



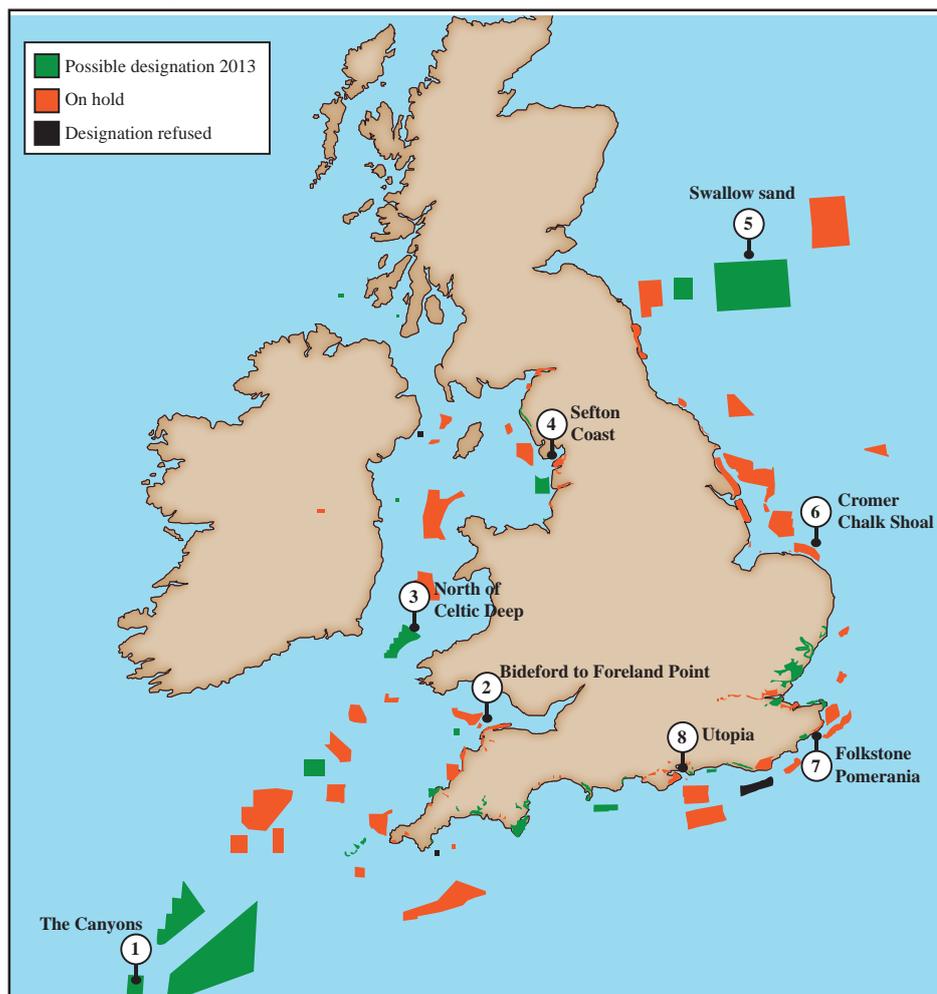
## Conflicts in conservation: Marine Conservation Zones

The UK has a coastline of over 18,000km and many of our marine habitats and species are rare and are of international importance and some species are threatened. Some of these areas are already protected by designations such as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), RAMSAR sites, SSSIs and Special Protected Areas (SPAs – for birds) but conservationists want the government to designate many more areas as Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).

Lundy Island became the first MCZ in 2010 but designation of many more MCZs is controversial because the aim is to somehow take economic and social factors into account when they are designated. In simple terms, they attempt to conserve species and habitats whilst allowing commercial fishing and recreational activities such as the mooring and anchoring of leisure craft. The needs of other industries such as dredgers, offshore wind farms and port authorities would also have to be taken into account.

