

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

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 Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ 3 Contains: Colne Point rRA no.1 & South Mersea rRA no. 2	3. Site surface area 304.97 km ² 30,497 ha
2. Site centre location ETRS89 N51 43' 14.012" E0 58' 20.552" N51 43.234' E0 58.343' (N.B. WGS 84 UTM 31N coordinates are provided in the map vertices)	4. Biogeographic region Southern North Sea

5. Features proposed for designation within Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries ¹

Feature type	Feature name	Area / No of records ²
Broad-scale habitats	A1.1 high energy intertidal rock	0.09 km ²
	A1.3 low energy intertidal rock*	0.18 km ²
	A2.2 intertidal sand/muddy sand	2.17 km ²
	A2.4 intertidal mixed sediments	0.08 km ²
Habitat FOCI	Native oyster beds	1.0 m ²
Species FOCI Low mobility	Native Oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	17 records
	Lagoon Sea Slug (<i>Tenellia adspersa</i>)**	2 records
Species FOCI High mobility	European Eel (<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>)	n/a
Geology	Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore	n/a

* Subsequent to the Final Recommendation Report calculations, NE have suggested this habitat is protected (see Table 6)

** occurs above MHW

6. Features within Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries not proposed for designation ³

Feature type	Feature name	Comments
Broad-scale habitats	A1.2 Moderate energy intertidal rock	Majority of habitat protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	A1.3 low energy intertidal rock	Fully protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.1 intertidal coarse sediment	Majority of habitat protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.2 Intertidal sand and muddy sand	Fully protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.3 intertidal mud	Fully protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.5 coastal saltmarshes/saline reedbeds	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.6 intertidal sediments (aquatic angiosperms)	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	A2.7 intertidal biogenic reefs	Only small areas occur
	A3.2 mod energy infralittoral rock	Only small areas occur
	A3.3 low energy infralittoral rock	Majority of habitat protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	A4.2 mod energy circalittoral rock	Protected in Essex Estuaries SAC
	A5.1 subtidal coarse sediment	Majority of habitat protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A5.2 subtidal sand	Majority of habitat protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A5.3 subtidal mud	Majority of habitat protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	A5.4 subtidal mixed sediments	Majority of habitat protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
A5.5 Subtidal macrophyte-dominated sediment	Fully protected by Essex Estuaries SAC	

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.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Feature type	Feature name	Comments
	Mosaic of A2.3, A2.5	Fully protected by Essex Estuaries SAC and SSSI
Habitat FOCI	Blue mussel beds	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Estuarine rocky habitats	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Intertidal underboulder communities	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Peat and clay exposures	Partially protected by Essex Estuaries SAC
	Rossworm (<i>Sabellaria spinulosa</i>) reef	Protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Seagrass beds	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC, Foulness, Dengie and Blackwater SSSIs
	Seapens & burrowing megafauna	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Sheltered muddy gravels	Fully protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
	Subtidal sands and gravels	Majority of habitat protected within Essex Estuaries SAC
Species FOCI	Smelt (<i>Osmerus eperlanus</i>)	Spread throughout but numbers not significant
High mobility	Undulate Ray (<i>Raja undulata</i>)	This species does not occur anywhere in the Thames region (KESFC)

7. Map of site (see below)

8. Site summary

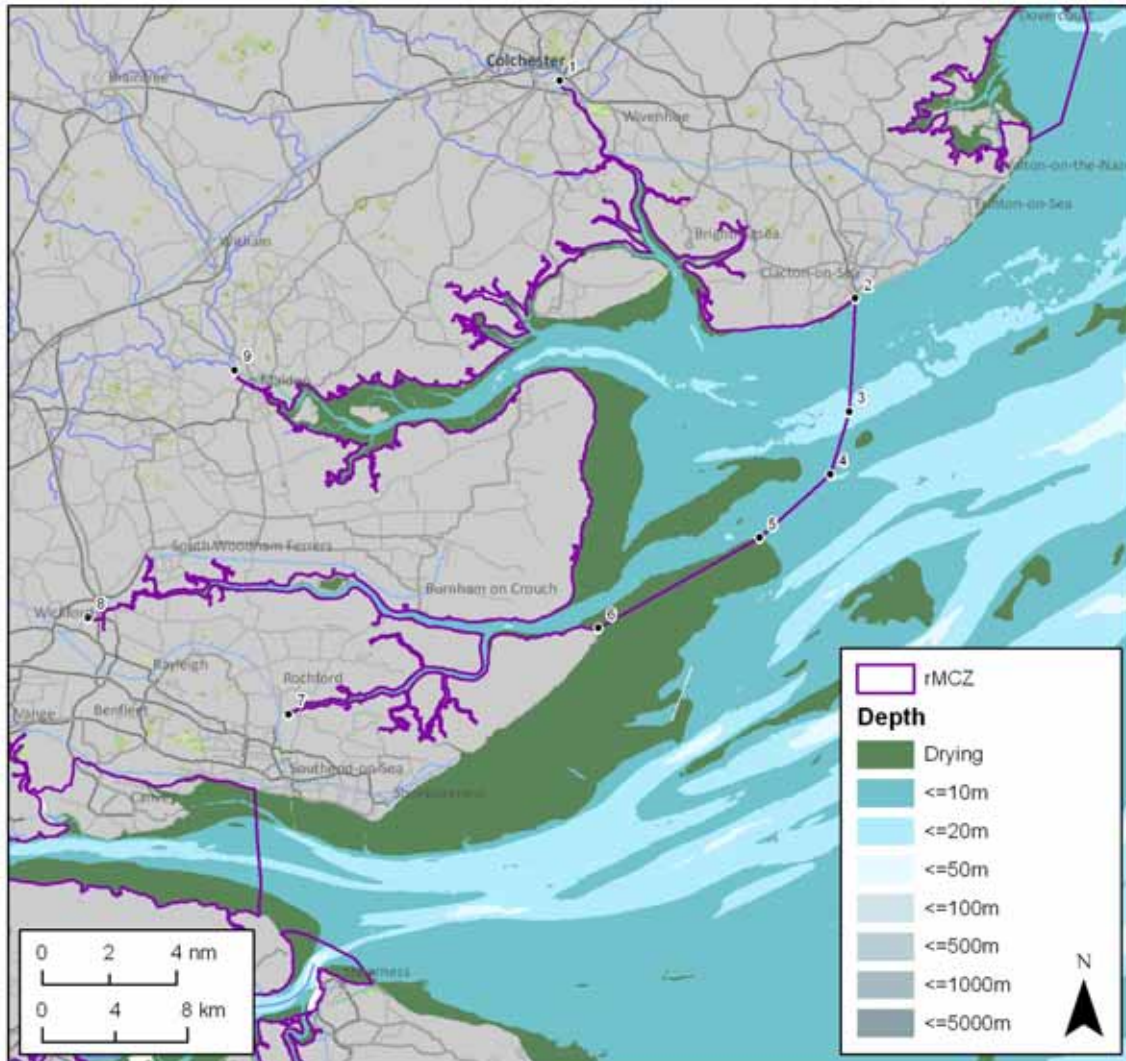
The Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ builds upon the existing protection offered by the Colne Estuary SSSI, Blackwater Estuary SSSI, Crouch & Roach Estuaries SSSI, Dengie SSSI and Essex Estuaries SAC. The site contains (though actually just outside the MHW limits) the only occurrence of the Lagoon Sea Slug (*Tenellia adspersa*) in the southeast region. Essex Wildlife Trust surveys at Abbotts Hall Farm and Howlands Marsh Nature Reserves (Wilson and Wilson, 1999; 2001) just outside the site boundaries have confirmed its presence. The site is considered to be the most important area for both wild and cultivated native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) in the southeast region, with significant beds occurring in the Crouch and Roach estuaries and throughout the Blackwater Estuary, though the existing data underestimates their distribution. Though only occurring in low densities, stakeholders note that the European Eel occurs in the site, with densities highest in the creeks (Balanced Seas Blackwater Sites Meeting Report, February 2011). Local knowledge suggests important geological features, fossils and rare species (e.g. algae) on rocky outcrops occur here and the Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore geological feature has been identified for protection. The site is considered to be very important as a spawning and nursery ground for several species of fish, as well as an important foraging ground for a number of bird species. The Colne and Crouch estuaries are recorded as having high benthic species richness, whereas the Blackwater has high benthic biotope richness.

