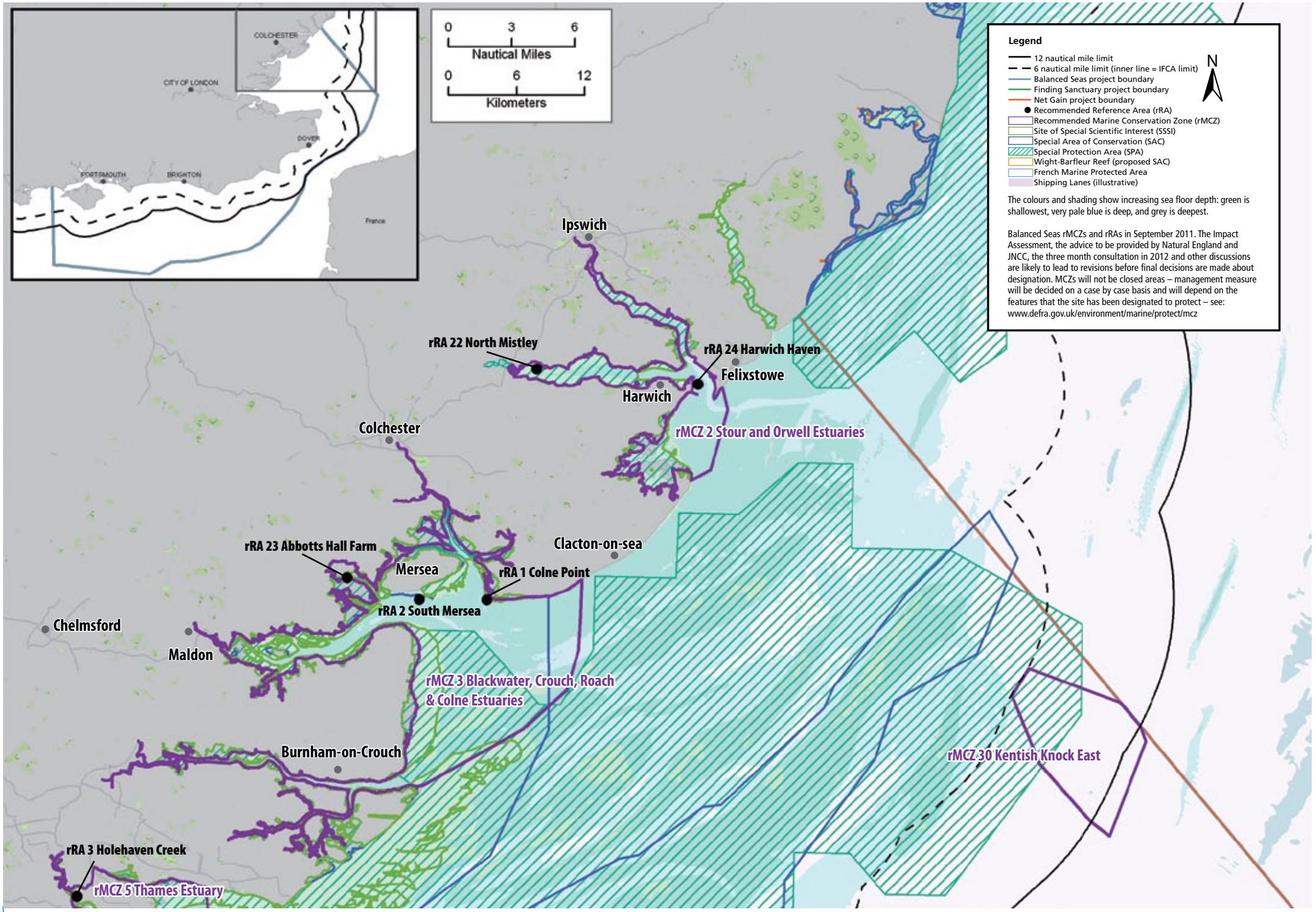
The seabed of rMCZ 26 is largely soft mud within which live an extraordinary burrowing community of rare spoonworms, shrimps and sea anemones.

