



Department of the
Environment

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Marine Division
Conservation and Reporting Team
Department of the Environment
Marine Environment Division
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14 December 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

INVITATION TO RESPOND TO THE CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES IN NORTHERN IRELAND INSHORE REGION

I am writing to invite you to respond to a consultation on proposals for Marine Conservation Zones in the Northern Ireland inshore region (out to 12 nautical miles). The four sites and the features for which they are being proposed for designation are as follows:

- Rathlin – Deep-sea bed, Black guillemot and Geological/geomorphological features (Submerged lagoons and Sea arches);
- Waterfoot – Subtidal (sublittoral) sand with subtidal seagrass beds (*Zostera marina*);
- Outer Belfast Lough – Ocean quahog (*Arctica islandica*) and associated habitat Subtidal (sublittoral) sand;
- Carlingford Lough – Subtidal (sublittoral) mud containing Sea-pen and white sea slug communities.

The consultation document is aimed at organisations, groups, and people who undertake activities, or have a general interest in the marine area.

Background

Each of the UK Administrations is responsible for designating Marine Conservation Zones, for the protection of nationally important habitats and species, in their territorial waters (out to 12 nautical miles).

MCZ designation powers became available in Northern Ireland under the Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, which was enacted in September 2013.

Since that time, the Department has been developing potential sites for MCZ designation based on sound scientific evidence and with the involvement of stakeholders from all marine sectors including angling, fishing, renewable energy, ports and harbours, and environmental groups.

Consultation Arrangements

Full details of the proposals for the four sites are available on the Departmental website <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/consultations/marine-conservation-zones-consultation>.

The following documents have been developed for each site:

- Site Summary Document for each pMCZ;
- Conservation Objectives and potential Management Options for each pMCZ;
- Assessment against Selection Guidelines for each pMCZ;
- Data Confidence Assessment for each pMCZ;

The following supporting documentation is also available:

- Guidance on selection and designation of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region
- Justification report for selection of proposed Marine Conservation Zone (pMCZ) features
- Guidance on the development of Conservation Objectives and Potential Management Options
- Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment for Marine Conservation Zones in the Northern Ireland Inshore Region; and
- Frequently Asked Questions.

As part of the site selection process the Department is seeking views on the proposals and in particular the following specific aspects.

- The pMCZ protected features.
- The pMCZ boundaries.
- The potential management options for each pMCZ.
- The Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment.

In an effort to reduce the environmental impact of the production of consultation papers, the Department is opting to send notification of this electronic consultation exercise to stakeholders.

If required, a limited number of hard copies (typescript) are available and the document may also be made available in alternative formats - please contact us to discuss your requirements by telephone (02890 569262), by text phone: 028 9054 0642 or in writing to the address below.

Equality Impact Assessment

Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity. Preliminary screening exercises have been undertaken, and it is considered that there are no significant implications for equality of opportunity as a result of these proposals. Therefore, a full Equality Impact Assessment is not required.

Copies of all screened policies are available on the Department's website:

www.doeni.gov.uk/equality-doe.

The Human Rights Act

The Human Rights Act 1998 implements the European Convention on Human Rights. The 1998 Act makes it unlawful for any public authority to act in a way that is incompatible with these rights. The Department considers that the proposals detailed in this consultation package are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

Rural Proofing

Rural proofing is a process to ensure that all relevant Government policies are examined carefully and objectively to determine whether or not they have a different impact in rural areas from that elsewhere, given the particular characteristics of rural areas, and where necessary, what policy adjustments might be made to reflect rural needs to ensure that, as far as is possible, public services are accessible on a fair basis to the rural community. The proposals detailed in this consultation package are aimed at affording greater protection to our nationally important habitats and species through the designation Marine Conservation Zones. It is important that these unique areas of the marine environment are managed sustainably and promoted as a valuable social and economic asset. By ensuring that our seas remain clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse, rural businesses and communities will be enhanced.

Responses

The consultation will close on 11 March 2016. You can make a response to this consultation by the following methods:

Online: Link to online response: [here](#) or via <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/consultations/marine-conservation-zones-consultation>

By e-mail: MarineDivision.InfoRequests@doeni.gov.uk

By post:

Marine Conservation Zones Consultation
Department of the Environment
Marine Environment Division
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Belfast
BT7 2JA

Please also provide:

- **Your name**
- **Your contact details**
- **The organisation you represent (where applicable)**
- **The main area of interest with which you identify** – for example, nature conservation, fisheries, industry/transport, aquaculture, recreation/tourism,

academic and scientific, local government, voluntary/community group, public sector, local partnership, other.

This information will assist with the analysis of the responses received.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultation responses

Following the end of the consultation, we shall publish a paper summarising the responses. Information you provide in your response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us why but be aware that, under the FOIA, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

If you are replying as an individual, the Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and this will mean that if you request confidentiality your personal information will not be disclosed to third parties.

What Happens Next?

Following the consultation the Department will analyse and consider the information received and will publish a synopsis of these responses on the website. The decision whether or not to make the final designations will be made by the Minister of the Environment and will be informed by the consultation responses.

Thank you for your help and participation in this consultation, should you have any queries please contact us to discuss further.

Yours faithfully,



Colin Armstrong
Marine Conservation and Reporting