Conservationists want 131 areas designated as MCZs (Fig.1), close enough together to ensure species can migrate and the ecosystem can function naturally. They want restrictions on commercial fishing and a ban on certain activities in particular areas. Commercial fishermen often oppose the size and number of proposed designations, arguing that they need to make a living.

**Fig.1 The original proposed sites**



### Government Consultation

The government ran a 4-month consultation during which all interested parties – the public, conservationists and any part of the fishing industry could write in with their views. They received 40,000 responses! In July 2013, the government published the results:

- Most campaigning conservation organisations e.g. RSPB wanted 127 MCZs designated. The government has agreed to 31 sites and argues that the scientific evidence to support many of the other sites was insufficient. The 31 sites would increase the percentage of protected inland waters in England from 23% to 25%.
- Many industry organisations argued that the management measures that would be put in place in new MCZs wasn't clear – the government argues it hasn't had time to work them out yet
- Conservation organisations wanted an ecosystem approach – joined up areas – to reflect the fact that many species of birds and fish are highly mobile and move over large areas. The government has opted for a features-based approach i.e. a particular site will be protected but if the birds or fish move, then they will lose that protection. The government argue that the best way to protect such species is by licensing and tougher rules on by-catch

- MCZs will not be designated specifically to protect birds
- Conservationists argue that the cost-benefit-analysis that was carried out assessed the potential loss to fishing fleets too highly and that the 20-year period it covers isn't long enough to properly weigh up the economic benefits of the MCZs. The government accepted that assessing economic benefits was harder than assessing economic costs. All environmental CBAs cover 20 years it said

### Creating An Ecological Network

The government want to create an ecological network on land and sea that is “coherent and resilient”.

#### What does this mean in theory and practice?

A **coherent** ecological network is one that has all the elements necessary to achieve its overall objectives. The value of the whole network is greater than the sum of its parts.

A network would include:

- Protected **core areas of high nature conservation value** which contain rare or important habitats or ecosystem services. They include protected wildlife sites and other semi-natural areas of high ecological quality
- **Corridors and ‘stepping stones’** enabling species to move between core areas.
- **Restoration areas**, where strategies are put in place to create high value areas (the ‘core areas’ of the future)
- **Buffer zones**, that protect core areas, restoration areas, and ‘stepping stones’ from harmful impacts in the wider environment
- **Sustainable use areas**; areas of surrounding land that are managed in a sustainable and wildlife

In practice this must mean joined up sites allowing organisms to move across the whole of their desired habitat. Conservation organizations argue that creating just 31 MCZs – not connected as a whole – goes against this concept.

A **resilient** ecological network is one that can absorb, resist or recover from disturbances and damage caused by natural influences and human activities (including climate change), while continuing to support biodiversity and providing ecosystem services. Conservation organizations argue that this requires large areas to be designated as MCZs

### The bigger picture

Globally, valuable terrestrial ecosystems get more protection than marine areas (Table 1).

**Table 1. Protected Terrestrial and Marine areas around the world**

	Percentage (%) of area protected	
	Terrestrial (land)	Marine (sea)
Global region	18	10
North America	14	6
Europe	10	24
Australia and New Zealand	21	11
Caribbean	15	3
South East Asia	14	1
South Asia	7	1
Western and Central Africa	10	4

Protected areas include: national parks, wilderness areas, nature reserves, marine reserves, conservation areas, biosphere reserves.

#### There are several possible reasons for this:

- Terrestrial areas may have received greater protection because there are more obvious ways of exploiting the protection to make money e.g. African safaris
- Many countries with important marine resources are under-developed and conservation is not a priority
- In countries such as Australia, locations such as the Great Barrier Reef might be seen as iconic and therefore protected whilst inland areas are seen as little more than desert
- Marine areas in Asia e.g. Cambodia may be seen as too economically valuable to protect e.g. for diving, fishing or aquaculture

But many conservation organizations point out that “designated” does not always mean “protected” - the concept of ‘protected’ varies from place to place and some argue that some designations are ‘paper parks’ - designation does not equal protection.

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Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, Shropshire, TF1 1NU

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