

The Needles rMCZ no 20

Marine Conservation Zone: Selection Assessment Document

Version and Issue date	Amendments made
V1.0 07.09.11	Draft final recommendations refined by the RSG and Local Groups in July 2011 and finalised by the RSG 2/3 August 2011.

1. Site name The Needles rMCZ no 20 Contains Stalked Jellyfish (in Alum Bay) rRA 20	3. Site surface area 1101 ha 11.01 km ²
2. Site centre location ETRS89 N50 40' 42.246" W1 34' 21.238" N50 40.704' W1 34.354' (N.B. WGS 84 UTM 31N coordinates are provided in the map vertices)	4. Biogeographic region Eastern English Channel

5. Features proposed for designation within The Needles¹

Feature type	Feature name	EUNIS L3 translation from REC	Area / No. of records ²
REC Broad-scale habitat	A5.4 subtidal mixed sediments	A3.A4 LE infralittoral rock and thin mixed sediments	10.58 km ²
		A4.94 ME circalittoral rock and thin mixed sediments	
		A4.A4 LE circalittoral rock and thin mixed sediments	
		A5.43 infralittoral mixed sediments	
Habitat FOCI	Seagrass beds		3004 records
Species FOCI Low mobility	Stalked Jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)		1 record
	Peacock's Tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)		21 records

6. Features within The Needles not proposed for designation³

Feature type	Feature name	Comments
Broad-scale habitats	A1.1 High energy intertidal rock	Protected by South Wight Maritime SAC
	A1.2 Moderate energy intertidal rock	Protected by South Wight Maritime SAC
	A2.1 intertidal coarse sediment	
	A2.2 Intertidal sand and muddy sand	Targets met by existing MPAs elsewhere
	A2.4 intertidal mixed sediments	Targets met by existing MPAs elsewhere
	A3.1 high energy infralittoral rock	
	A3.2 mod energy infralittoral rock	
	A3.3 low energy infralittoral rock	Protected by South Wight Maritime SAC
	A4.2 mod energy circalittoral rock	Protected by South Wight Maritime SAC
Habitat FOCI	Native oyster beds	Plenty covered elsewhere
	Subtidal chalk	Fully protected within South Wight Maritime SAC
	Subtidal sands and gravels	Modelled and targets met
Species FOCI Low mobility	Native Oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Plenty covered elsewhere
Species FOCI High mobility	European Eel (<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>)	Occur throughout but not appropriate
	Smelt (<i>Osmerus eperlanus</i>)	Occurs under Totland Pier; not important site for species
	Undulate Ray (<i>Raja undulata</i>)	Breeding grounds occur, though not though to require protection here

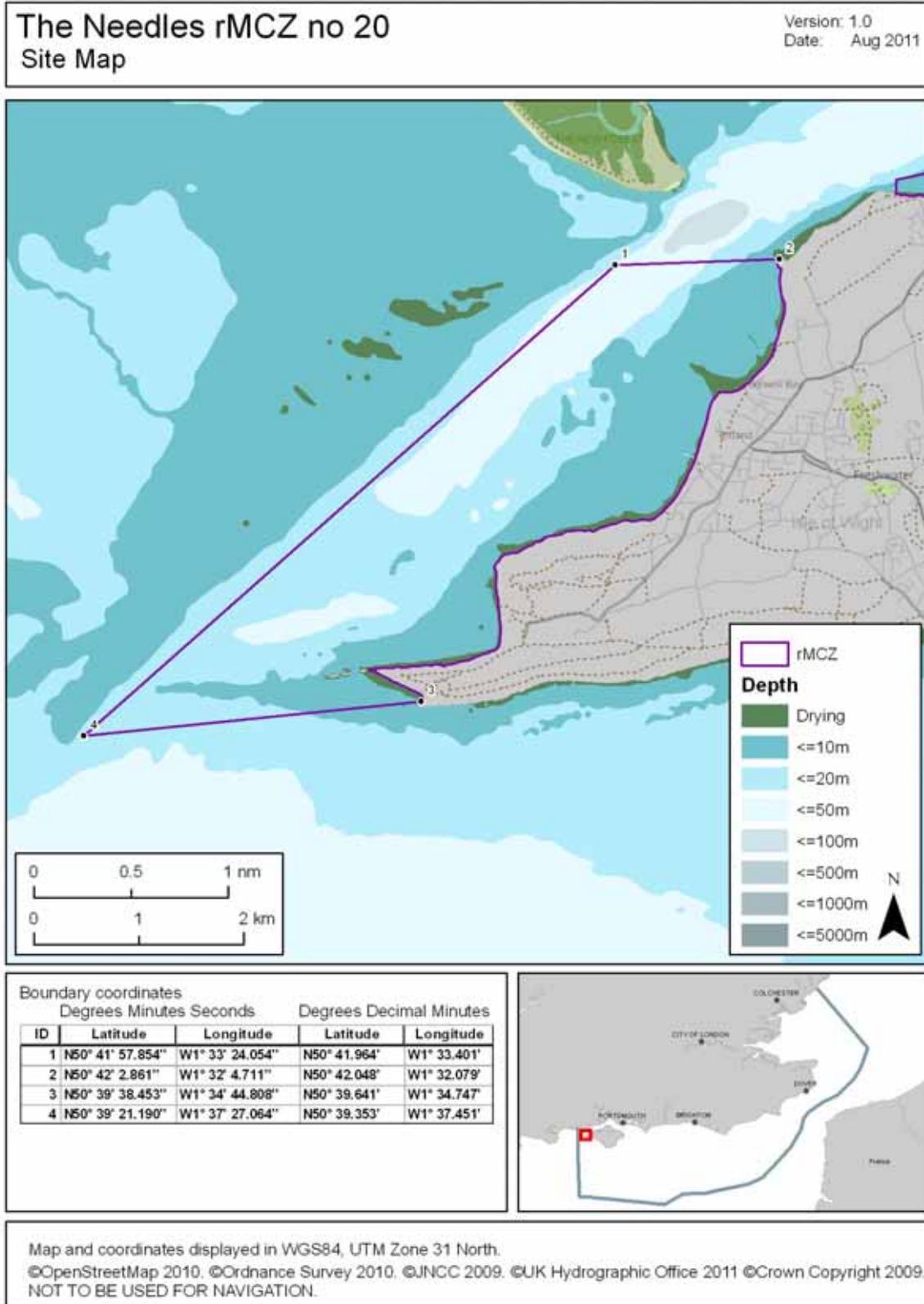
¹ Sources of information relating to these features are listed in Section 13.