Map 4. East Sussex

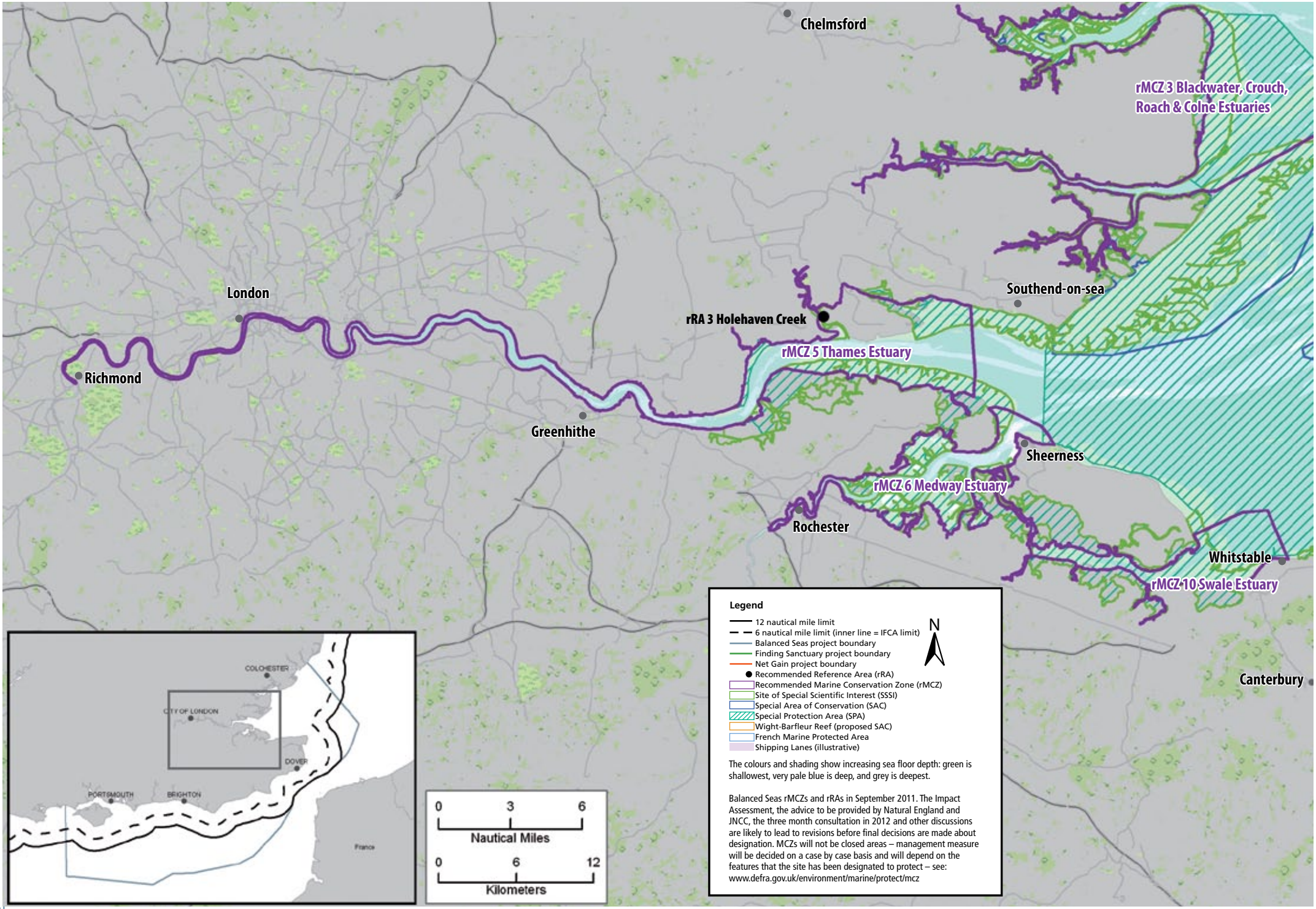
The Sussex coast has a gently shelving seabed, apart from at the headlands of Dungeness and Beachy Head, where there is deep water close inshore. At present the rich waters off the Seven Sisters, Beachy Head and around the Sovereign Shoals have no protection, apart from the Seven Sisters Voluntary Marine Conservation Areas which does not represent a formal designation. rMCZs 13.1 Beachy Head East and 13.2 Beachy Head West would help to rectify this. The former is designed to protect the well known Sovereign Shoals which consist of chalk and sandstone reefs, providing a home for abundant marine life. The latter rMCZ runs along the base of the Seven Sisters from Beachy Head to Brighton and is aimed at protecting some of the best examples of subtidal chalk gullies and ledges in the region, as well as two species of seahorse and a range of other species.

Two rMCZs have been proposed further offshore, both in the shipping lane where there are few activities that affect the seabed because of risk of collisions, to protect primarily rocky seabed (rMCZ 31 Inner Bank) and sands and gravels (rMCZ 29 East Meridian), and also part of the bed of the ancient river that once flowed between England and the continent. Two options have been put forward for East Meridian: the large area covered by the full rectangle on the map; and the smaller eastern half. From an ecological standpoint, the large area would be better. However, this part of the English Channel is very important for fishing and scalloping, and from an economic standpoint, the smaller eastern half would be preferable.