At current levels, all activities are thought to be compatible with achieving the draft conservation objectives in this site. However, two features were added at the last RSG meeting and will have to be assessed in order to determine the appropriate conservation objectives.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3 Site Map

Version: 1.0
Date: Aug 2011



Boundary coordinates
Degrees Minutes Seconds Degrees Decimal Minutes

ID	Latitude	Longitude	Latitude	Longitude
1	N51° 53' 28.399"	E0° 54' 53.530"	N51° 53.473'	E0° 54.892'
2	N51° 47' 13.365"	E1° 9' 19.515"	N51° 47.223'	E1° 9.325'
3	N51° 43' 51.158"	E1° 9' 10.681"	N51° 43.853'	E1° 9.178'
4	N51° 41' 58.156"	E1° 8' 22.025"	N51° 41.969'	E1° 8.367'
5	N51° 40' 1.285"	E1° 5' 3.186"	N51° 40.021'	E1° 5.053'
6	N51° 37' 12.347"	E0° 57' 28.498"	N51° 37.206'	E0° 57.475'
7	N51° 34' 21.385"	E0° 42' 49.022"	N51° 34.356'	E0° 42.817'
8	N51° 37' 3.544"	E0° 33' 5.593"	N51° 37.059'	E0° 33.093'
9	N51° 44' 33.722"	E0° 39' 43.511"	N51° 44.562'	E0° 39.725'



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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.

rMCZ no 3 includes the Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries, including all the creeks below the Mean High Water for all these estuaries, and is designed to protect features that are not already protected by the existing designations. The largest of the estuaries is the Blackwater, considered to be one of the largest in the East of England region, with extensive areas of mudflat and saltmarsh (Heppel & Brown 2008). According to the UKSeaMap/MESH (JNCC v7) data that has had protected habitats removed, most of the broad-scale habitats found in the site are protected under the Essex Estuaries SAC, though a few small unprotected areas of habitat that remain have been listed as features for protection in the rMCZ in order to ensure that all habitat types are protected in both biogeographic regions where possible (see Broad-scale habitats map.) However, some of the exceptionally small areas of habitat shown in the project data may be an artefact of the mapping process, where protected habitats have been removed.

The site is considered to be the most important area for both wild and cultivated native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) in the southeast region, with significant beds occurring in the Crouch and Roach estuaries and throughout the Blackwater Estuary (see FOCI map). The Essex Wildlife Trust, the Blackwater Oystermen and other local stakeholders have pointed out that the project's data significantly underestimates the distribution for native oyster; the Blackwater Oystermen have prepared a map, with the Essex Wildlife Trust, showing distribution within the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries according to their own knowledge and this was presented at the Local Group meeting in July 2011, though the map was not subsequently given to the Balanced Seas. The Blackwater Oystermen assert that the wide diversity of benthic life in the seabed of the River Blackwater today is due to the constant cultivation over several centuries (such as controlling the harvesting of oysters, removing silt and predators such as the starfish and whelk tingle). They have suggested that the good management of the Blackwater has improved the water quality and led to an abundant stock of native oysters. There is concern, however, that the invasive species Pacific Oyster (*Ostrea gigas*) could become a problem if not managed.

The site contains the only occurrence of the Lagoon Sea Slug (*Tenellia adspersa*) in the southeast region. Essex Wildlife Trust surveys at Abbots Hall Farm and Howlands Marsh Nature Reserves (Wilson and Wilson, 1999; 2001) have confirmed its presence, though precise distribution data have yet to be confirmed as the geographical co-ordinates for the few scarce records of this species are lacking. However, georeferenced spatial data was provided for the Abbot's Hall Farm record and the RSG subsequently recommended this as a Reference Area for the species, adjusting the boundary of the site to include the boundary of the farm. Though only occurring in low densities, the European Eel has been recorded in the site, with densities highest in the creeks.