² Areas have been calculated according to spatial GIS data and are indicative only. A "record" is a survey point where a single individual, population or habitat has been found.

³ Features may occur in both tables (sections 5 & 6) if the rMCZ overlaps with an existing MPA where the features are protected.

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7. Map of site



8. Site summary

The site covers the stretch of Solent adjacent to the northwest side of the Isle of Wight, from opposite Hurst Point down to just south of the Needles. The majority of the site is comprised of low energy infralittoral rock covered with a thin veneer of mixed sediments. Moving towards the Shingles channel, the seabed depth increases and the habitat becomes predominantly infralittoral mixed sediment. Seagrass beds occur in both Totland and Colwell Bays and although these are not considered by the Wildlife Trusts to be the best beds in the region, they are important for breeding seahares. The intertidal drying areas in Colwell Bay are home to Peacock's Tail (*Padina pavonica*), found, in the Balanced Seas project area, on the Isle of Wight alone. The north of the site is highlighted as being high in benthic species taxonomic distinctness. Alum Bay contains the only record, dating from 1999, in the Balanced Seas region of Stalked Jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*). Local and regional stakeholders have raised concerns about the age of the record and the fact that there is no information confirming the current presence of a stable population in Alum Bay, where recreational activities are very intense. It has been suggested that consideration might be given to the distribution of this feature within rMCZs in Finding Sanctuary.

To achieve the draft conservation objectives for the site, set netting might need to be managed to protect the seagrass beds. Other current activities are thought to be acceptable according to the available information.

9. Detailed Site Description



The following is a description of the site based on extracts from literature held by the Balanced Seas Project and stakeholder correspondence. It does not constitute a complete literature review or ecological description of the site.

The site covers the stretch of Solent adjacent to the northwest side of the Isle of Wight, from opposite Hurst Point down to just south of the Needles. The site boundaries encompass the intertidal and subtidal stretch of the Southern Solent adjacent to the West coast of the IOW including a series of sheltered bays ranging north from The Needles, a row of three distinctive stacks of chalk off the western extremity of the West Wight. The seaward boundary follows the farther edge of the deep water channel approach into the Solent proper. The area is subject to fast tidal flows and is highly dynamic especially in the northern part of the site where the channel narrows between Fort Albert, IOW and Hurst Point, Hampshire.

This geographical location has meant that the seabed ecosystems are also naturally bounded by the landforms. In addition, the intense level of shipping traffic occurring in the Solent has meant that the channels are regularly and heavily dredged to maintain clear passage. For these ecological and socio-economic reasons, the RSG has not extended the site to have a minimum dimension of 5km.

According to the UKSeaMap/MESH data (JNCC 2011 v.7), the site contains only subtidal mixed sediments (A5.4) (see Broad-scale habitats map). This habitat type was derived or 'back translated' from finer-scale EUNIS Level 4 habitats produced by two recent MALSF-funded seabed surveys (James *et al.* 2010, 2011) which reclassified seabed habitats into new EUNIS Level 4 habitats that were not previously part of the existing hierarchical EUNIS habitat classification system. According to the recent MALSF REC data (James *et al.* 2011), the site is comprised of low and moderate energy infralittoral or circalittoral rock and thin mixed sediments, as well as deeper infralittoral mixed sediments (see REC EUNIS Level 4 habitats map). These finer-scale REC habitats better represent the complexity of habitat in the area and have all been selected for protection in this site.

National contract data (DEFRA MB102 2C) shows seagrass beds occurring in Totland, Alum and Colwell Bays but a recent Wildlife Trust survey has shown that of these three bays the beds within

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Totland Bay are the most extensive (Wildlife Trust, Inventory of Eelgrass Beds in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Section One: Report, 2011) (see FOCI map.) Wildlife Trusts consider this to be one of the top three sites for seagrass beds in the IOW and a high priority for this site, particularly as these beds are important for breeding seahares (Balanced Seas Solent/IOW/Hants Local Group Meeting Report 3, November 2010).

The site is important for regionally rare species FOCI. The only record in the Balanced Seas region of the Stalked Jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*) is located in Alum Bay. This species is known to attach to algae and seagrasses on the lower shore and sublittoral rocky zones but there is no more recent data than this record of 1999 (Seeley *et al.* 2010 DEFRA MB102 2B). There is no local knowledge of any stable population occurring there at present and there is conjecture that this may be the eastern extreme of its range and a serendipitous record (Balanced Seas Solent/IOW/Hants Local Group Meeting Report 4, April, 2011). However, given that it represents the only record in the region, the RSG have recommended a Reference Area in this locality (see rRA 20), but have emphasized very strongly that additional survey work would be essential prior to delineating the boundaries.