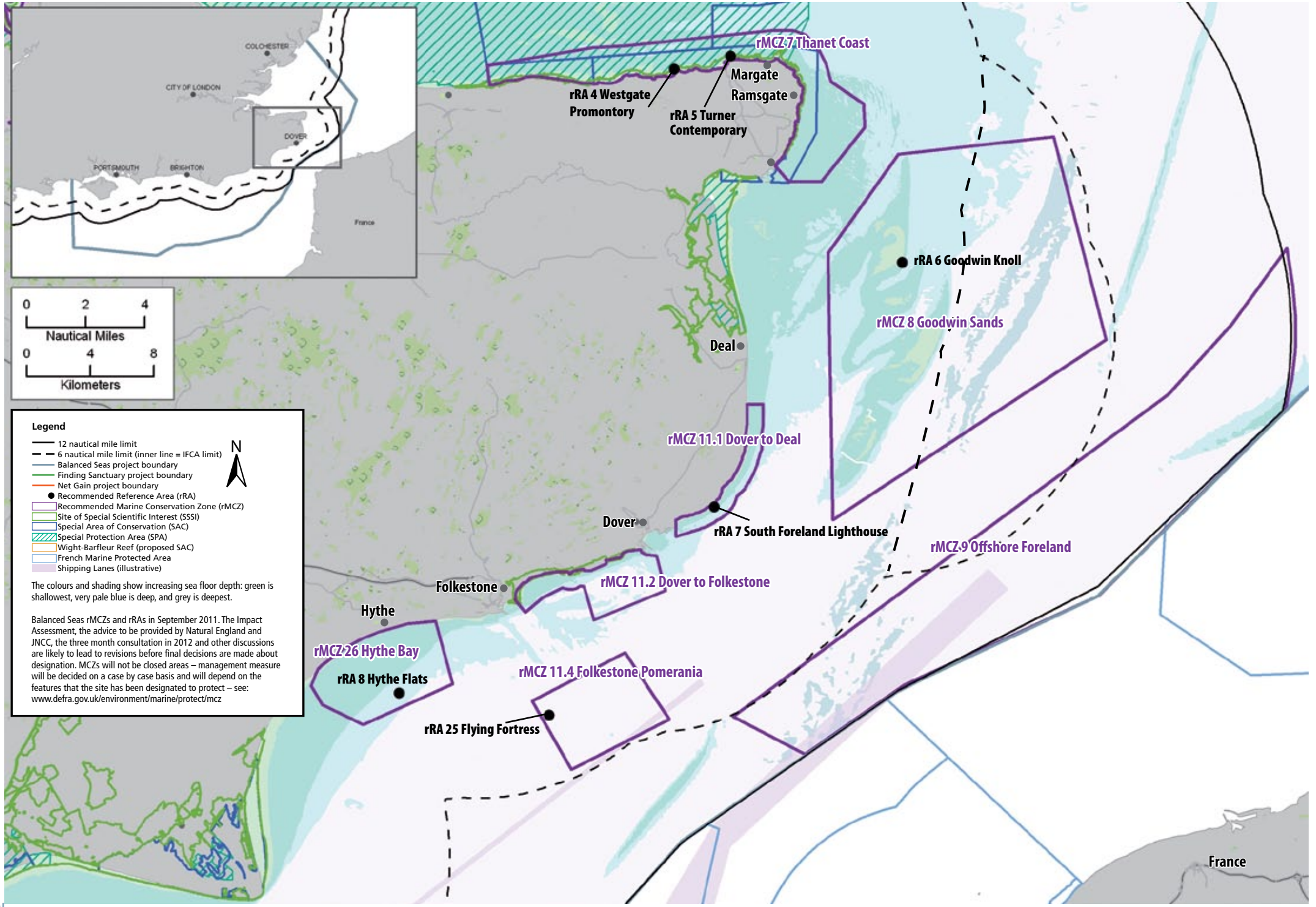
MAP 1 SOUTH SUFFOLK AND ESSEX RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



