

**MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES  
IN THE  
NORTHERN IRELAND INSHORE REGION**

**JUSTIFICATION REPORT FOR SELECTION OF PROPOSED  
MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES (pMCZ) FEATURES.**



## Document version control

Version	Date	Author	Comments
Version 0.1	12/05/2014	Liz Pothanikat	Initial draft
Version 0.2	21/05/2014	Liz Pothanikat	Addition of text
Version 0.3	22/05/2014	Nuala McQuaid & Stephanie Bennett	Updates
Version 0.4	25/09/2014	Nuala McQuaid & Stephanie Bennett	Amendments and updates
Version 0.5	01/10/2014	Nuala McQuaid & Stephanie Bennett	Revised format and text amendments
Version 0.6	02/10/2014	Joe Breen	Revision and amendments
Version 0.7	03/10/2014	Colin Armstrong	Revision and amendments
Version 0.8	03/10/2014	Clara Alvarez Alonso	Table of contents, version control and format
Version 1.0	17/11/2014	Clara Alvarez Alonso	Amendments
Version 1.1	02/12/2014	Clara Alvarez Alonso	Update

## Distribution List

Version	Issue date	Issued to
Version 0.7	03/10/2014	CNCC
Version 0.8	14/10/2014	JNCC
Version 1.0	17/11/2014	DOE Website
Version 1.1	02/11/2014	DOE Website update
Version 1.2	08/12/2015	DOE Website update



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## **Summary**

Priority Marine Features (PMFs) is a collective term for those features (habitats, species and geological/geomorphological) which are considered to be of conservation importance in the Northern Ireland (NI) inshore region. Proposed MCZ (pMCZ) features are a subset of the PMF list which are used to identify areas of search and will underpin the MCZ designation.

Once the MCZ has been designated for the identified MCZ feature, the PMFs that are also present within the boundary will be listed in the designation documentation and afforded protection.

The proposed MCZ (pMCZ) feature list consists of a range of species and habitats that require conservation action in NI waters. These features were put forward from the PMF list as, at the time of publication, they contain sufficient evidence for the designation of MCZs. After several reviews the recommended pMCZ list consists of 6 broad-scale habitats and 4 species for which MCZs are deemed the most appropriate conservation measure.

It is important to note that the PMF and pMCZ lists will be continually reviewed to include/exclude other features as further evidence becomes available.

Ultimately the combination of Ramsar, SAC, SPA, ASSI and MCZ protected sites will form the basis of Northern Ireland's contribution to the OSPAR ecologically coherent network of MPAs.

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## **Glossary of Terms and Acronyms**

**ASSI** – Area of Special Scientific Interest.

**Birds Directive** – Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (30 November 2009) on the Conservation of Wild Birds.

**EUNIS** – European Nature Information System.

**Habitats Directive** – Council Directive 92/43/EEC (of 21 May 1992) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora.

**Habitats Regs** – The Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended).

**IUCN Red List** – International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species.

**MPA** – Marine Protected Area.

**NI Priority** – Northern Ireland List of Priority Habitats and Species.

**NIMF** – Nationally Important Marine Features.

**OSPAR** - OSPAR is the mechanism by which fifteen Governments of the western coasts and catchments of Europe, together with the European Union, cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

**OSPAR T&D** – OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats.

**PMF** – Priority Marine Feature - collective term for those features (habitats, species and geological/geomorphological features) which are considered to be of conservation importance in the NI inshore region.