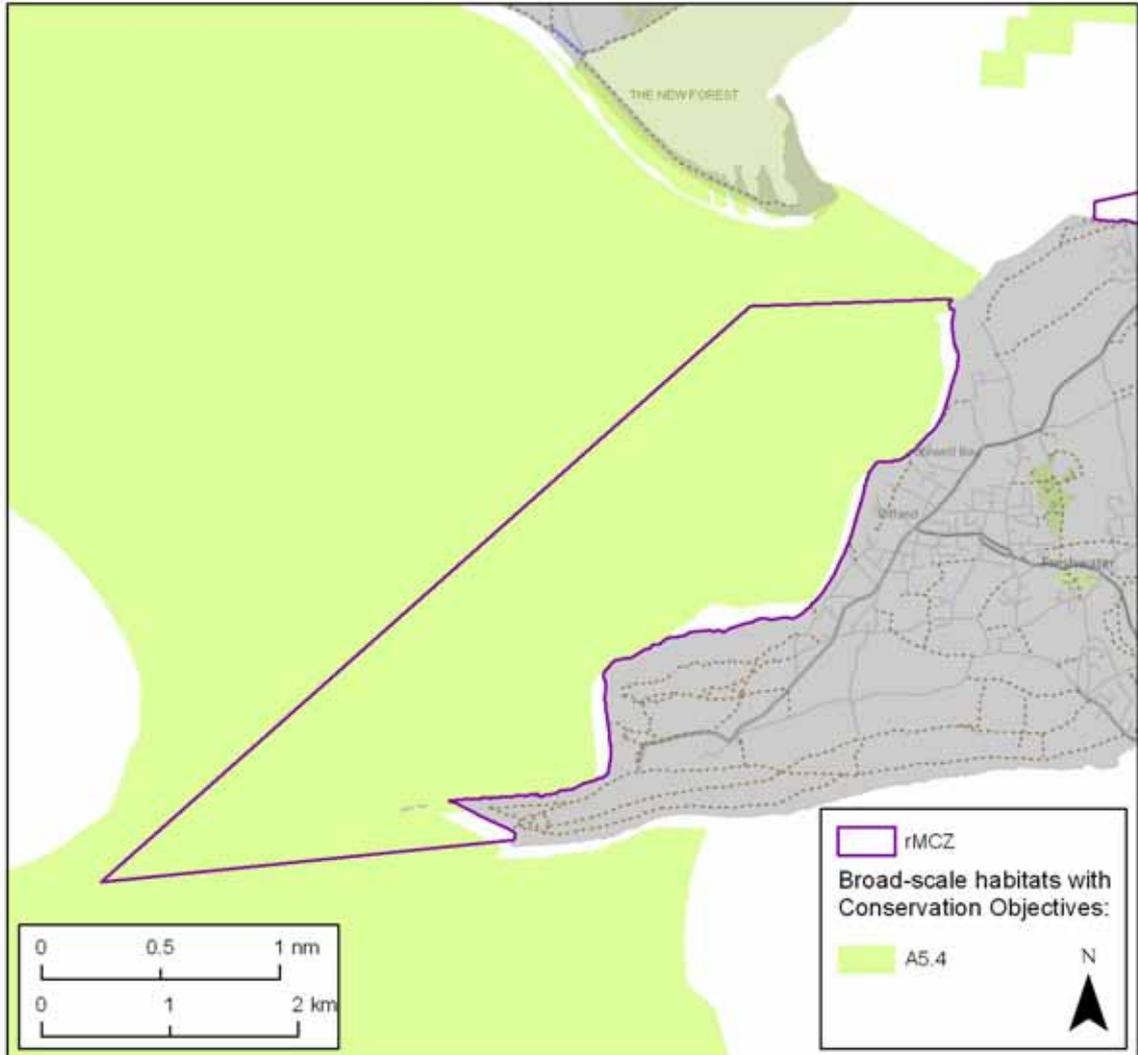
Peacock's Tail (*Padina pavonica*) has only been recorded in the Balanced Seas region around the IOW. National contract data (Seeley *et al.* 2010 DEFRA MB102 2B) contained some extremely old records from the Phycological Society, dating back to 1900, for this species. These data points clearly represented simply the south westernmost point of a survey atlas grid square and so were discarded in favour of more recent survey data from the Isle of Wight Natural History Society (Herbert, 2010). The population found in the northern part of the rMCZ is the western extreme within the region and is known to be found in rock pools and on stones on the mid to low shore.

The Wildlife Trusts have identified various habitats and species considered to be important in the Southeast and provided spatial data to show where these occur (see Southeast Features map). In this site, sea squirt (*Molgula* spp) beds and sea anemones (*Cerianthus lloydi*) occur on rich stable mixed ground in the southern part of the site in Alum Bay. There are three protected wrecks within The Needles complex, one of which has drifted over the years into the more sheltered realms of Alum Bay. Sea birds feed on the subtidal tide lines all the way through the site (RSPB, Balanced Seas IOW Sites Meeting Report, February, 2011) and, according to the RSPB, the area is particularly important foraging grounds for Black-headed Gulls and Great Cormorants.

Local stakeholders believe this is a highly productive area biologically but were unsure as to whether it is an important spawning or nursery area, and the project has no records of such areas within the site. A range of fish species including Common Smelt, Bass, Smoothounds, Sole, Pout and Mullet and crustaceans (lobsters) and molluscs (whelks) are known to occur here and are fished commercially and recreationally (Balanced Seas IOW Sites Meeting Report, February, 2011). This biological productivity is underpinned by a hot-spot of high benthic species taxonomic distinctness that occurs in the northern part of the site (Jackson *et al.* 2010 DEFRA MB102 2F). The Needles is one of the Key Inshore Biodiversity Areas in the Balanced Seas Region recommended as an MCZ (for mussels beds, Sabellaria reefs and seals), by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF, 2010). This site was also one of the recommendations put forward by the Marine Conservation Society as part of their 'Your Seas Your Voice' Campaign, where the general public could vote for the site they would most like to see gain more protection; of those who voted (289), about 80% were in favour (MCS, 2011).