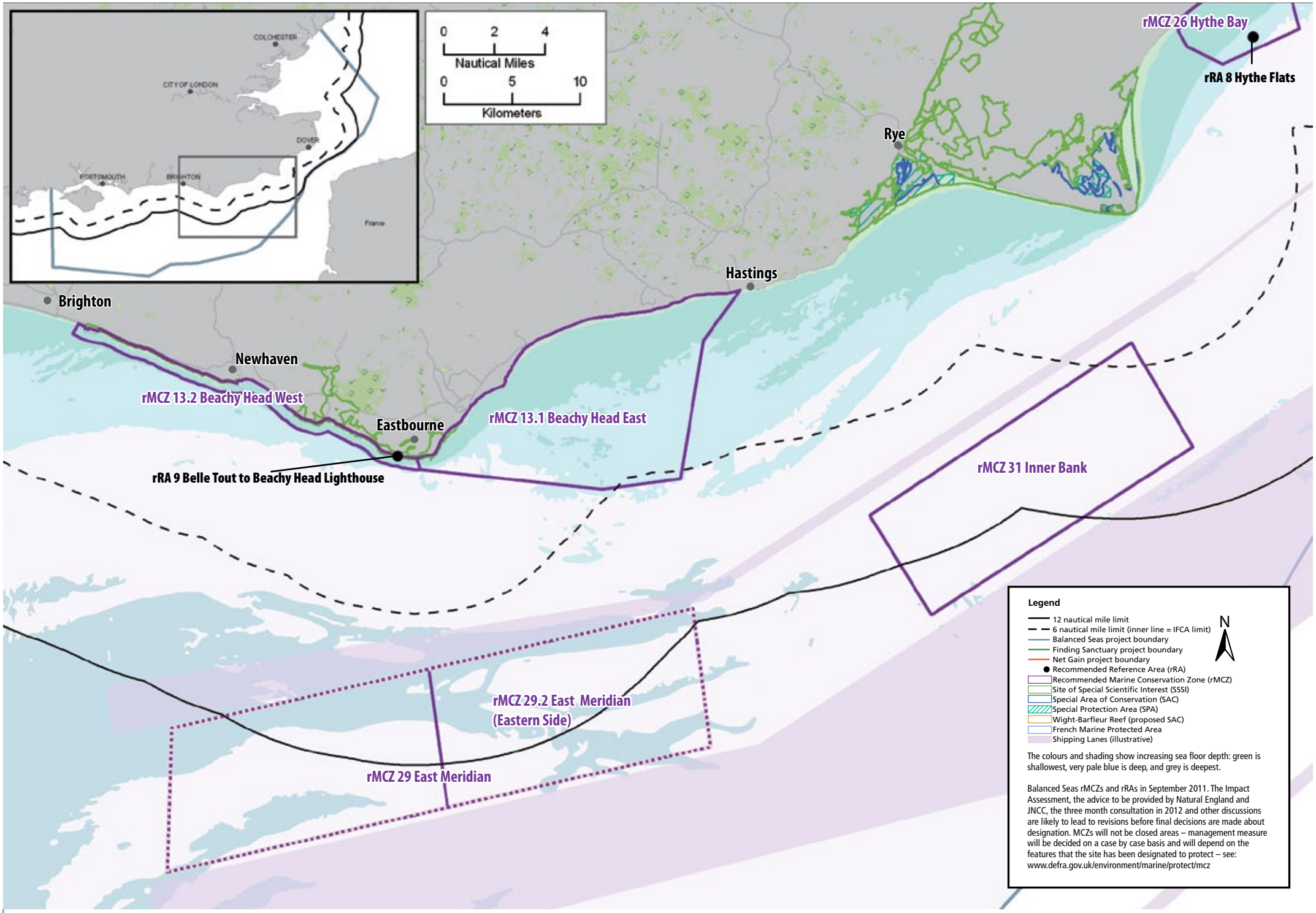
MAP 2 THAMES AND NORTH KENT RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



MAP 3 EAST KENT RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



MAP 4 EAST SUSSEX RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



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Map 5. West Sussex, Solent and offshore rMCZs

West of Brighton, the seabed consists of sands and gravels, with scattered sandstone and chalk rocky outcrops forming reef like features fairly close to shore. The rich wildlife makes these popular diving sites in the same way as coral reefs attract divers in tropical countries, and they are equally important for fishing. rMCZ 16 Kingmere Rocks is one such area, and provides ideal nesting sites for Black Bream. rMCZ 25.2 Selsey Bill and the Hounds is another well known rocky reef area, important for the potting fishery. It includes the famous Mixon Hole, thought to be a segment of an ancient river gorge, its near-vertical 20m cliff with numerous ledges and crevices providing home to a rich diversity of marine wildlife. rMCZ 25.1 Pagham Harbour is the only site where Defolin's Lagoon Snail occurs in the project area, and one of only three places where this species is found in the UK. It lives in the huge shingle bank that separates Pagham Harbour from the sea.