Throughout discussions, the importance of spawning and nursery grounds has been clearly noted by stakeholders. However, spawning grounds were considered to be additional areas of ecological importance that should be protected indirectly via direct protection of the broad-scale seabed habitats that support them. With nearly all the broad-scale habitats already protected under existing designations, the RSG has found it challenging to ensure that the important spawning and nursery grounds in this site receive the necessary protection. In the Blackwater and Colne Estuary in particular, Sand-smelt and Bass nurseries exist, where saltmarsh provides the optimum nursery ground for the early life stages of these species (Colclough, 2010). Migratory species including salmon, sea trout and eel are common to almost all of these estuaries and a sprat nursery at

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Bradwell appears to be present for most of the year (Colclough, 2010). The RSPB Wallasea Island Wild Coast Project will lead to creation of new habitat that is thought likely to be good for small fish/fry. Blackwater Herring (*Clupea harengus* L. and also called the Thames Herring) are a distinct population breeding in spring along the coast, in comparison to the offshore herring population that breeds in autumn, and the principle recognized spawning site for this species is Eagle Bank at the mouth of the Blackwater Estuary (Fox, 2001). Local stakeholders have stated that the site is also a spawning for Grey Mullet, Thornback Ray, Stingray, Sole and Brown Shrimp, the latter being an important source of food for fish species. Tope Shark and Whiting have nursery areas in the area.

The area is also an important foraging area for birds, particularly Black-headed Gull. Buxey Sands and Dengie Flats are notable as an important Grey Seal haul-out and pupping site that is said to attract more than 100 individuals. The Wildlife Trusts have collected information on species and habitats considered to be rare or important in the region and have provided Balanced Seas with spatial data for these features. Their data show that the site contains *Ampelisca* mats (recorded at 2 locations in 1991), sea anemones (*Diadumene cincta* and associated species) and Horned Wrack (*Fucus ceranoides*) (see map of South East features). The Wildlife Trusts have noted that pink coralline intertidal algae form an unusual habitat near Osea Island and Maldon, though the Wildlife Trusts had no spatial data to support this, and stakeholders noted that it is already protected in the existing MPA (Blackwater site meeting, March 2011). The Blackwater, Croach and Roach, and Foulness are among of the Key Inshore Biodiversity Areas in the Balanced Seas Region recommended as an MCZ by the South East England Biodiversity Forum (SEEBF, 2010).

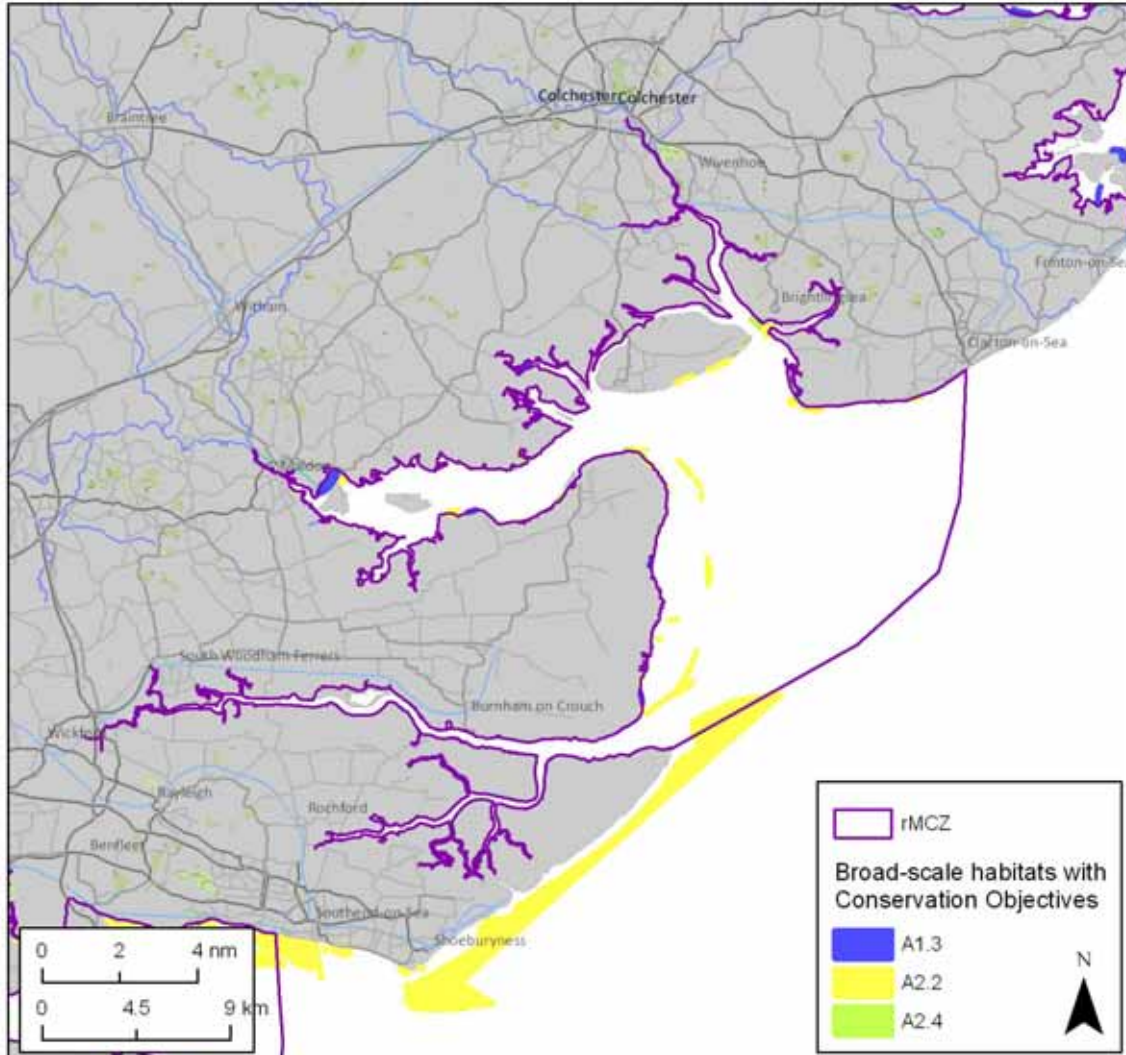
Local knowledge suggests important geological features, fossils and rare species (e.g. algae) on rocky outcrops occur here and the Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore geological feature has been identified for protection (see Geology map). The national contract datasets (Seely et al, 2009 DEFRA MB102 2B) show that the Colne and Crouch estuaries have high benthic species richness, whereas the Blackwater has high benthic biotope richness.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

