

Government continues its plans for nature recovery in our seas

News story

Four Marine Management Organisation (MMO) byelaws come into force today (June 13) to protect four offshore marine protected areas.



These are being introduced under new powers under the Fisheries Act, the first major fisheries legislation in almost 40 years. These new measures will prohibit fishing activities in MPAs where there is evidence that they harm wildlife or damage habitats.

Formal consultation was held between 1 February and 28 March 2021 on proposed management measures to manage fishing within four Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the English offshore region. Having reviewed the consultation responses, the MMO has now made these four byelaws which were confirmed by the Secretary of State and have come into force today.

The byelaws will bring in management measures on fishing within these four MPAs in English waters:

- Dogger Bank Special Area of Conservation
- Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge Special Area of Conservation
- South Dorset Marine Conservation Zone
- The Canyons Marine Conservation Zone

Under these byelaws, bottom trawls, dredges, demersal seines, and semi-pelagic trawls, collectively known as bottom towed gear, cannot be used over certain areas. Two of the sites also prohibit the use of certain static gear such as pots, nets, or lines over particularly sensitive areas.

Protecting the features of these MPAs is important to safeguard the ecosystem services which they provide. These may include providing nursery areas for commercially important fish species, providing food for marine birds and other threatened species, and sequestering and storing “blue” carbon. These measures also provide an opportunity to better understand how these services

change as ecosystems recover.

These first four MPAs were selected as a priority to preserve their vibrant and productive undersea ecosystems. They include the Dogger Bank Special Area of Conservation, which has the largest shallow sandbank in British waters and supports commercial fish species such as cod and plaice, as well as sand eels that provide an important food source for kittiwakes, puffins and porpoises. They also include the Canyons Marine Conservation Zone which protects rare and highly sensitive deep water corals.

The names of the byelaws are:

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