South of Selsey Bill is an extensive gravel bed. rMCZ 28 Utopia is a unique outcrop of rock with larger boulders, creating a reef-like feature that sticks up from the surrounding sediments east of Bembridge (Isle of Wight) and south-west of Selsey Bill. Discovered (and named) in 2005 by University of Southampton divers, it is proposed for protection of the rare and fragile sponges, colourful sea anemones and other marine invertebrates that grow over it profusely.

The large area surrounding and including the Overfalls to the south, rMCZ 17 Offshore Overfalls, consists of sand and gravel banks which are relict glacial deposits and provide sheltered habitat for many fish and other animals. The Overfalls itself, is an area of offshore sand and gravel banks in the northwest corner of the rMCZ which are unique geological features, and that are thought to have formed during a period of lower sea levels. They provide rich habitat for Sand Eels, Undulate Rays and Bass.

South of the Isle of Wight, the seabed drops to a gently sloping plain which is intersected by St Catherine's Deep, which reaches depths of some 85 m, the deepest part of the Balanced Seas project area. Further south, towards the median line, is an area of even more extensive gravel deposits, before the seabed drops to the deeper rocky part of the central English Channel. Two offshore rMCZs have been proposed here. rMCZ 21 Wight-Barfleur Extension has been proposed to cover part of a deep sub-marine channel, reaching down to 90m, with scour marks and landforms shaped by a torrent of water 400,000 years ago, that broke through the land bridge that once joined England to France. To the east, rMCZ 14 Offshore Brighton is important not only for both sands and sediments but also rarer deep water rocky habitats. This offshore site lies close to the median line with France, due south of Brighton. It is proposed for protection of three habitats, including deep water rock which is relatively rare in the Balanced Seas project area.

The Needles © Copyright Peter Trimming and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence

Map 6. Solent and Isle of Wight

The Solent, Isle of Wight and Hampshire coasts have a huge diversity of marine wildlife and habitats, ranging from the muddy sheltered bays of the Solent to the underwater chalk ledges and rocky outcrops of the Isle of Wight and the sandy and gravel seabed further out to sea. The Solent is an ancient river valley and is shallow with a maximum dredged depth of 15-20 m in the central channel, although off Hurst Spit in the west, strong tidal currents scour the channel to much greater depths.