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Broad-scale habitats (EUNIS Level 3) with Conservation Objectives

Version: 1.0
Date: Aug 2011



Broad-scale habitats with Conservation Objectives:
- A5.4 subtidal mixed sediments

IMPORTANT: Only those broad-scale habitats with Conservation Objectives have been shown here. To see those habitats that have not been proposed for designation, please look at Section 6.

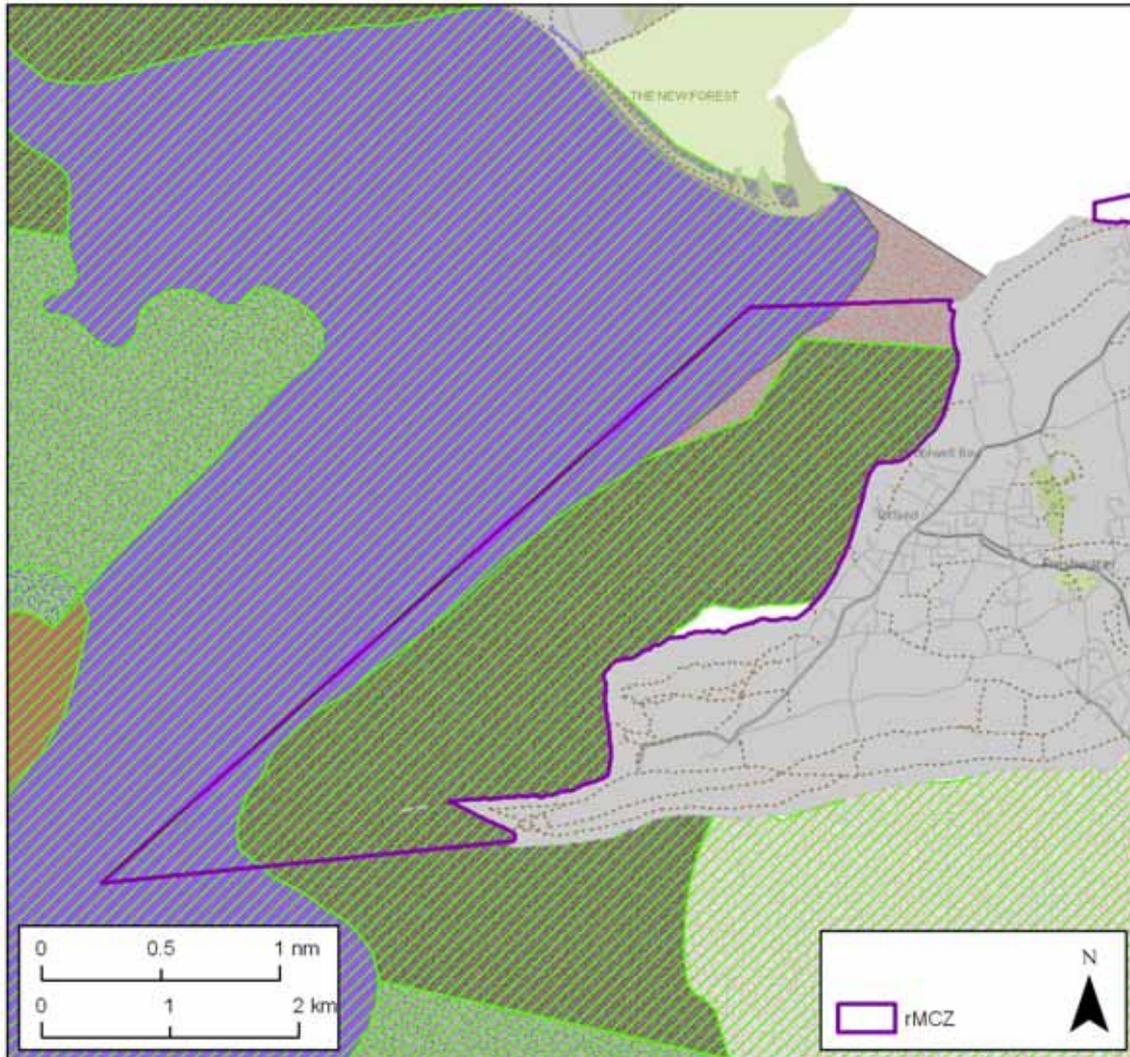


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Broad-scale habitat (reclassified EUNIS Level 4 from REC data)

Version: 1.0
Date: Aug 2011



Broad-scale habitat (reclassified EUNIS Level 4 from REC data)