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

Version: 1.0
Date: Aug 2011



Broad-scale habitats with Conservation Objectives:

- A1.3 low energy intertidal rock
- A2.2 intertidal sand/muddy sand
- A2.4 intertidal mixed sediments

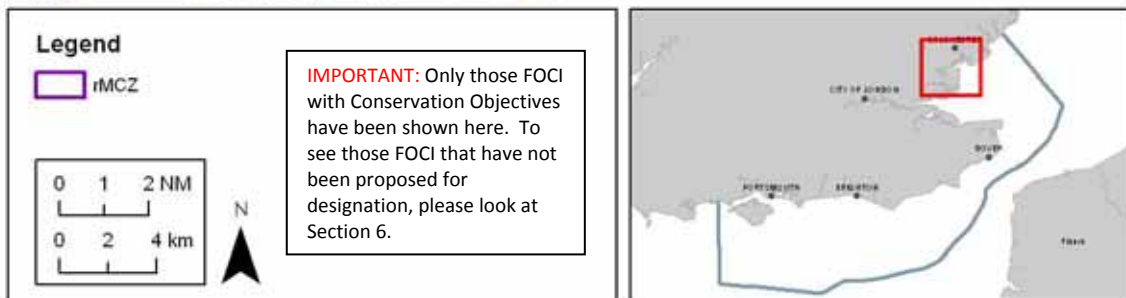
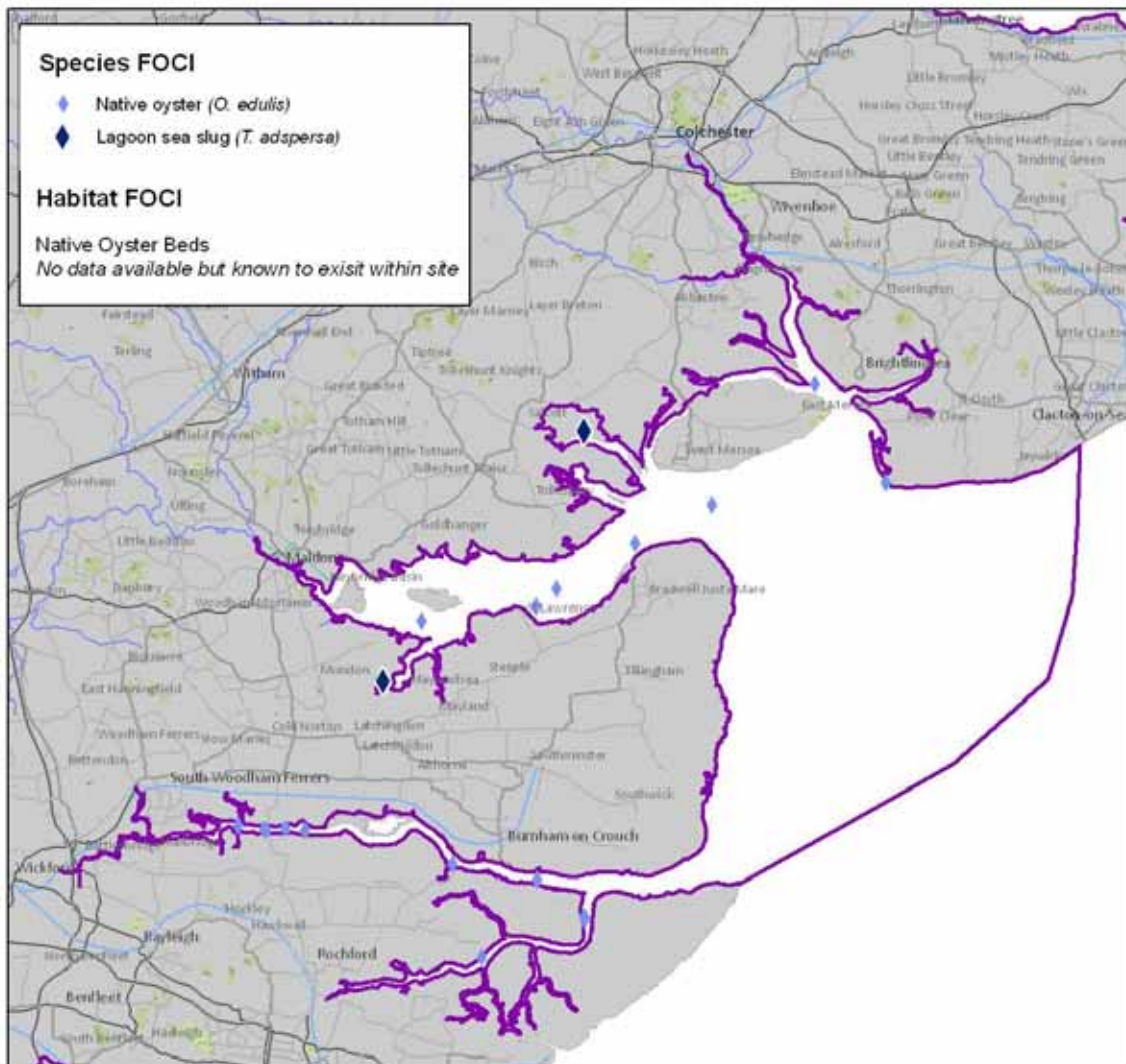
IMPORTANT: Only those broad-scale habitats with Conservation Objectives have been shown here. To see those habitats that have not been proposed for designation, please look at Section 6.



