

Marine Protected Areas



Key message

The Marine Protected Area (MPA) network encompasses 231 sites covering 22% of Scotland's marine environment. Since 2012, 42 new sites have almost doubled the area designated, protecting a broader range of habitats and species. Progress has been made with implementation of site specific fisheries site management measures for those sites where they are required.



The Eden estuary © John Baxter

Background

Scotland's position at the edge of the north-west European continental shelf has a huge influence on its coasts and seas. The marine environment has been shaped by wind, water, and ice over thousands of years, creating the environment that supports productive and abundant marine life.

The meeting and mixing of nutrient-rich waters provides the perfect environment for sea life to thrive. Scotland is of international importance for marine biodiversity providing the ideal environment for both overwintering and breeding birds, marine mammals and fish, as well as for the invertebrates and algae that are found on and within the sea bed.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have an important role to play in conserving the seas. They enable the focused protection of habitats and species considered important for the functioning of the marine ecosystem. MPAs facilitate an increase in ecosystem resilience and recovery of habitats and species where required.

The MPA network (Table 1 and Figure 1) consists of nature conservation sites designated under various legislative frameworks. These are underpinned by the [Marine \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#), which provides the powers to designate MPAs within inshore waters (within 12 nautical miles), and the [UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#) which gives powers for offshore waters.

Table 1: Scottish Marine Protected Area network.

Type	Number	Number
MPAs for nature conservation		217
Marine Protected Area (MPA)	31	
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	58	
Special Protection Area (SPA)	47	
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	65	
Ramsar	16	
MPAs for other purposes		9
Demonstration and Research MPA	1	
Historic MPA	8	
Other area based measures		5
Total		231

The network also includes other areas which deliver nature conservation benefits, known as Other Area Based Measures (OABMs). Sites are also designated to protect the historic environment and for demonstration and research purposes.

This assessment is based on the Marine Protected Area Network - 2018 Report to the Scottish Parliament (Scottish Government, 2018).