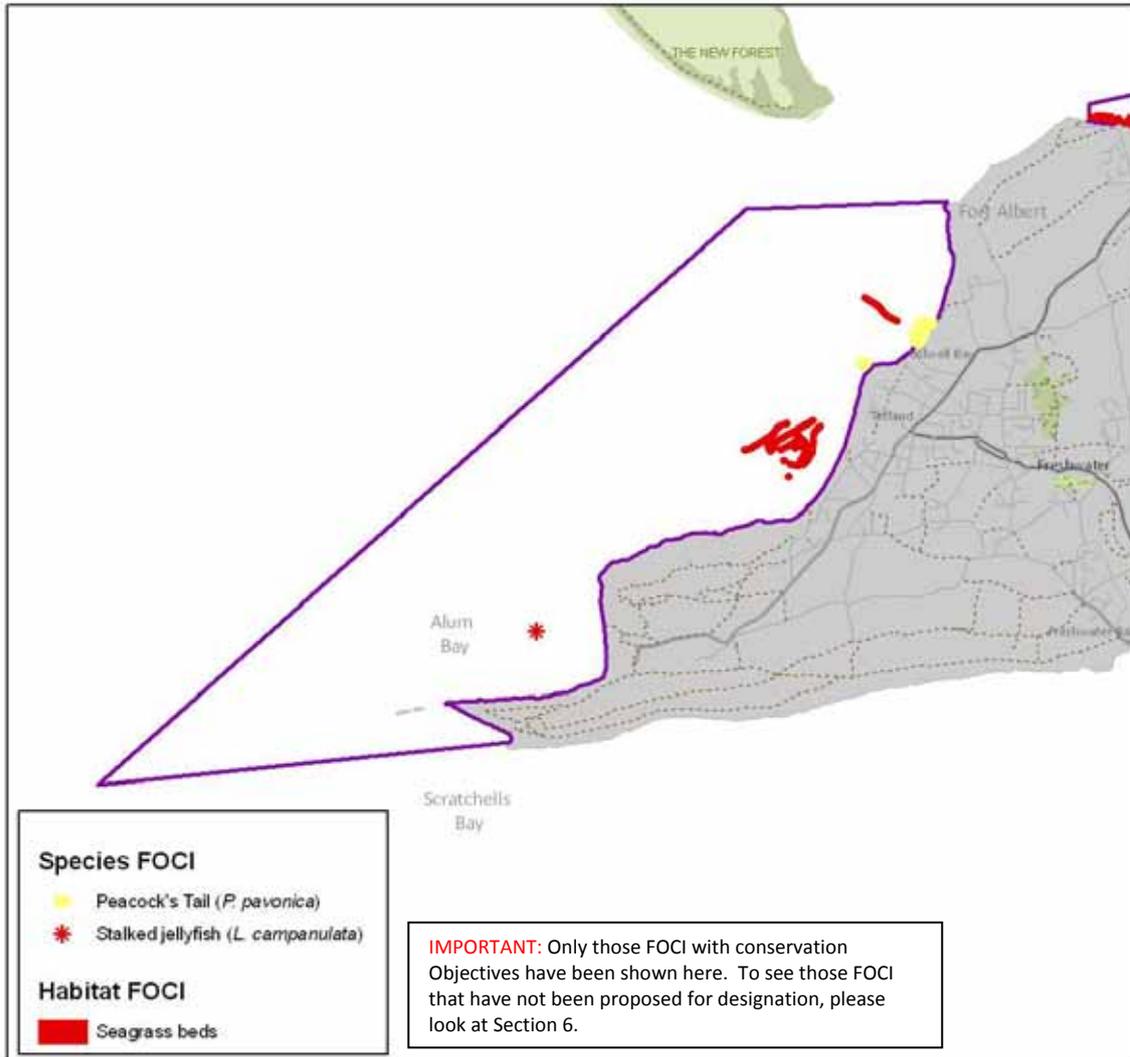
- A3.A4: Low energy infaunal rock and thin mixed sediments
- A4.B4: Moderate energy circalittoral rock and thin mixed sediments
- A4.A4: Low energy circalittoral rock and thin mixed sediments
- A5.43: Infaunal mixed sediments



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The Needles rMCZ no 20
Habitat and Species FOCI Conservation Objectives

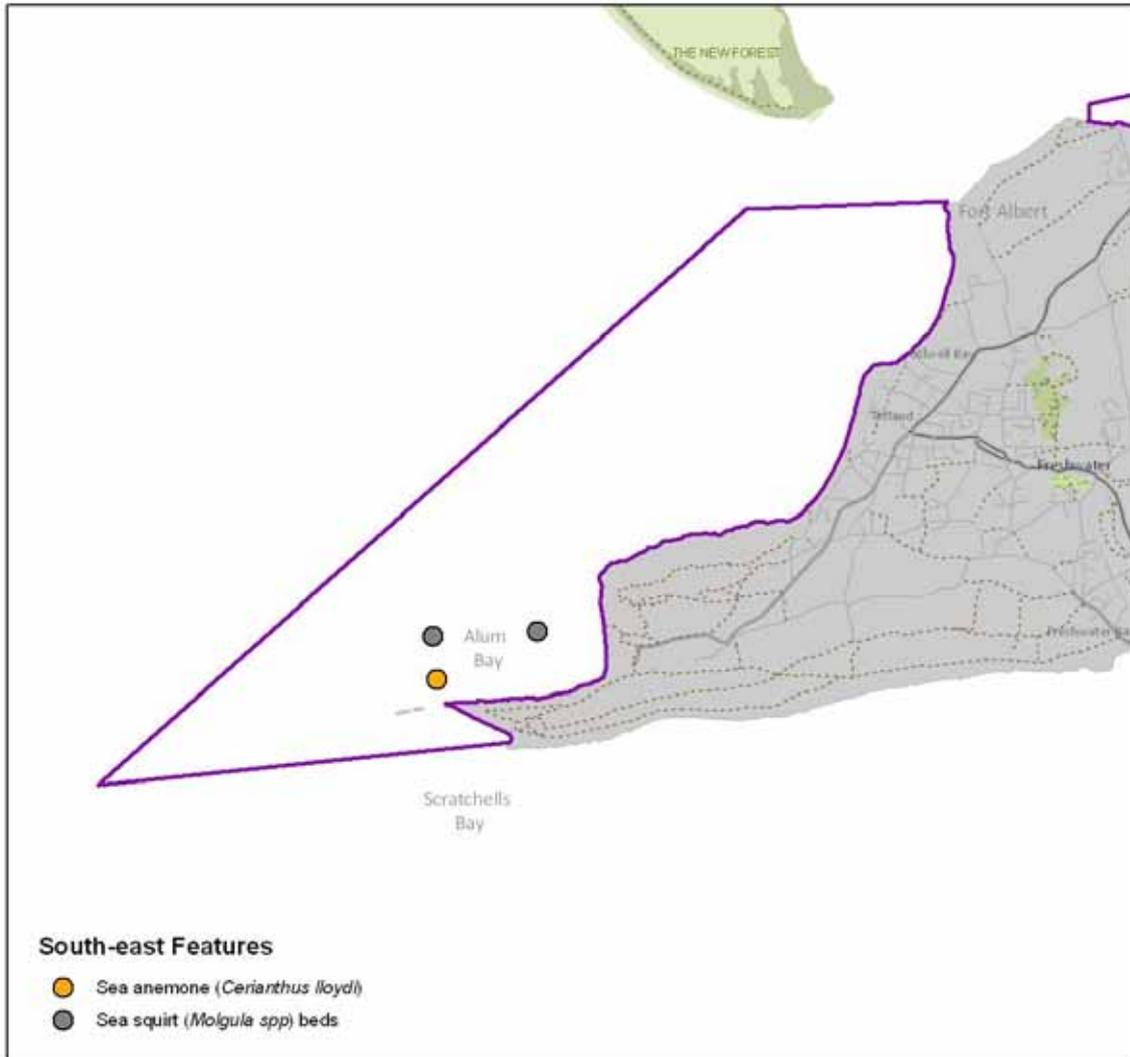
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The Needles rMCZ no 20
South-east Features