**pMCZ Feature** – proposed Marine Conservation Zone features that will underpin the MCZ designation

**SAC** – Special Area of Conservation, designated through the Habitats Directive.

**SOCC** – Northern Ireland Species of Conservation Concern.

**SPA** – Special Protection Area, designated under the Birds Directive.

**UK BAP** – The UK Biodiversity Action Plan List

**WANE** – Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

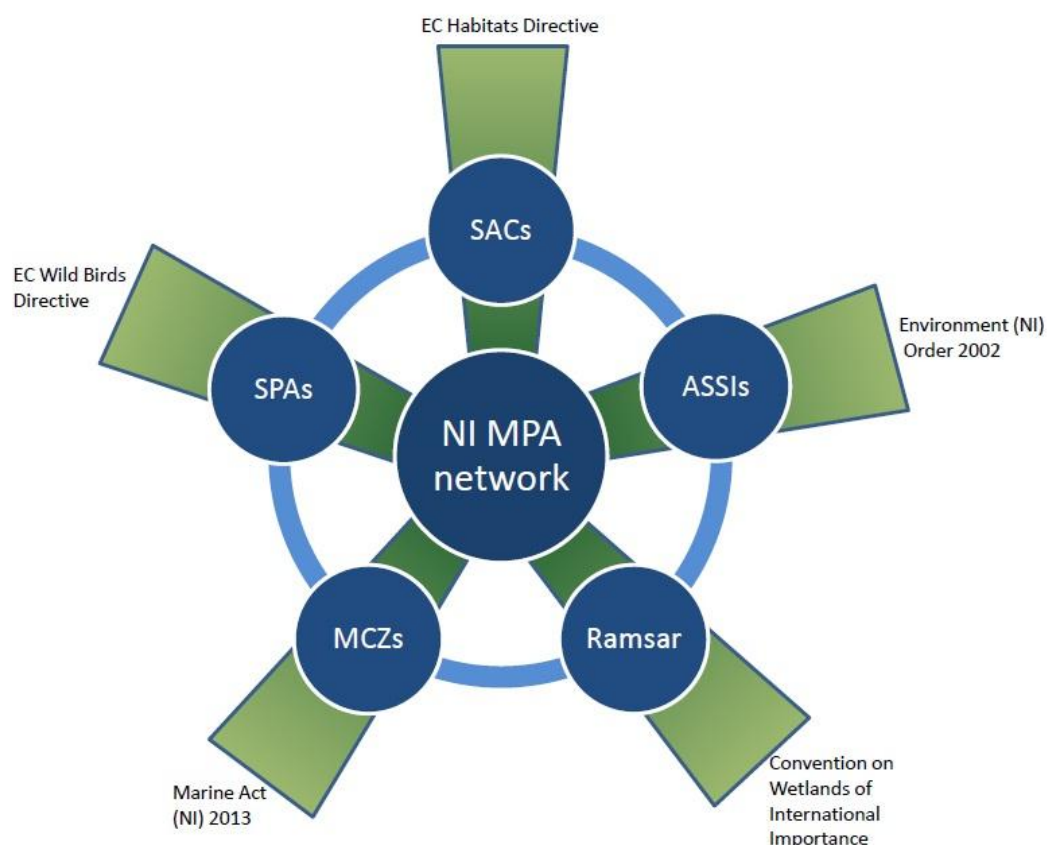
**WO** – The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985



## Introduction

The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 contain new powers to designate Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), in the Northern Ireland inshore and offshore regions respectively, as part of measures to manage and protect our seas for current and future generations.

The 'Guidance on selection and designation of Marine Conservation Zones in the Northern Ireland inshore region' (hereafter referred to as the 'Guidance document') details how the Department intends to identify potential MCZ locations, which, along with Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) will contribute towards a Marine Protected Areas (MPA) network in Northern Ireland's seas.



**Figure 1:** The contribution of nature conservation legislation governing the marine area to Northern Ireland's Marine Protected Area (MPA) network.

It is important to identify whether site based designation is the best mechanism for protecting a particular feature and once designated what management will be required to ensure the features are achieving their conservation objectives. For some species, it may be more appropriate to protect the habitat they are associated with to better facilitate management measures and monitoring programmes.

