

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Marine Conservation Zone

Where is this site?

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries MCZ is located on the Essex coast. It extends from the mean high water mark to where the estuary mouths join the North Sea, and is the largest inshore MCZ covering an area of 284 km²



Mud flats near Mersea Island © L Jenner

Why is this site important?

The site protects one of the largest estuaries in the East of England and includes the Blackwater, the largest tidal river in Essex. There are already a number of designations within the area including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation and Mid Essex coast Special Protection Area.

These existing sites protect extensive areas of mudflats and saltmarsh, which support a wide range of species including internationally and nationally important numbers of waterfowl such as Brent Goose and Curlew. The MCZ will build upon these existing designations, by offering protection to features such as the native oyster which are not already protected.



Estuary at Tollesbury © Sue Wells

What does this Marine Conservation Zone protect?

The MCZ comprises the most important area for both wild and cultivated native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) in the south-east region. Where native oysters are found in large numbers they form beds made up of the oysters themselves and dead shells.

Many marine species such as sea snails, crabs and sea urchins live amongst these beds, with some using them as a place of shelter whereas others attach themselves to the surface.

Extensive oyster beds are found in the Crouch and Roach estuaries and throughout the Blackwater estuary. Oysters are susceptible to a range of threats including invasive species and overfishing.



The Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore is a geological feature of international importance which extends from the land into the subtidal area of the MCZ. It has been identified as one of the best Ice Age sites in Britain and contains an abundance of molluscan and mammalian fossil remains which were deposited during the interglacial periods. Part of the feature is already protected through other designations but the MCZ will offer protection to the marine extent of the feature.

Features	General management approach
Intertidal mixed sediments	Maintain in favourable condition
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>) beds	Recover to favourable condition
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Recover to favourable condition
Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore	Maintain in favourable condition

Who will manage Marine Conservation Zones?

Many activities within the marine environment are regulated through marine licences. More information regarding the marine licensing process in relation to MCZs can be found on the MMO website www.marinemangement.org.uk/licensing/marine.htm

Other activities are regulated through different mechanisms. For example fishing activities are managed through European legislation, national statutory instruments, byelaws and self-imposed voluntary agreements. Similar arrangements are in place to manage the range of activities that may impact MCZs including pollution, coastal development and recreation.

Management of sites is currently being prioritised nationally according to the potential or actual adverse impacts of activities on the features designated in relation to fishing activities. This prioritisation will be further refined at a local level taking into account relevant information and will guide regulators to those sites which may need protection before others.

Any management measures that are required for MCZs will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Management measures will be implemented at sites most at risk of damage first, regulating only those activities which have a detrimental impact on the features. In cases where there is a high risk to designated features being damaged emergency measures may be put in place to ensure the protection of vulnerable habitats and species.

What happens now this site has been designated?

The site specific information below provides an overview of which activities may be affected by the designation of the MCZ and the current management measures. As with all management measures, they may, of course, be subject to change in the light of new evidence becoming available.

Current activities identified at this site which could be affected include commercial fisheries, laying renewable energy cables, ports and harbour operations, coastal development, national defence and archaeological excavations. Most of these activities will be regulated through the appropriate licensing regimes. MCZ designation will need to be taken into consideration when assessing environmental impacts of marine works as part of the licensing application process.

With regard to fisheries management the site is within the jurisdiction of Kent and Essex IFCA. All relevant IFCA district-wide byelaws will apply to this site, in addition to all relevant national and EU fisheries legislation such as Cod Recovery control and technical measures. Further information is available at www.marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/monitoring/regulations_bluebook.htm

Relevant restrictions relating to this site include restrictions on the size of the vessels able to operate in the area. There are a number of private aquaculture grounds within the site which are regulated under different legislation, although aquaculture interests are recognised and will be taken into account when developing measures for the site. For further information visit the Kent & Essex IFCA website at www.kentandessex-ifca.gov.uk

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Current activities identified at this site which could be affected include commercial fisheries and ports operations. Port operations will be regulated through the appropriate licensing regimes, which will take into consideration the MCZ designation when assessing environmental impacts of marine works as part of the licensing application. Anchorage issues within the inshore area falls within the management responsibilities of the MMO.

With regards to fisheries this site is within the jurisdiction of the Southern IFCA. All Southern IFCA District-wide byelaws will apply to this site, in addition to all relevant national and EU fisheries legislation. Further information is available at www.marinemangement.org.uk/fisheries/monitoring/regulations_bluebook.htm

Current relevant restrictions relating to this site include the size of the vessel permitted to operate in the area (vessel length), seasonal closures and restrictions on gear for oyster fisheries. Also in place at Stennis Ledge is a local voluntary agreement on dredging to protect sensitive reef features from damage.

For further information visit the IFCA website at www.southern-ifca.gov.uk

Where can I find out further information?

An interactive map showing this MCZs and other marine protected areas is available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5201>

Additional information about this site and other MCZs is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/protecting-and-sustainably-using-the-marine-environment> and within Natural England's advice available at <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6574636884033536?category=1499649>



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Annex: Management

Lead organisation	Activities
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries (0-6nm) including commercial fisheries and recreational fishing activities such as sea angling <p>For further information visit www.association-ifca.org.uk</p>
Marine Management Organisation (MMO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries (management) (6-12nm) Fisheries (enforcement) national and EU legislation Licensable activities such as deposit and removal activities below mean high water springs, including subsea cables (up to 12nm), construction (including renewables <100MW, ports and coastal protection), dredging and disposal Harbour Orders and Harbour Empowerment Orders Section 36 and safety zone consents Enforcement of licensable activity and other consents (including deemed marine licences) Development of marine plans integrating the social requirements, economic potential and environmental priorities of marine plan areas Activities requiring a wildlife licence <p>For further information visit www.marinemangement.org.uk/fisheries or www.marinemangement.org.uk/licensing/marine.htm</p>
Environment Agency (EA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries management for migratory and fresh water fish Coastal protection and flood management Water quality Permitted discharges from terrestrial sources <p>For further information visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk/default.aspx</p>
Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oil and Gas related activities Renewable energy related activities <p>For further information visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change</p>
Harbour Authorities and local planning authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harbour authorities have management responsibilities for the port and coastal waters within their jurisdiction Local authorities have role to manage, regulate and facilitate activities at the coast. These include management of coastal recreation, tourism, economic regeneration, flood protection, spatial planning and coastal zone and estuary management, <p>For further information contact your local authority or IFCA</p>
Department for Transport (DfT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for shipping, harbours, ship pollution and offshore safety <p>For further information visit www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport</p>
Natural England (NE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public access <p>For further information visit www.naturalengland.org.uk/</p>