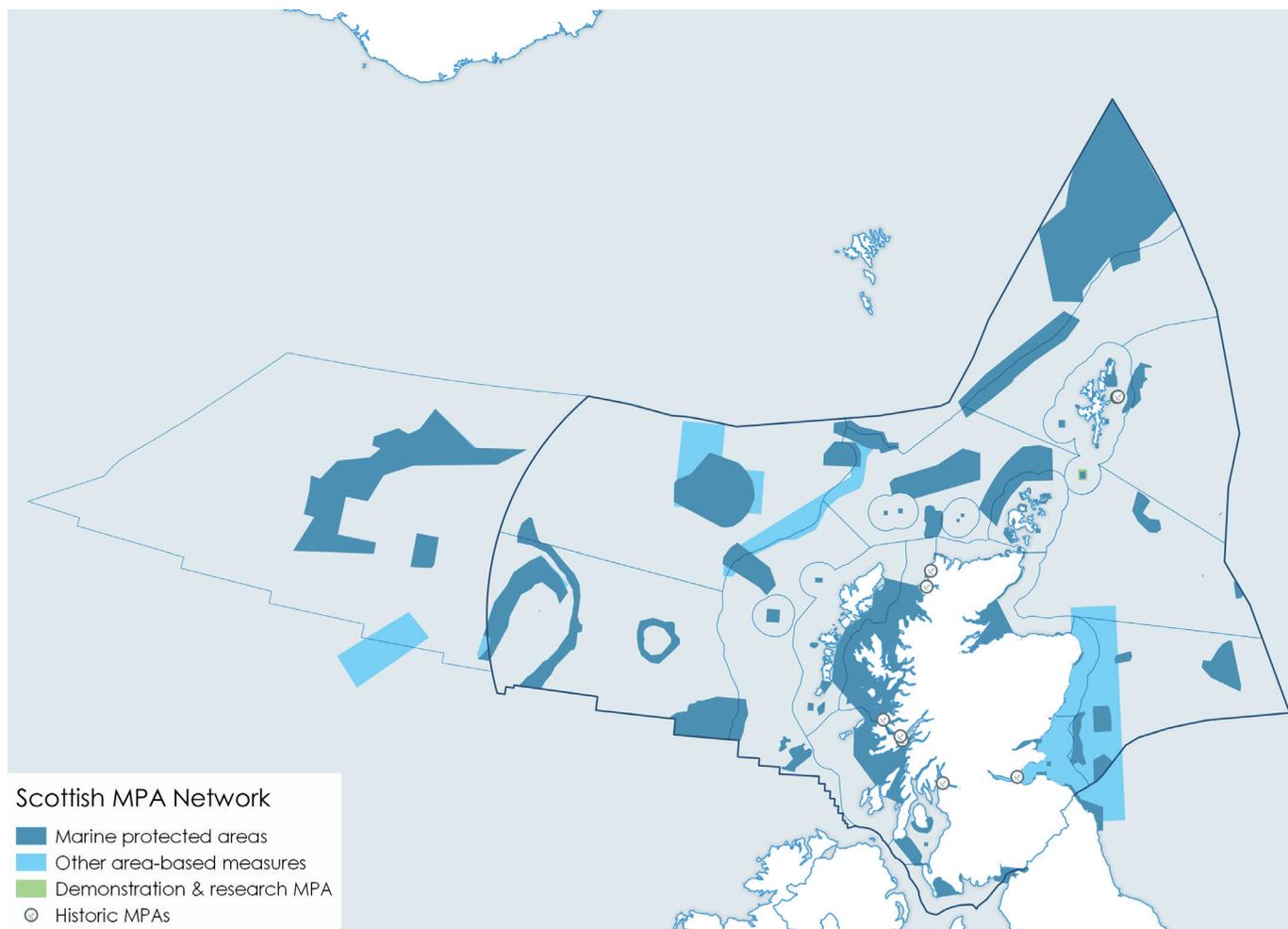


Figure 1:
Scottish Marine Protected Area Network (2019).

Results

The Scottish MPA network has changed considerably since 2012, and now better reflects the variety of life found in the seas. In total 231 MPAs cover 22% of the seas, which represents a considerable step forward. Figure 1 shows all MPAs and area-based measures which contribute to the MPA network.

Since 2012, a total of 42 new MPAs have been designated to protect features including, black guillemot, flame shell beds, common skate, seamounts, warships and merchant trading vessels and two sites have been extended to better protect seabed habitats.

In Scottish waters there are currently 217 MPAs for nature conservation purposes covering an area of about 108,000 km², approximately 18% of the sea area adjacent to Scotland. It represents 52% of overall UK Network.

The Marine Acts, which underpin the MPA network, include three conditions that it must achieve:

- Contribute to the conservation or improvement of the marine environment.
- Represent the range of features present in the UK marine area.
- Reflect that the conservation of a feature may require the designation of more than one MPA.

These conditions have mostly been achieved with the network including all widely distributed habitats and species in several sites. Possible MPAs for mobile species, currently being progressed, will help improve the ecological coherence of the network.

These sites also contribute to spatial protection measures under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and the OSPAR MPA network in the North-East Atlantic and address commitments in relation to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In spatial terms Scotland's seas make up a relatively small proportion of the OSPAR maritime area. Although no regional based target has been set for MPA coverage the Scottish MPA network covers significant parts of each OSPAR region (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of area designated by OSPAR Regions.

OSPAR Region	Percentage of area within Scottish waters covered by MPAs
Arctic Waters (I)	73%
Greater North Sea (II)	12%
Celtic Seas (III)	25%
Wider Atlantic (V)	14%

The MPA network covers a diverse array of marine habitats, wildlife, geology, landforms and historic shipwrecks. Conservation objectives have been agreed for the MPAs and describe what the sites are aiming to achieve. Management advice for each site is used to determine whether new activities or development can be consented, as soon as an MPA is designated. It is the responsibility of all public authorities to ensure that the conservation objectives of MPAs are not hindered. This applies equally to their own functions as well as when determining whether to consent activities they regulate.

Progress has been made since 2012 in implementing fisheries management measures in MPAs, which due to their differing management regime do not come into effect immediately after designation of a MPA. There are now 27 MPAs that have specific fisheries measures in place and measures for a further 39 are currently being developed in partnership with the fishing industry, other stakeholders and other European countries.

Conclusion

Progress has been made in developing the Scottish MPA network which has increased in size significantly and now exceeds international targets. However, further work is required to complete the network, deliver any necessary management measures, and continue the monitoring programme.

To complete the network a number of actions are currently underway, including:

- Nature conservation proposals are being progressed for seabirds, waders and seaducks, basking shark, Risso's dolphin and minke whale.
- Progressing assessment of historic wrecks - The Queen of Sweden wreck near Shetland, and the wartime history of Scapa Flow. A small number of other assessments may be anticipated as new discoveries come to light.
- Development of a Deep Sea Marine Reserve to safeguard marine life that is under threat in deeper waters across the North-east Atlantic.

To ensure the network is well-managed the following work is ongoing:

- Progressing further fisheries measures as required to achieve site objectives.
- Ensuring that Public Authorities get clear advice to inform their decision making where an MPA may be affected.
- Trialing innovative approaches to MPA management planning, working with local communities and other stakeholders to develop these.
- Continued implementation of the MPA monitoring strategy.

Knowledge gaps

As the MPA monitoring strategy follows a risk-based approach not all sites have been monitored since the last assessment. The ongoing monitoring programme will allow a more thorough assessment of whether individual MPAs are achieving their objectives by the time of the next report to parliament in 2024.

Status and trend assessment

It is not possible to undertake a traffic light or trend assessment on whether the ecological objectives of the MPA network have been met due to the lack of data points. However, the MPA monitoring strategy should allow for this by the time of the next assessment.

In terms of process the designation of the network and establishment of management measures is either achieved or on track to be achieved, apart from offshore fisheries management measures, which have been delayed by EU Exit. No trend assessment is possible.