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10. Site boundary

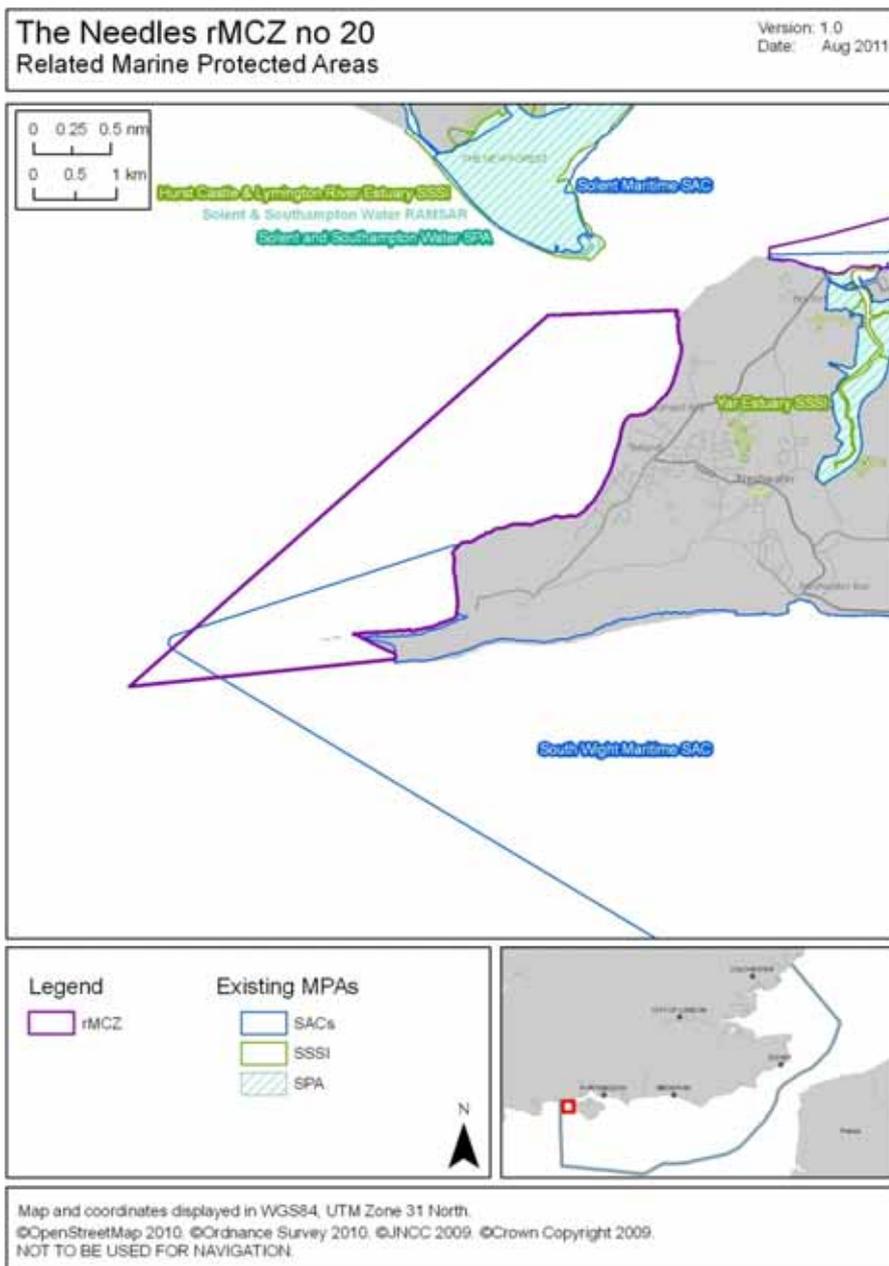
The landward boundary of this site is described by the Mean High Water mark from the point on the Isle of Wight opposite Hurst Point southwards to the southern point of Scratchell's Bay. From the north of the island, the seaward boundary of the site extends due southwest to meet the fairway buoy and avoid the dredging spoil area, before following a straight line to the lit red channel mark west of the Needles, avoiding the Shingles where the trawling activity is heaviest.