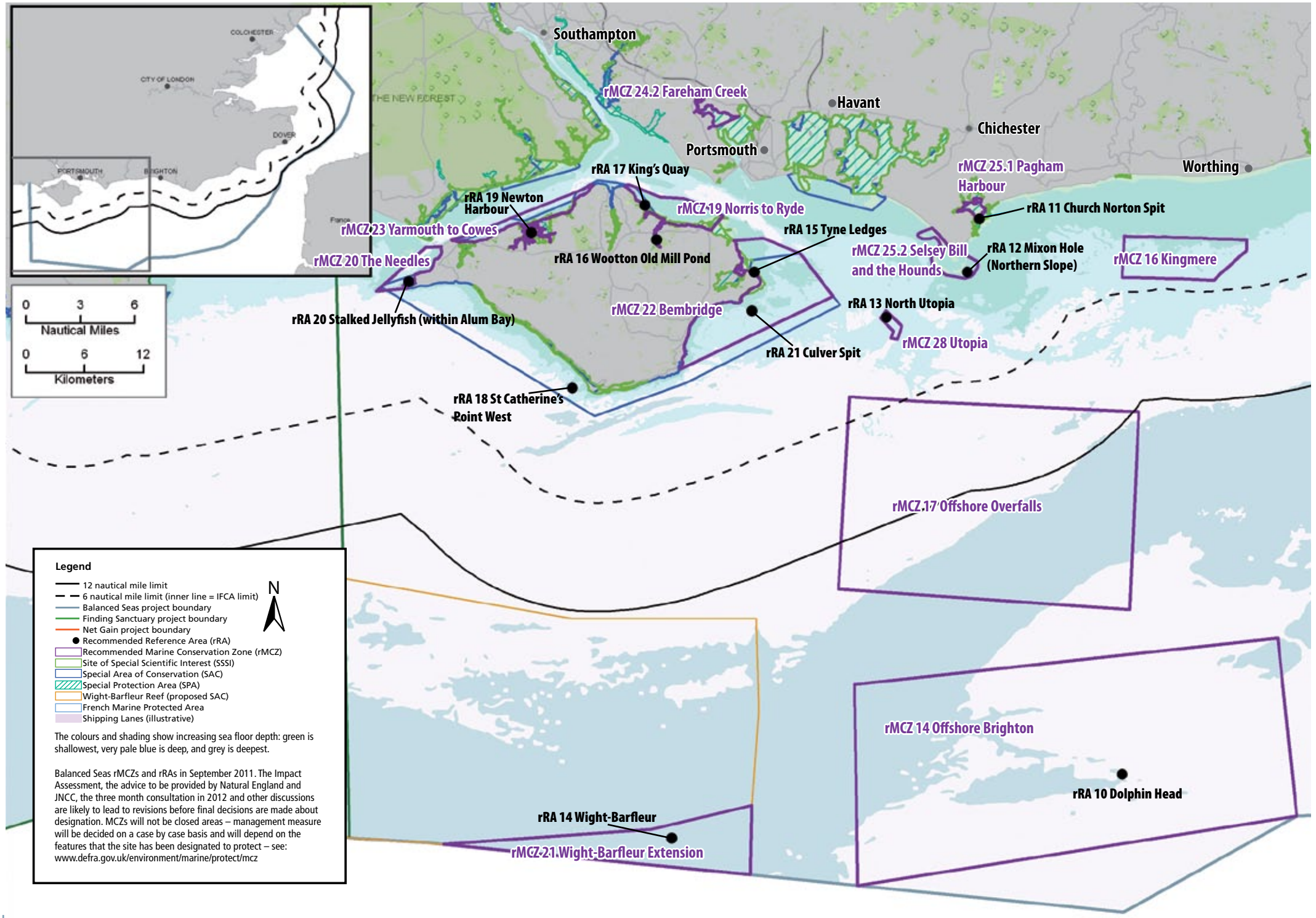
The marine wildlife of the Isle of Wight is particularly rich which has led to recommendations for MCZs in four areas here. rMCZ 19 Norris to Ryde contains some of the best seagrass beds in the Solent and a substantial area of undersea mud, rich in worms and bivalves. Wootton Old Mill Pond has an important population of the rare Tentacled Lagoon Worm, providing an additional replicate for the population in the Thames. Perhaps the most diverse of all the rMCZs proposed in the Balanced Seas area is that of Bembridge, rMCZ 22, where seagrass beds, rocky ledges and reefs provide particularly productive habitats for a large range of species, such as seahorses, lagoon worms, Stalked Jellyfish and rare seaweeds.

The famous landmark of the Needles, rMCZ 20, is rich in marine wildlife due to the mix of current-swept and sheltered seabed habitats. Rare species such as Stalked Jellyfish and Peacock's Tail seaweed, which is found only in the Isle of Wight, Dorset and Devon, occur here. rMCZ 23 Yarmouth to Cowes contains good examples of a variety of rocky outcrops, boulder beds and chalk formations that host rich communities of small burrowing animals, as well as the rare Lagoon Sand Shrimp. Newtown Creek contains important Native Oyster beds and Bouldnor Cliff is of significant geological interest for its fossilised trees and relic peat and clay formations.