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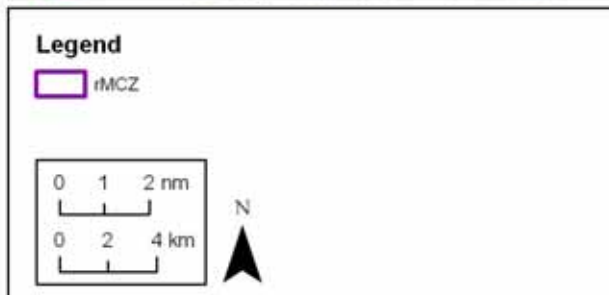
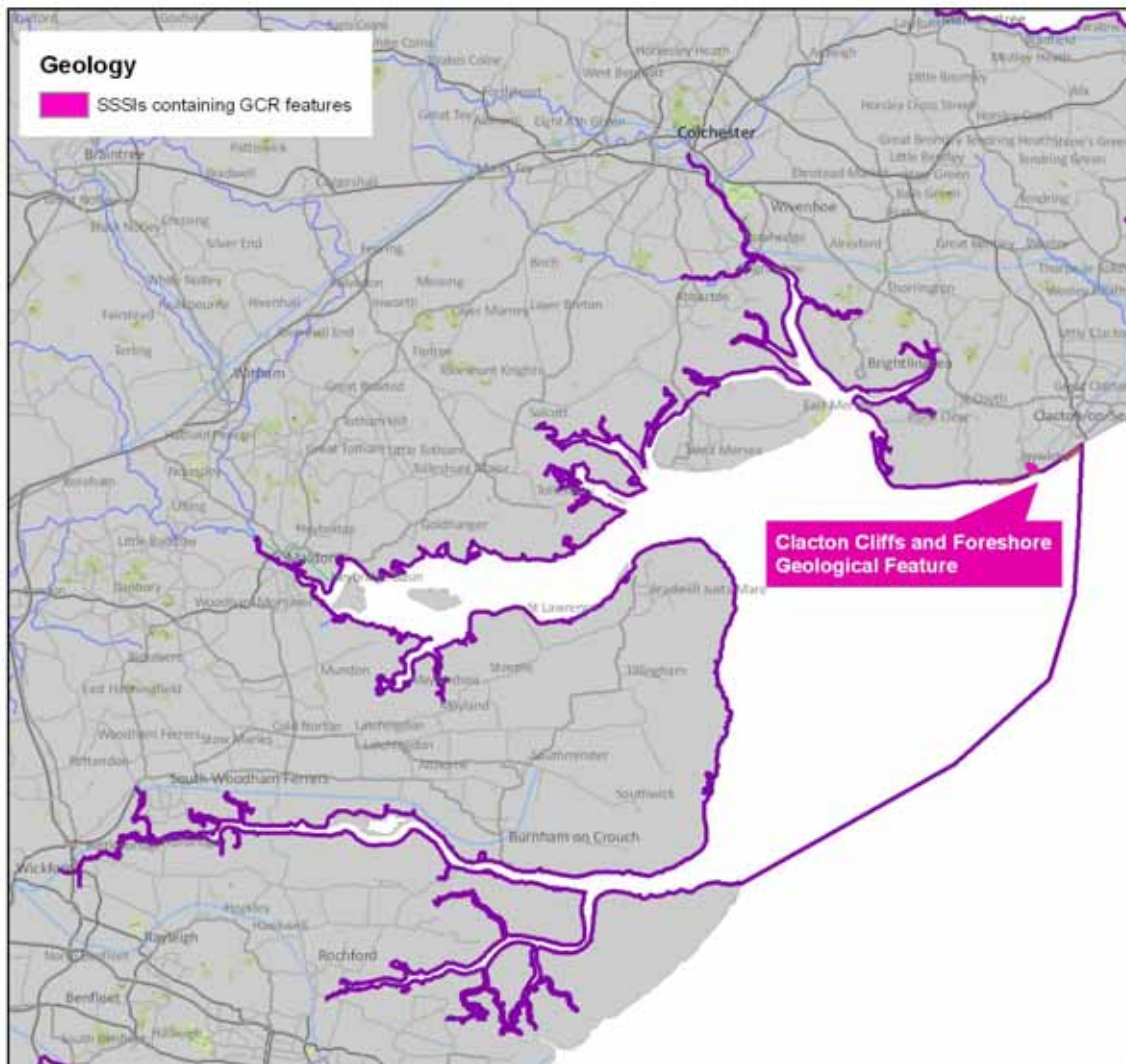
Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3 Habitat and Species FOCI Conservation Objectives