11. Conservation objectives

Individual conservation objective forms for each feature can be found in Appendix 1. For a site-based summary of the conservation objectives and proposed management measures, please see Section 15.

12. Sites to which this site is related

This site partially overlaps the South Wight Maritime SAC.



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13. Supporting documentation (information relating to ENG features only)

Information	Type of information	Source	Name of survey	Date
Broad-scale habitats	Modelled and survey data	JNCC V.7 Combined UKSeaMap and MESH	Combined	June 2011
Broad-scale habitats	Modelled data	MALSF REC	Synthesis study of central and eastern English Channel	2011
Native oyster beds	Survey	Marine recorder extract Sept 2010 (via Kent Wildlife Trust)		15/10/1999
Stalked Jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	Survey	National Contract data, DEFRA MB102 2B	JNCCMNCR20000801	15/10/1999
Seagrass beds	Survey	Ken Collins (Totland August 2006)		01/08/2006
Seagrass beds	Survey	Ken Collins (Totland June 2006)		01/06/2006
Seagrass beds	Survey	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust 2008 Seasearch		22/08/2008
Peacock's Tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Survey	National contract data, DEFRA MB102 2B		30/07/1972
Peacock's Tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Survey	IoW Natural History Society		24/08/2009

References (additional information can be found in the Bibliography)

- DALE, A. L. CHESWORTH, J. C. & LEGGETT, V. L. 2011. *Inventory of Eelgrass Beds in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Section Two: Data*. Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire.
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- JACKSON, E.L., LANGMEAD, O. HISCOCK, K. TYLER-WALTERS, H. MILLER, P. McQUATTERS-GOLLOP, A. SAUNDERS, J. & C. FOX. 2009. *Accessing and Developing the Required Biophysical Dataset and Data Layers for Marine Protected Areas Network Planning and Wider Marine Spatial Planning Purposes. Task 2F: Development of Marine Diversity Data Layer: Review of Approaches and Proposed Method*. DEFRA, London.
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- SEELEY, B., LEAR, D. HIGGS, S. NEILLY, M. BILEWITCH, J. EVANS, J. WILKES, P. & ADAMS, L. 2010. *Accessing and Developing the Required Biophysical Dataset and Data Layers for Marine Protected Areas Network Planning and Wider Marine Spatial Planning Purposes: Mapping of species with limited mobility (Benthic species). (Task 2B)*. DEFRA, London.
- SEELEY, B., HIGGS, S., LEAR, D., EVANS, J., NEILLY, M., CAMPBELL, M., WILKES, P., ADAMS, L., 2010. *Accessing and Developing the Required Biophysical Dataset and Data Layers for Marine Protected Areas Network Planning and Wider Marine Spatial Planning Purposes. Report No 16: Mapping of Protected Habitats (Task 2C)*. DEFRA, London.
- SOUTH EAST ENGLAND BIODIVERSITY FORUM (SEEBF) 2010. *Key Inshore Biodiversity Areas in the Balanced Seas Region for Recommendation as Marine Conservation Zones*. Letter and list to RSG and Balanced Seas Project Team, 22 Nov 2010.

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14. Stakeholder support for the site

The RSG as a group reached consensus that this site should be put forward in their final recommendations. Most sectors supported this site during stakeholder discussions.

Individual sectors wishing to note their support or concerns about the site recorded the following at the final RSG meeting in August 2011; their comments have been transcribed verbatim from the form that they completed:

SECTOR	ORGANISATION	COMMENT for The Needles rMCZ 20
Yachting	RYA	Support maintain objective on anchoring, but further research is needed on the impact of anchoring on seagrass beds and ways of mitigating this.
Kite Surfing	British Kite Surfing Association	Contentious area but supported by kitesurfers.
Sea Angling		We would support maintain and a code of conduct to control commercial fishing.
	Local Fisheries Representatives	Low level of acceptance. Still questions about viability of eel grass in this area.
Fishing - FPO, beam trawling		Good support.
Birds	RSPB	Support as will benefit seabird foraging areas - particularly blackheaded gull + cormorant.
Wildlife Trusts	Hampshire Wildlife Trust	I support this site. The data for potting and netting in seagrass is wrong as there is an overlap. Anchoring in seagrass also occurs but this isn't in the VA.
Marine Ecology	Seasearch	Strongly support this site for protection of seagrass and sands and gravels around the chalk in the SAC.
Marine Wildlife	Marine Conservation Society	<u>Support site</u> . Subtidal mixed sands must be protected and recovered otherwise predominantly a paper park.
Heritage and Archaeology	English Heritage	Support.

15. Site summary of conservation objectives (COs) and proposed management measures

A conservation objective (CO) is a statement describing the desired quality of the feature. Existing MPAs in the UK use the term *Favourable Condition* to represent the desired state of their features. Some pressures caused by human activities may stop the feature attaining favourable condition if present at sufficient intensity.

MAINTAIN means that, the *stated levels of activity* currently occurring on the feature are considered acceptable, but features will be monitored and restrictions may have to be introduced if the condition declines.

RECOVER means that restrictions may be necessary on the activity causing the pressure, in order to allow the feature to recover to favourable condition. It does not necessarily mean that the activity will be prohibited, as other mitigation measures might be appropriate (e.g. change in gear type, reduction of intensity, seasonal restrictions, etc)

The table below documents the draft COs for ALL the features listed for protection within the site, as established by JNCC and NE through the Vulnerability Assessment (VA) process⁴ and then sense-checked at the national level⁵. Where a RECOVER objective is noted, the associated activity causing

⁴ The process of establishing conservation objectives is outlined in the [Conservation Objectives Guidance](#) (JNCC /NE 2011)

⁵ VA results were standardised across all four regional projects but the fisheries activity data is still undergoing assessment.