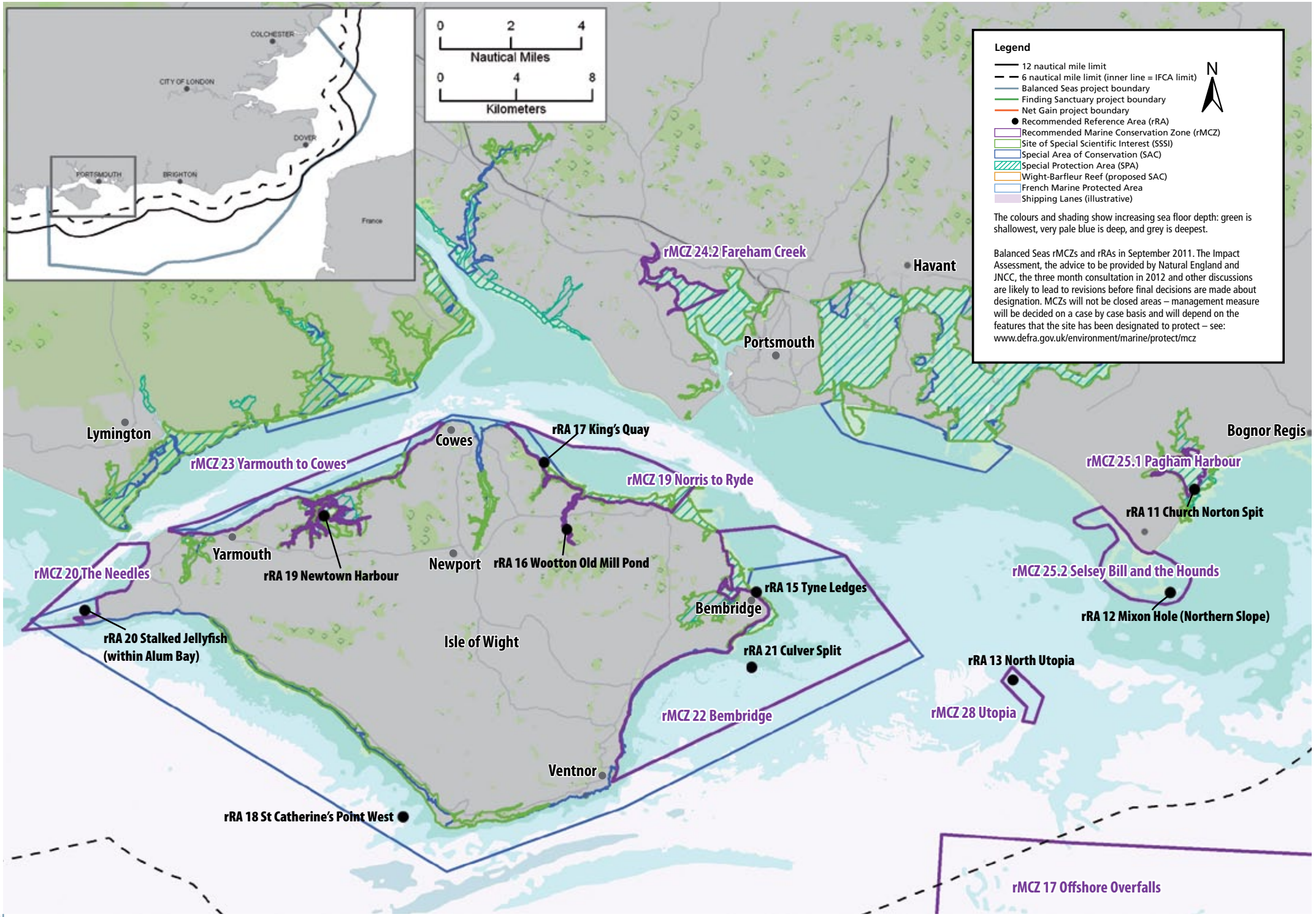
On the mainland, rMCZ 24.2 Fareham Creek in the north-west corner of Portsmouth Harbour has been proposed as it has a healthy bed of young Native Oyster beds; protection of this could contribute to the rejuvenation of the commercially important oyster fishery of the Solent, where harvests have been declining in recent years.

Wootton Creek © Copyright Graham Horn and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence

MAP 5 WEST SUSSEX, SOLENT AND OFFSHORE RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



MAP 6 SOLENT AND ISLE OF WIGHT RECOMMENDED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES AND RECOMMENDED REFERENCE AREAS



"These recommendations to Government for Marine Conservation Zones in the south-east are a major milestone in the quest for a secure legacy for our fantastic seas.

It is a huge credit to all the many stakeholders who have devoted copious time and energy to unlocking knowledge of the wildlife and activities going on above and beneath the surface, and to conclude as far as they are able to, their recommendations to balance the conservation benefits of Marine Conservation Zones with socio-economic activities."

Linda Davies, Balanced Seas Project Board Chair

Native Oyster
Paul Kay

How have the Marine Conservation Zone recommendations been made?

The MCZ recommendations were developed by the Balanced Seas RSG which has wide cross-sector representation (see inside front cover), with each member working on behalf of the interests of their sector.

It was supported by three Local Groups (Solent, Isle of Wight and Hampshire; Sussex and South Kent; Suffolk, Essex and Thames) acting in an advisory capacity. Their representation mirrored that on the RSG and their role was to provide local knowledge to the RSG on ecological and socio-economic aspects. Membership of the RSG and the Local Groups was decided through consensual agreement, using information and recommendations resulting from discussions and meetings with stakeholders.

Development of the recommendations involved 50 Balanced Seas stakeholder meetings, including introductory meetings to identify sectors for representation on the groups, the formal RSG and Local Group meetings and more local site specific meetings. These meetings were professionally facilitated, by a company engaged by Balanced Seas for the duration of the process.

International stakeholders (representatives of the Dutch, Belgian and French fishing industries) have taken part in the process in the south-east either by participating in meetings or through correspondence.

