



NEWS RELEASE

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Formal consultation starts on proposed European marine sites

A formal consultation on proposed new marine protected areas starts today (27 Nov 2009). The sites are being put forward as the latest additions to the 'Natura 2000' network of European protected areas designed to protect important habitats, species and birds.

Four of the 12 sites are located off the coast of the South West. These proposed 'Special Areas of Conservation' – Lands End and Cape Bank (Cornwall), Lizard Point (Cornwall), Prawle Point to Plymouth and Eddystone (Devon), Poole Bay to Lyme Bay (Dorset and Devon) have been nominated for their reef and sea cave features.

The consultation provides an opportunity for interested groups to make formal comments on the proposed sites to help refine the evidence base and enable a fuller understanding of the likely impacts of site designation on marine user groups.

Janette Ward, South West Regional Director for Natural England, said: "The four sites identified in the South West play a vital part in ensuring that our most important marine habitats, those of European importance, are effectively protected. This consultation process gives us the chance to ensure that all relevant information has been considered in our recommendations to Government."

Dr Keith Hiscock of the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth said: "South-west England has some of the most extensive, varied and biodiverse reefs in the UK. Apart from having typical features for warmer waters of the north-east Atlantic, there are rare and fragile habitats and species that will benefit from protection."

The consultation runs for three months from 27 November 2009 to 26 February 2010. To comment formally on the proposals for the four sites in the South West, email: swmarine@naturalengland.org.uk; or phone 0300 060 1110 (Devon & Dorset sites) / 0300 060 1655 (Cornwall sites). Following this formal consultation process, final site recommendations will be made to Government, and Ministers will decide the final submission to the European Commission in August 2010.

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Notes to editors:

1. Natura 2000 is the name for all European terrestrial and marine sites which are designated under European legislation. This legislation includes the Birds Directive

(1979) and the Habitats Directive (1992), both of which are implemented in the UK under the Habitats Regulations (1994) on land and in the sea out to 12 nautical miles and the Offshore Regulations (2007) for the UK's offshore marine area (from 12 nautical miles, within British Fishery Limits and the seabed within the UK Continental Shelf Designated Area). There are currently 81 SACs with marine components and 73 SPAs with marine components in the UK which cover 1.76 million hectares.

2. Undersea habitats that would benefit from protection under the proposed new designations are sandbanks, reefs and sea caves. Sandbanks act as nursery grounds for many commercial fish species such as plaice and sole whilst also supporting sand eel communities that are a food source for seabirds, porpoises and seals. In contrast reefs support a colourful array of sponges, sea squirts and corals that provide shelter for crabs, lobsters and fish such as the multi-coloured cuckoo wrasse.
3. UK inshore waters lie from the coastline to 12 nautical miles. Each of the country agencies (Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside) is responsible for implementing the Habitats and Birds Directives for inshore waters. The UK offshore area lies between 12 and 200 nautical miles from the coast and out to the Continental Shelf designated area. JNCC is responsible for the implementation of the EC Habitats and Birds Directives in this sea area. Where sites overlap, the agencies work together.
4. As the Government's statutory advisers, Natural England, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) have been working together to identify important or threatened examples of marine habitats and species in inshore and offshore waters, and to map the boundaries of the sites that are proposed for special protection.
5. Natural England was established in 2006, and is the government's independent advisor on the natural environment. All information on the South West proposed sites, including proposed boundary maps, can be found on its web site:
<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/marine/sacconsultation/default.aspx>
6. Dr Hiscock advised Natural England during the survey work leading to the identification of the areas and used his personal knowledge of the reefs to help in the description of features. The MBA (The Marine Biological Association) is a professional body for marine scientists with some 1200 members world-wide. Since 1884 the MBA has, amongst much else, undertaken extensive surveys and re-surveys of the seabed out of Plymouth. The MBA hosts many conservation science projects. For further information, visit www.mba.ac.uk and www.marlin.ac.uk
The MBA is a founder member of the Plymouth Marine Sciences Partnership (PMSP) www.pmsp.org.uk
7. For more details, images and interviews please contact;

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