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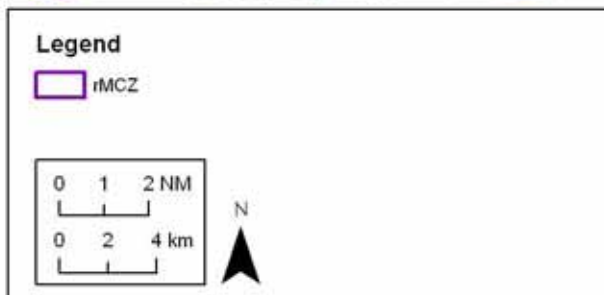
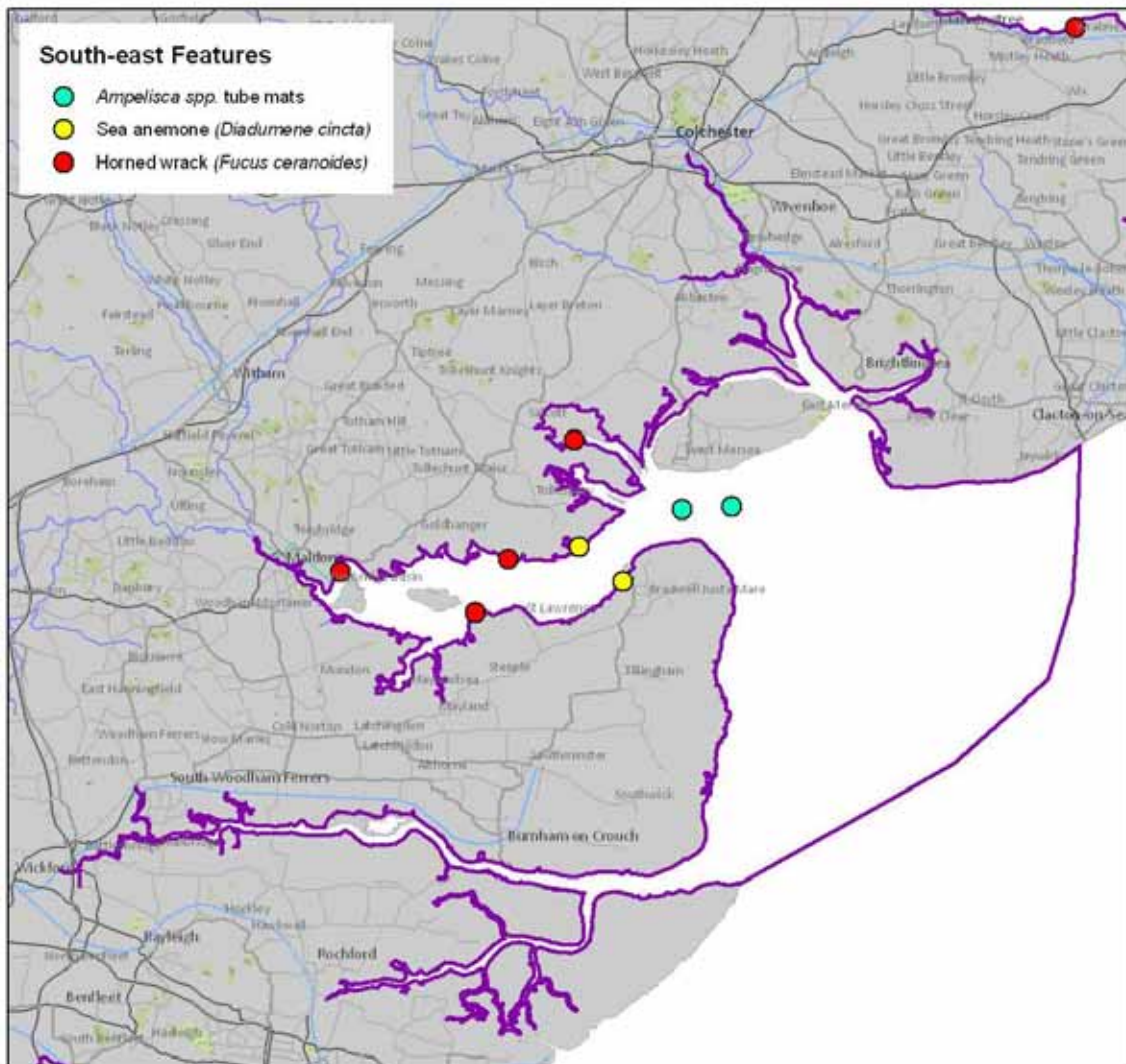
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Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3 Geology



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South-east Features



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10. Site boundary

The landward boundary of the site is determined by the Mean High Water limit of the Colne, Blackwater, Crouch and Roach estuaries. The seaward boundary of the site has been drawn to include the mouth of all four estuaries as it reaches the Southern North Sea.

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 (see map below)

This site partially overlaps the Colne Estuary SSSI, Blackwater Estuary SSSI, Crouch & Roach Estuaries SSSI, Dengie SSSI, the Essex Estuaries SAC and a number of Ramsar sites (see map below). The site contains rRA 1 Colne Point and rRA 2 South Mersea.

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
Geology	Literature search	National Contract Data DEFRA MB102 2A	Mapping of Geological and Geomorphological Features	2009
Peat and clay exposures	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2C	JNCCMNCR10000341	30/09/1992
Peat and clay exposures	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2C	Multiple	2006-2009
Blue mussel beds	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2C	Multiple	1992-2006
Estuarine rocky habitats	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2C		26/09/2006
Seagrass beds	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2C		26/09/2006
Native oyster (<i>O.edulis</i>)	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2B		1954-1998
Lagoon sea slug (<i>T. adspersa</i>)	Survey	National contract data DEFRA MB102 2B		1998-2000

References (additional information can be found in the Bibliography)