The project has built up a database of stakeholders who have been kept regularly informed about the project with newsletters and ebulletins. The website has been a key channel of communication. The general public have also been kept informed across the south-east with regular media releases, articles in key publications and presentations and displays about the project at events and other meetings.

Richard Benyon, Richard Harris and RSG 10

"All processes which attempt to help diverse groups achieve consensus result in the people involved learning - about the issues, themselves, other people and their views. This process has been no different - good progress and learning has been achieved and I think it points the way to successful implementation, but only if the conversation started in the Balanced Seas process is allowed to continue in some form."

Richard Harris, 3KQ, Director and Facilitator

What information has been used to develop the recommendations?

To help the RSG make informed recommendations, the project team has gathered as much data as possible on the location of habitats and species, and also on how the sea is used for both commercial and recreational purposes. This information has come from a wide range of national and local sources.

In order to gather information from those sectors for which there were little or no centralised or regional databases (i.e. commercial inshore fisheries and recreation) and to build local stakeholder understanding of the project, the Balanced Seas Liaison Officers carried out interviews using a methodology developed with and agreed by all four projects. In the Balanced Seas Project area, over 700 interviews were undertaken including 280 fishermen and nearly 440 water sports and recreational angling clubs and organisations, and private charter boats.

Leigh-on-Sea Fishing Festival

Next Steps

In the crowded waters of the south-east, all the sites recommended are in one way or another important to sea users. The Impact Assessment is thus vitally important. It will include:

- A site-specific analysis for each rMCZ and rRA
- A regional summary for the Balanced Seas project area
- A national cumulative Impact Assessment across all four regional projects

The Impact Assessment is being prepared by the project economist and will estimate the costs and benefits associated with the recommendations, including the costs of potential management measures. Impact assessments are required by Government to assess the likely costs and benefits and any associated risks of any proposed project that might have an impact on the public, or on private or civil society organisations. There will be a brief period for RSG members to review the regional and site specific Impact Assessments later in the year.

In the remainder of this year, Natural England, JNCC and the Science Advisory Panel will be assessing whether the recommendations together satisfy the Ecological Network Guidance (ENG) design criteria and principles, and highlighting any gaps or duplication. They will submit their statutory advice to Defra early next year.

Once the Impact Assessment and Natural England and JNCC's advice have been received, Ministers will consider the supporting evidence for, and the potential environmental, social and economic impacts of, the recommended sites before deciding which ones to take forward to the public consultation. This will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to review, comment and feedback to Government their views on the sites before designation decisions are made. The factors to be considered in reaching the Government's decisions will be made clear in the public consultation documentation.


Blackwater
Sue Wells


Blue mussel beds - Paul Kay


Kayaker - Paul Kay

Stay informed about the Marine Conservation Zone Project

Information about the national MCZ Project can be found at:

Defra - www.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/protect/mcz

JNCC - http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2409

Natural England - www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/marine

To receive updates on the ongoing process, sign up to the national MCZ newsletter by visiting http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2409

Email queries to the national MCZ Project: mczproject@jncc.gov.uk

The Marine Conservation Zone Project interactive map includes the information from all four regional projects' Final Recommendations Reports, showing the overall network configuration. Users can zoom in to areas of interest and see where the species and habitats of conservation importance are recorded. View the interactive map at: www.mczmapping.org

To view archived Balanced Seas regional project information and reports including the Final Recommendations Report, visit www.balancedseas.org

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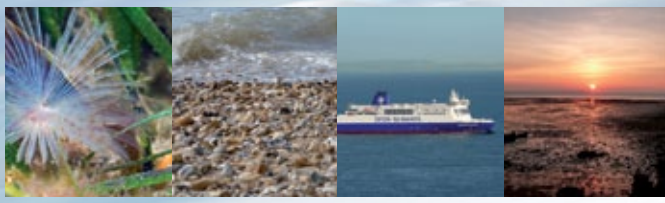

BalancedSeas
Delivering Marine Conservation Zones in the South-East

JNCC
Joint Nature Conservation Committee

NATURAL ENGLAND

Kent County Council

DICE
University of Kent

Photos: Front cover Left to right, Boat - Paul Kay, Stalked Jellyfish (Haliclystus auricula) on Seagrass blade (Zostera marina) - Paul Kay, Fisherman - Peter Wakely, Native Oyster - Paul Kay. Back cover, Peacock Worms in Sea grass - Paul Kay, Beach - Phil Darrell-Smith, St Margarets Bay Boat - Phil Darrell-Smith *Whitstable* - Phil Darrell-Smith