What are the Assessments against the MPA Selection Guidelines?

Background

The assessments against the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Selection Guidelines are one of five documents created for each possible MPA as part of the consultation evidence base. The full process for selecting Nature Conservation MPAs is set out in the Guidelines on the selection of MPAs and development of the MPA network.

The assessments against the MPA Selection Guidelines helped us to prioritise MPA search locations and to determine which features should be proposed for protection within them. Only locations which passed through all stages of the assessment were considered for inclusion in the network.

The assessment process highlighted where additional locations or features were required to develop the MPA network. Similarly, on the basis of the assessments it became clear that not all locations or features initially identified needed to be included. A number of features were dropped as a result of the assessment and some locations have changed in size and shape as they have progressed through the assessment process.

The documents provided here present the detailed assessments for all MPA proposals outlined in SNH and JNCC’s advice to the Scottish Government for development of the MPA network (November 2012). These have been approved by Scottish Ministers for public consultation and are now termed possible MPAs. Four areas remain as MPA search locations. These will be assessed fully against the Selection Guidelines in 2014. SNH will then submit formal advice on the potential progression of these locations to Scottish Ministers.

The documents present a record of the assessment process, so that anyone with an interest can review our advice. They include scientific detail and technical language which is necessary to convey the information we have considered. The information is very condensed and in places we provide summaries of more detailed assessments.

For more accessible information on the possible MPAs please look at the Site Summary documents which you can find on the MPA consultation websites:

For possible MPAs in Scottish territorial waters - www.snh.gov.uk/mpa-consultation
For possible MPAs in offshore waters adjacent to Scotland - www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/scottish-mpa-consultation

Structure of the Assessments against the MPA Selection Guidelines

You can find more detail on how MPA search locations were assessed in Annex 1 of the MPA Selection Guidelines.

Within the main body of the assessment, the terminology used in the ‘blue’ and ‘grey’ box headers reflects the original wording from the MPA Selection Guidelines (MPA search locations and MPA search features etc.). The assessment text itself is presented from the perspective of the current status of these areas e.g. as possible MPAs with proposed protected features. A glossary is provided at the start of each assessment document that explains these different terms.

The documents start with a page explaining the purpose and history of development of the possible MPA. Then follows the assessment against the guidelines, which is a five stage process:

Stage 1  Identifying search locations that would address any significant gaps in the conservation of MPA search features

Stage 1 relates to the identification of search locations based on presence of MPA search features.
A summary of the assessment gives an overview of the proposed protected features of the possible MPA, and below this, a table lists each feature, providing detail on whether they are considered threatened and/or declining (T&D) at international or national level, under e.g. the OSPAR Convention (Oslo and Paris Convention for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic). A number of features were also considered to be of functional significance for the overall health and diversity of Scottish seas (e.g. places for feeding, breeding, juveniles and/or spawning, or sediment supply).

A map then shows the known distribution of the features across the possible MPA.

**Stage 2  Prioritisation of search locations according to the qualities of the MPA search features they contain**

This stage consists of parts a-e, the key points of which are summarised in the Summary of assessment box. In Stage 2a we assessed if the possible MPA contains a combination of features, because such locations were given priority over single-feature proposals. Stage 2b contains most of the biological information, describing and assessing whether the features are of high natural biological diversity. In 2c we looked at coherence of individual features, taking into account ecological concepts such as typicalness, fragmentation, longevity and viability. In 2d we assessed the naturalness of the features and whether they have been modified by human activities, and in 2e we looked at the risk posed to features by human activities at a regional level.

**Stage 3  Assessing the appropriate scale of the search location in relation to the search features it contains**

In this stage we assessed the size and shape of the possible MPA to ensure that it was suitable for maintaining the integrity of the proposed protected features. In some cases only part of the original search location was recommended as a possible Nature Conservation MPA. In other cases, parts of adjacent search locations were joined together. The focus was on features but changes were also made to ensure the boundaries were meaningful to people likely to be using the sites.

**Stage 4  Assessing the potential effectiveness of managing features within a search location as part of a Nature Conservation MPA**

In this stage we provide a summary of the proposed conservation objectives for each feature - these describe the desired ecological/geological state and are either ‘conserve’ or ‘recover’. The management options papers give more detail on how conservation objectives can be achieved for all features in each possible MPA. The management options papers can be found on the MPA consultation websites. All MPA search locations passing this stage were then assessed at stage 5 as potential areas for MPAs.

**Stage 5  Assessment of the contribution of the potential area to the MPA network**

Stage 5 guidelines were applied at a network level. We provide a summary of the contribution the possible MPA would make to achieving an ecologically coherent network. This stage includes consideration of key OSPAR principles such as replication and resilience.

If a possible MPA included geodiversity features as proposed protected features, these were not assessed through the table used for the biological features but were covered in a separate paragraph below the table with a focus on representation of geodiversity features at a national scale.

The documents finish with a Bibliography section, which includes a list of all sources used in the assessment process (including data sources). You can find more detail on the data underpinning these assessments against the guidelines in the data confidence assessments.