

Loch Sunart

Marine Protected Area

Remote and
secretive sea loch



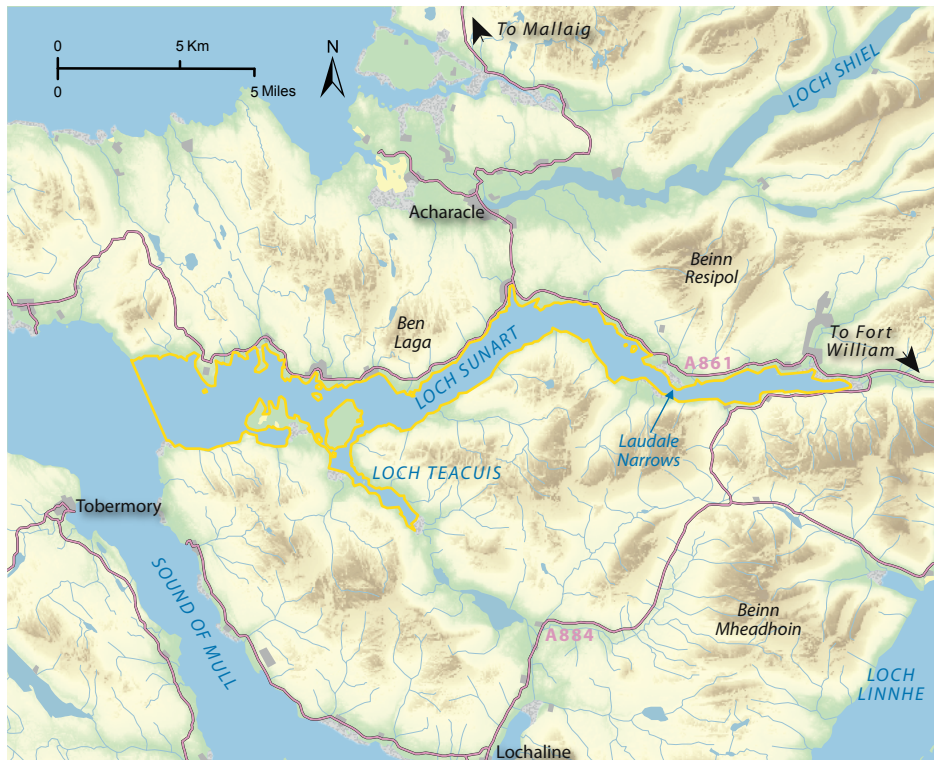
Loch Sunart

Marine Protected Area

Loch Sunart is a long narrow sea loch at the northern end of the Sound of Mull. Within the loch there are numerous small islands creating narrow channels through which the incoming and outgoing tide is squeezed. These fast flowing currents create the essential conditions for the development of extensive flame shell beds, the largest of which is found in the Laudale Narrows.



Flame shells are small bivalve molluscs that build a nest on the sea bed by sticking shells, stones and other debris together with their byssus threads. When numerous flame shells build their nests alongside each other a flame shell bed is formed. This stabilises the sea bed forming a habitat for many other organisms such as sponges, starfish and brittlestars.



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Location: 56° 40.578' N 005° 50.510' W

Area: 49 km²



A pair of flame shells

Protected Features & Conservation Objectives

Biodiversity: flame shell beds; northern feather star aggregations on mixed substrata; serpulid aggregations.

The aim is to **conserve these features** in order to make a long lasting contribution to the MPA network.

An exciting discovery was made in 2006 when aggregations of the serpulid or organ-pipe worm were found in the shallow waters of Loch Teacuis, a small arm off Loch Sunart. Loch Creran (another fjordic sea loch Marine Protected Area (MPA) on the west coast) is the only other place in Scotland where such aggregations are known to occur. Although not yet at the stage of building large reefs like the ones in Loch Creran (which has the best examples of this habitat in the world!) the worm aggregations in Loch Teacuis may in time develop into more substantial structures.

Northern feather stars are typically found in deep water (40 to 100 m) but in the sheltered west coast sea lochs they can be found in water as shallow as 20 m. Their slender arms can be a variety of colours including yellow, white, pink, red or striped red and white. They position themselves in strong currents fanning out their arms to filter out passing food. Where feeding conditions are good northern feather stars can form dense beds creating a bristling carpet of vivid colour on the seafloor sediments.

The Loch Sunart MPA overlaps the subtidal part of the existing Sunart Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its rocky reefs, otters and terrestrial habitat interests such as oak woodlands.

Further Information

Further information on Nature Conservation MPAs, the wider network and protected areas management is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork

For Nature Conservation MPA site documents and more on the fascinating range of marine life to be found in Scotland's seas, please visit

www.snh.gov.uk/mpas - for territorial waters

www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/scottishmpas - for offshore waters



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 **JNCC**
Joint Nature Conservation Committee

A small serpulid aggregation in Loch Teacuis