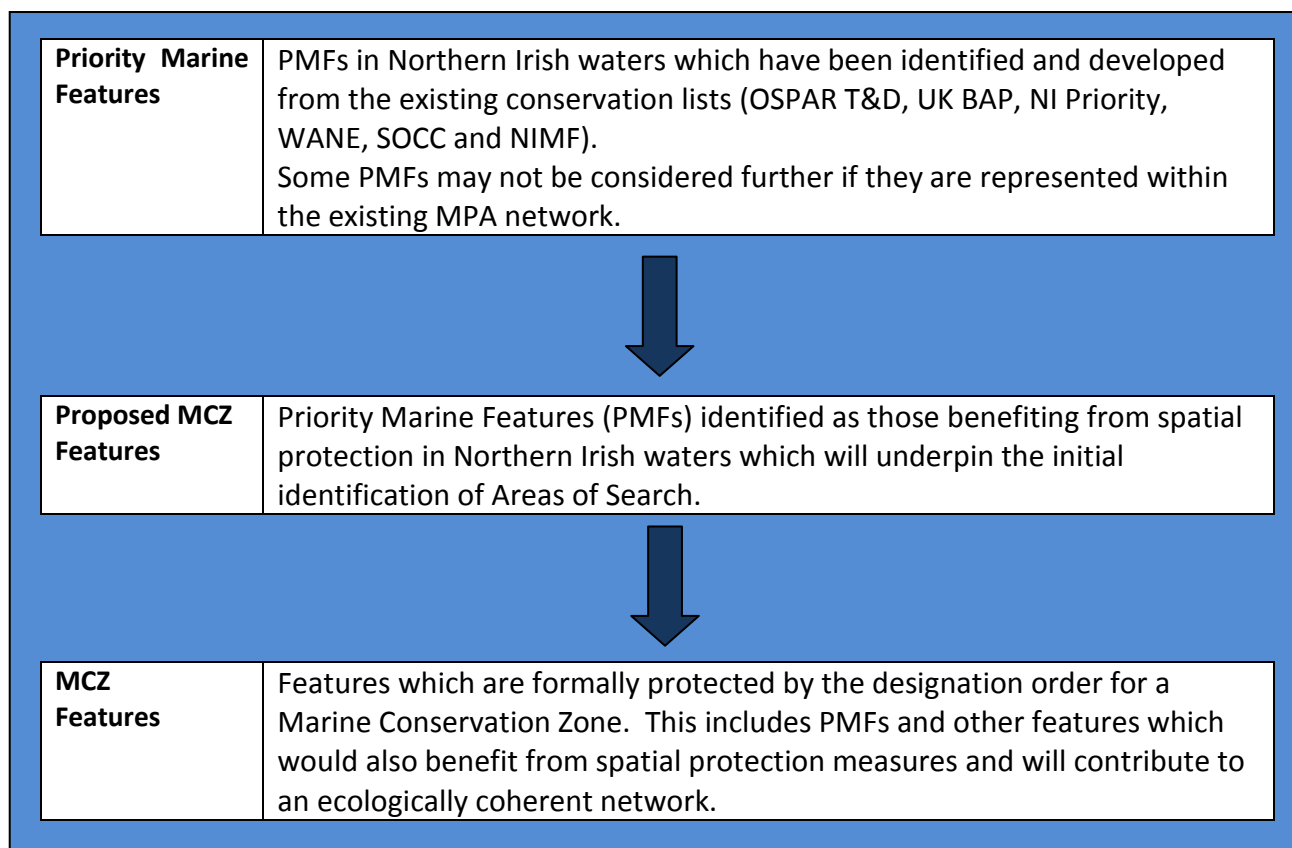
## Development of the Priority Marine Feature (PMF) lists

The existing conservation lists (outlined below) were amalgamated to identify marine features of nature conservation importance in Northern Irish waters. This is to ensure the range of representative, threatened, rare or declining species and habitats are protected. From this, the PMF Habitats, PMF Limited/low mobility species and PMF Highly mobile species lists were developed.

- OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats (**OSPAR T&D**);
- The UK Biodiversity Action Plan List (**UK BAP**);
- Northern Ireland List of Priority Habitats and Species (**NI Priority**);
- Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 Schedule 5 (**WANE**);
- Northern Ireland Species of Conservation Concern (**SOCC**), and
- Nationally Important Marine Features (**NIMF**).

The Department carried out a comprehensive criterion based review of all habitats and species on the PMF lists to identify the pMCZ features. These will underpin the MCZ designation process and be used to identify areas of search. The process for developing the pMCZ lists is described in Box 1 (below).

### Box 1. Development of the pMCZ feature lists





Department of Environment (DOE) held three workshops with experts<sup>1</sup> between 2011 and 2012 to develop a list of features that would be used to identify potential MCZs. These features are known as proposed MCZ features (pMCZs). Vagrants and migratory species (where there is no clear evidence of site fidelity for a particular life stage) were removed from the lists.

The pMCZ feature lists, however, are not exhaustive or fixed; evidence in the future may indicate other features from the PMF lists that are not adequately protected within the existing MPA network. In these cases new MCZs may be identified and designated. Refer to **Tables 1.1 to 1.4 (Annex I)** for details on the full PMF list.