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the pressure is indicated. In some cases, where data and information warrant it, the RSG chose to adopt the changes to COs recommended by the public authorities: Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), Marine Management Organisation (MMO), Environment Agency (EA) or Natural England. Changes were only accepted when recommended by these authorities and have been clearly noted. Where the VA has not yet been undertaken, or there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the accuracy of the information being used to recommend a change to the conservation objective, it has been noted as 'TO BE ASSESSED'. Local and regional stakeholders were given the opportunity to comment on the COs and potential management measures and to provide additional information that might not have been taken into account in the VA work.

For greater detail on discussions relating to the site and the network, please refer to both RSG and Local Group stakeholder meeting reports at www.balancedseas.org.

Feature	Draft CO	Activity exerting pressure	IFCA/MMO /EA/NE Comments	Stakeholder comments on draft COs and potential management measures
A5.4 Subtidal mixed sediments	MAINTAIN			CO was RECOVER in Draft Final Recommendations but had been changed to Maintain during sense check as it was felt that Hurst Waste Disposal site is not a problem. Some LG members (July 2011) feel this needs re-assessing as there is some evidence that dredging spoil sediment spreads downstream across this feature. NE said that this is a licensed activity managed by relevant agencies and maintenance dredging protocols are reviewed, so the CO is appropriate
Seagrass beds	RECOVER	Fishing - set netting	IFCA code of conduct if CO remains as Recover.	<p>LG (July 2011) suggested this should not be a feature for protection at this site, but the WT consider it as suitable habitat for recovery of seagrass. Fishing sector said there is no overlap with set-netting or potting, and LG suggested the VA should be revised.</p> <p>RYA wants CO of MAINTAIN, although anchoring is not a pressure, as there is some overlap (e.g. off water front cafe (any good weekend 40-50 yachts will be anchored in front of it) and if restrictions are brought in it would affect 4-5 businesses; RYA would want proof that anchoring damages seagrass before restrictions are imposed.</p> <p>At the final RSG (Aug 2011):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Wildlife Trust (WT) said that recent surveys showed an overlap with potting and set netting, but other stakeholders were concerned about the lack of firm knowledge on the extent of the seagrass beds. Fishing industry said that any overlap will be accidental and can be mitigated against and suggested that the cuttlefish traps in the WT photos were there to allow the eggs that attach to the pots to be naturally removed by the tide. Wildlife sector noted that anchoring has not come up as a pressure and suggested that the VA be checked and a further assessment completed if necessary. Several sectors felt much concern as to whether sea grass is a suitable feature to protect here
Stalked Jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	MAINTAIN			
Peacock's Tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	MAINTAIN			LG (July 2011) confirmed that there is no overlap with bait digging on this feature; and the only activities are shore based such as walking on the beach.

16. Evolution of the site recommendations

A broad area of interest (BAI) was located here to capture the diversity of different broad-scale habitats (RSG 2, June 2010), and expanded soon after to include the very rare St John's Jellyfish and the important population of Peacock's Tail. The RSG agreed to exclude an Area of Search for tidal energy development (RSG 5, October 2010) but as planning for this progressed it became clear that the proposed MCZ boundary did not need to overlap with it anyway, and the northern boundary was extended north to Hurst Castle to include additional broad-scale habitat and an area of higher biodiversity (Solent Inshore Task Group, Dec 2010). The Isle of Wight Site Meeting (Feb 2011) discussed future cable developments and current trawling activity that might be affected by an MCZ, and suggested that the outer (western) boundary be moved in slightly to accommodate these activities, with the caveat that subtidal mixed sediments habitat would have to be found elsewhere (this was subsequently achieved). The northern boundary was also extended to Hurst Spit, and then designed to follow the northern channel markers and then down to the buoy at the southwest corner to make navigation easier (Inshore Task Group, Feb 2011).

For greater detail on discussions relating to the site and the network, please refer to both RSG and Local Group stakeholder meeting reports at www.balancedseas.org.

17. Implications for Stakeholders

This site was identified early on in the MCZ recommendation process and has had good support from many sectors with some exceptions. The following issues are associated with this site:

- Major concerns were initially raised by the tidal energy industry as there were concerns that it would impact on The Solent Ocean Energy Centre, which has now received the go-ahead for its initial trials. This is one of only a handful of sites in the country where this technology may be possible; as presently configured the rMCZ should not affect this initiative.
- Some areas within the rMCZ are used intensively for recreational and refuge anchoring particularly Alum, Colwell and Totland Bays. This area is the first possible point of refuge for recreational vessels travelling across the Channel and thus is a very popular spot. The bays are also used by commercial charter vessels particularly from Yarmouth and Lymington.
- Lymington and Yarmouth ports are concerned about the proximity of this site to Hurst Spoil Ground which is used for dumping maintenance dredging materials. Concerns were also raised from several stakeholders over the effects of sediment dispersal from Hurst Spoil Ground on the broad scale habitats in the northern section of the site. Yarmouth Harbour Commissioner is also considered about the potential impact of this rMCZ on other port activities.
- Needles Pleasure Cruisers operate tourist trips out of Alum Bay which requires laying long and heavy seasonal moorings and ground chain from the pier in a westerly direction. The Conservation Objectives do affect this activity at present.
- The Crown Estate accept the site but note that the site is a potential cable route for Round 3 Zone 7 aggregates work and is the site of active and inactive cables, as well licensed disposals and outfalls.

This list represents only the major issues associated with the site. To see all stakeholder discussions, please refer to the Balanced Seas RSG and Local Group meeting reports at www.balancedseas.org.