

## Science Advisory Panel feedback on Balanced Seas draft final recommendations

Balanced Seas Regional Stakeholder Group (RSG) submitted its draft final recommendations for a network of draft Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and draft Reference Areas to the Science Advisory Panel (SAP) on June 10<sup>th</sup> 2011. The SAP provided detailed feedback on how it felt the draft final recommendations met the Ecological Network Guidance (ENG) and the suitability of draft MCZs and draft Reference Areas to protect their listed features.

The SAP feedback is structured in the following way:

- **Section 1** Overview
- **Section 2** Detailed comments on Balanced Seas recommendations in relation to the ENG
- **Section 3** Recommendations for Actions by the RSG and project
- **Section 4** General comments relating to all four projects
- **Section 5** Balanced Seas Site Specific Issues - predominantly comments on each reference area

The major points raised by the SAP are as follows:

- **Significant achievement** - The RSG should be congratulated on the significant work undertaken to produce the draft final recommendations and the virtually complete network of draft MCZs and draft Reference Areas. In particular, the SAP was impressed how the RSG had overcome the challenges presented by incorporating the newest seabed habitat data (English Channel Synthesis REC Study) at a late stage in the process.
- **Potential reduction in adequacy targets** –the SAP felt that incorporating the REC seabed survey had significantly increased confidence in the data, which would permit lower adequacy targets (for subtidal sediments) captured by the network, if that might increase stakeholder support .
- **Reference areas**
  - Reference Areas should be found for outstanding features (A1.1, A1.3, A5.3)
  - Site specific feedback on Reference Areas should be considered
  - The SAP considered that all Regional Projects had failed to meet the viability criteria for reference areas, and encouraged an increase in their size, particularly for broad-scale habitats
- **Representativity** - effort should be made to ensure that all broad-scale habitats were represented in both biogeographic regions, where this was possible. This relates to broad-scale habitats A2.2, A2.4, A3.3.
- **Replication** – the SAP agreed with the justifications provided by the RSG where FOCI replication targets had not been met, with the exception of Peacock's Tail (*Padina pavonica*)
- **Viability** – sites that did not meet the viability criteria (e.g. Kingmere) should be enlarged
- **Connectivity** – should be reviewed where possible between the Regional Projects
- **Finalise conservation objectives** – all conservation objectives should be agreed by the RSG for the final recommendations

**Given the limited project time remaining, the Balanced Seas and the other four regional projects will address the SAP feedback in a pragmatic and prioritised way, ensuring that any further additions to the network do not compromise the work necessary for the RSG to agree upon the final recommendations.**