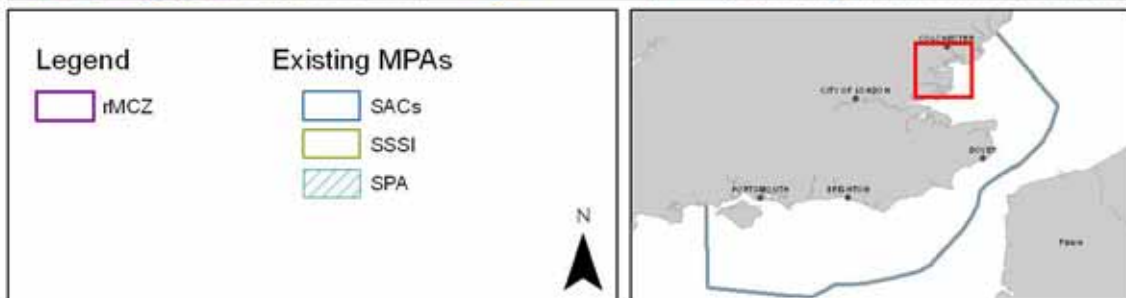
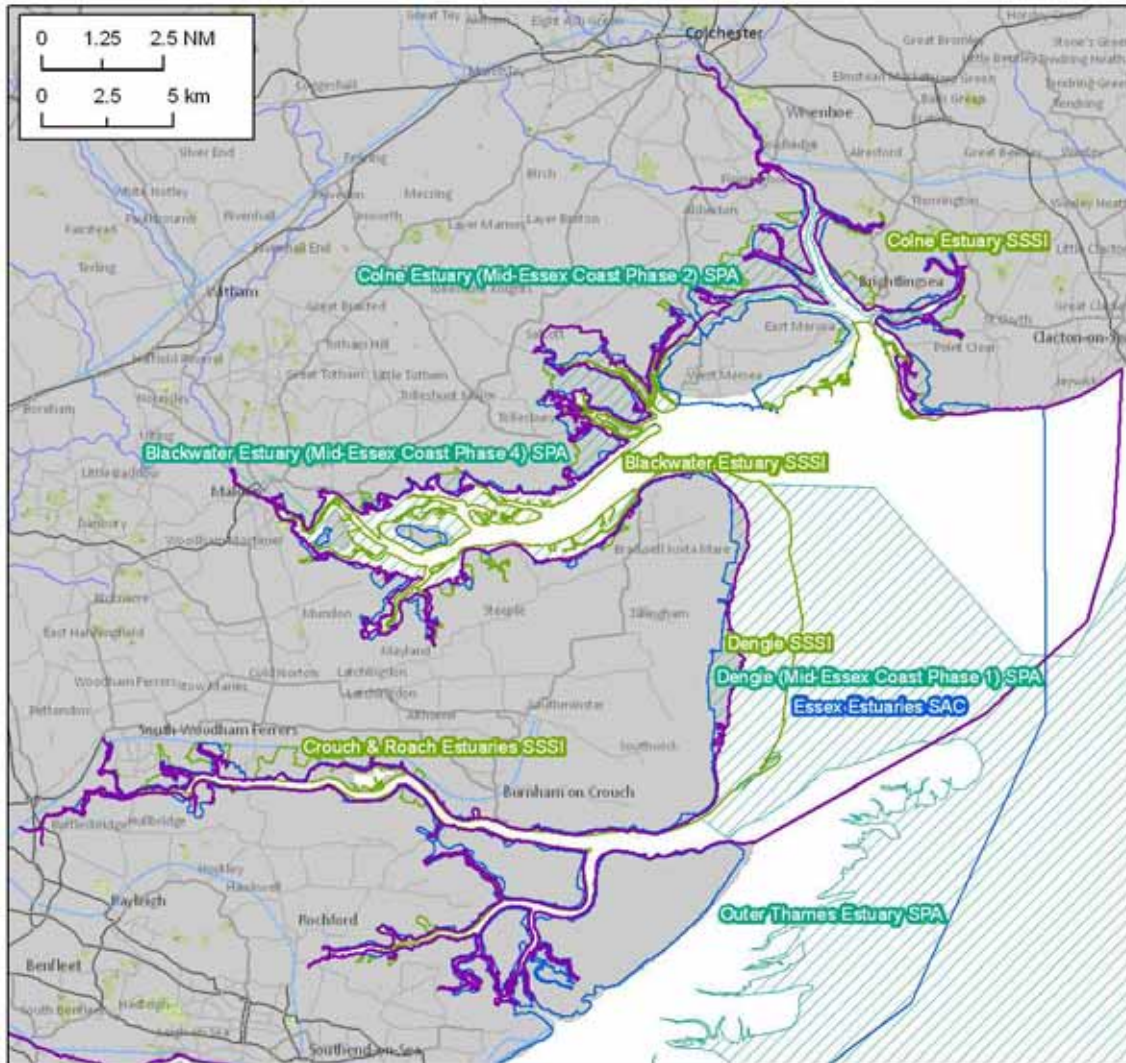
- COLCLOUGH, S., 2010. *Marine Fishery Nursery Function in the Blackwater and Colne Estuary*. Environmental Agency, United Kingdom.
- FOX, C.J., 2001. Recent Trends in Stock-Recruitment of Blackwater Herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) in Relation to Larval Production. *Journal of Marine Science* **58**: 750 – 762.
- HEPPEL, E.M., & BROWN, N. 2008. Rapid Coastal Zone Survey and Beyond: Research and Management of the Essex Coast, UK. *Journal of Wetland Archaeology* **8**: 26 – 52.
- SEELEY, B., LEAR, D. HIGGS, S. NEILLY, M. BILEWITCH, J. EVANS, J. WILKES, P. & ADAMS, L. 2010. *Assessing 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.
- 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.
- WILSON P., & WILSON P. 1999. *Tenellia adspersa* (Nordmann, 1845) Living at St Osyth in Essex. *Journal of Conchology* **36**: 125.
- WILSON P., & WILSON P. 2001. Marine Molluscs of the Borrow Dykes of North-East Essex. *Conchologists Newsletter* **10**: 62-66.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Related Marine Protected Areas

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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.

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 Blackwater, Crouch, Roach & Colne Estuaries rMCZ 3
Yachting	RYA	Oppose move to recover for native oyster. Otherwise support.
Kite Surfing	British Kite Surfing Association	Not sure <i>Ostrea Edulis</i> occur in Crouch and Roach in significant numbers. Therefore restricting anchoring in Crouch not necessary. Support for MCZ otherwise.
Sea Angling		I support this location with maintain for all features.
Fishing - under 10s (static gear)		(Tick)
Fishing - FPO, beam trawling		I have no real knowledge of this area, or expertise, but fisheries sector overriding principle is that "current activities must be allowed to continue".
Fishing - Over 10s, FPO, trawling sector (under and over 10m)	Gilson Co.	Happy
Shipping	Chamber of Shipping	Difficult to support because of impact on licensing/EIA costs for development/maintenance of port infrastructure (e.g. Brightlingsea).
Birds	RSPB	Support - this site important for black-headed gull, common tern, cormorant and MCZ will benefit these additional features of ecological importance.
Wildlife Trusts	Hampshire Wildlife Trust	I support this site but oyster CO should be recover as this is supported by oyster fishermen and NGOs, and IFCA.
Marine ecology	Seasearch	Strongly support site designation with management plan implementing a recovery objective. Reference areas are critical (and probably not large enough).
Marine Wildlife	Marine Conservation Society	<u>Support</u> . Native oyster should be <u>recover</u> in future.
Statutory environmental	Environment Agency	Broadly support - issue as above (in 2).
IFCA	Kent and Essex IFCA	General support. Support for native oysters change to RECOVER.
Heritage and Archaeology	English Heritage	Support. Management measures favourable to research in intertidal site and occasionally of peat exposures.

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.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

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 the pressure is indicated. In some cases, where information and data warranted 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.

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.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Feature	Draft CO	Activity exerting pressure	IFCA/MMO/EA/NE Comments	Stakeholder comments on draft COs and potential management measures
A1.1 High energy intertidal rock	To be assessed		This habitat was included as a potential feature for designation at the final RSG meeting in August in order to meet the remaining ENG targets. As a consequence, a vulnerability assessment will need to be undertaken to determine the CO.	RSG was concerned that A1.1 does not occur here and if it does, it is not a natural feature but a product of anthropogenic development (local knowledge). However, it was agreed that if future survey work identified the presence of this habitat, it would be included as a feature for protection
A1.3 Low energy intertidal rock	To be assessed		This habitat was included as a potential feature for designation at the final RSG meeting in August in order to meet the remaining ENG targets. As a consequence, a vulnerability assessment will need to be undertaken to determine the CO.	RSG had considerable concern that A1.3 does not occur here and if it does, it is not a natural feature but a product of anthropogenic development (local knowledge). However, it was agreed that if future survey work identified the presence of this habitat, it would be included as a feature for protection
A2.2 Intertidal sand/muddy sand	MAINTAIN		The vulnerability assessment and associated COs were only completed for the final RSG meeting in August and were therefore not discussed at the July LG meeting.	
A2.4 intertidal mixed sediment	MAINTAIN		The vulnerability assessment and associated COs were only completed for the final RSG meeting in August and were therefore not discussed at the July LG meeting.	
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)beds and species FOCI	MAINTAIN			<p>LG (July 2011) support this CO. However the RSG shellfish representative at LG meeting (July 2011) stated that there is local support for the CO to be changed to RECOVER. The Blackwater Oystermen propose this change which it is supported by the IFCA and the Wildlife sector. However, a RECOVER CO would be of concern to recreational sailing and RSA sectors.</p> <p>LG comments (July 2011)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no data other than that held by the project for native oysters in the Crouch and Roach; information was provided that these estuaries have been historically harvested and are recognised as important oyster habitat but the species occurs in lower numbers and less dense populations here than in the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries. There has been a long co-existence of oysters and moorings. • Crouch Harbour Authority feel that the evidence of the need for native oyster protection in the Crouch and Roach is not adequate and would like to see the Crouch and Roach removed from the site boundaries – they are concerned about possible future restrictions to recreational activities (mooring maintenance and anchoring) in such a popular tourist area if subsequent monitoring shows native oysters to be in decline. • Swinging yacht moorings occur opposite Royal Burnham Yacht Club on the Crouch Estuary, the 2nd most important yacht club in the UK. The yachting sector has concerns

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

Feature	Draft CO	Activity exerting pressure	IFCA/MMO/EA/NE Comments	Stakeholder comments on draft COs and potential management measures
				<p>about potential future reviews and changes to COs, although the oyster fisheries sector pointed out that the two activities have operated together for many decades</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The old Bradwell Nuclear Power Station is being decommissioned; however the site is one of eight in the UK identified in 2010 as suitable for construction of a new nuclear power station
European eels (<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>)	MAINTAIN		<p>Existing measures in place through the WFD and EA</p> <p>EA is working with developers of structures to ensure adherence to eel migration needs under the WFD and eel management plans</p>	LG agree with CO
Clacton Cliffs & Foreshore	MAINTAIN			At the RSG (2/3 August 2011), concern was noted from Dong Energy re: laying of wind farm cables coinciding with the geological feature Clacton Cliffs and Foreshore. NE stated that this would be addressed through the EIA.

Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuaries rMCZ no 3

16. Evolution of the site recommendations

The Blackwater, and Colne Estuary and the Crouch and Roach estuaries were identified as two separate Broad Areas of Interest in the first progress report, due to the very large number of ENG features and broad-scale habitats found here, as well as the stakeholder assertion that the area is very important for fish spawning and nursery grounds, bird foraging and seal pupping. They were subsequently joined as a single more coherent ecological unit. The Crouch and Roach part of the site has always had rather less stakeholder support on the grounds that there is less ecological evidence for its inclusion, and the high socio-economic importance of these estuaries for recreation (RSG 4, Sept 2010). As the contribution of existing protected areas became better understood, many features (particularly broad-scale habitats) were revealed as being protected, leaving only very small patches of unprotected habitat, some of which have been identified for protection to meet the biogeographic representativity ENG guideline. The southern boundary was extended approximately 100m south to meet the jurisdiction area of the PLA so that it might include important seal haul out areas. Later the RSG (RSG 7, Feb 2011) adjusted the boundaries at the northern section of the estuary mouth to include additional broad-scale habitats.

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

The following issues are associated with this site:

- The Blackwater Oystermen (the main native oyster fishery in the site) and Essex Wildlife Trust have jointly prepared a draft management plan for the Blackwater and Colne part of the rMCZ, as they see designation of the area as an MCZ, and thus protection of the habitat and marine wildlife, as a key mechanism for ensuring the future sustainability of the native oyster fishery. A major concern is the spread of the Pacific oyster.
- The compatibility of Native Oyster dredging activities and protection of these features still remains uncertain, although a specifically commissioned Natural England report has addressed much of this uncertainty and has been helpful in discussions on management.
- The rMCZ has very high recreational use for angling and yachting, and the yachting sector in particular has expressed concerns about the long-term implication of an rMCZ on activities such as maintenance of facilities and moorings, anchoring, maintenance dredging etc (particularly within the Crouch and Roach Estuaries).
- Some stakeholders had concerns with the renewed interest for a nuclear power station at Bradwell as water extraction for cooling systems would have an impact on the ecology of the estuary as a whole. Removal of native oyster spat during water extraction is a major concern and any increase in water temperatures when the water is flushed back out into the estuary would have a knock on effect for most flora and fauna including extending the period of time during which Pacific oyster populations could spawn (i.e. warmer water temperatures for longer periods of time)
- The Crown Estate noted that there are 11 active power cables and 2 active unknown cables. They have given support to the site on the assumption that 2km is a sufficient buffer to avoid impact on windfarm construction and operation

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.