### **Application of Criteria**

A number of criteria were used to develop the feature lists:

1. Already protected within an existing MPA – if a habitat or species was identified as being present within an existing MPA (SAC/ASSI) and associated with a designated feature then it was considered as being already afforded protection. In these cases the habitat or species was not progressed further for consideration. However, if during the assessment of Ecological Coherence, it is found that the features do not meet all the 7 OSPAR selection criteria, consideration will be given to identification of further sites within Northern Ireland and the wider UK network.
2. The suitability of MPAs as a conservation measure – for some habitats and species MPAs or site based management may not be the most suitable measure for protection. Other measures may already exist (e.g. fisheries closures, Wildlife legislation) that are more appropriate, in which cases the features are not considered further.
3. Rarity – in some cases rarity is an artefact of survey effort or difficulties identifying species *in situ*. Expert collective knowledge (see note<sup>1</sup>) is applied in these cases to determine whether the features should be retained for further consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> The expert list consisted of DOE Marine Division, the National Museums Northern Ireland, Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), Queens University of Belfast, University of Ulster (UU), Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and independent experts. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) also provided comments on relevant features. These individuals are deemed experts by virtue of their knowledge and experience in ecology and distribution of these features.

4. Data deficiency – gaps in information on feature extent and presence may result in decisions being made on the inclusion of features based on reasoned judgement combined with expert knowledge (best available evidence).

## Development of the Proposed Marine Conservation Zones (pMCZ) Feature lists

The Department recommends six broad-scale habitat types should be protected as features within MCZs in the Northern Ireland inshore region. These broad-scale habitats (based on the EUNIS Level 2 & 3 classifications) are used as this will ensure a wider range of habitats and species are protected and will represent the diversity of the marine environment. These are now referred to as proposed Marine Conservation Zone (pMCZ) Habitats (**Table 1**).

The Department recommends that two Limited/low mobility species and two Highly mobile species should be protected as features within MCZs in the Northern Ireland inshore region to conserve and aid the recovery of rare, threatened and/or declining species. These are now referred to as proposed Marine Conservation Zone (pMCZ) Low/limited mobility species (**Table 2**) and proposed Marine Conservation Zone (pMCZ) Highly mobile species (**Table 3**).

Even though an MCZ is identified for the reduced list of pMCZ features all additional PMFs contained within the boundary will be afforded protection and identified in the citation for the site.

**Table 1** pMCZ Habitats. This list describes the broad scale habitats (based on EUNIS Level 3 classification system) and their corresponding finer sub-scale habitats contained for which marine protected areas are considered an appropriate conservation measure. These pMCZ Habitats will be used in the early stages of the MCZ development, underpinning the initial selection of search locations.

pMCZ Habitat	Component (sub-scale) habitats
Deep sea bed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cold water coral reefs<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
Low energy circalittoral (subtidal) rock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estuarine rocky habitats</li> </ul>
Sublittoral (subtidal) biogenic reefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horse Mussel (<i>Modiolus modiolus</i>) beds</li> <li>• Blue Mussel (<i>Mytilus edulis</i>) beds</li> <li>• Brittlestar beds</li> </ul>
Sublittoral (subtidal) muds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mud habitats in deep water</li> <li>• Sea-pen and burrowing megafauna communities</li> <li>• Blue Mussel (<i>Mytilus edulis</i>) beds</li> </ul>
Sublittoral (subtidal) sand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circalittoral sand and gravel communities</li> <li>• Tide-swept channels</li> <li>• Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>) beds</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> No sites for the location of this feature has yet been determined.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brittlestar beds</li> </ul>
Sublittoral (subtidal) mixed sediments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brittlestar beds</li> </ul>

**Table 2** pMCZ Low/limited mobility species list. This list describes the species for which marine protected areas are considered an appropriate conservation measure. These pMCZ Species will be used in the early stages of the MCZ development, underpinning the initial selection of search locations.

pMCZ Limited/low mobility species
<i>Arctica islandica</i> (Ocean Quahog)
<i>Atrina fragilis</i> (Fan Mussel) <sup>4</sup>

**Table3** pMCZ Highly mobile species list. This list describes the species for which marine protected areas are considered an appropriate conservation measure. These pMCZ Species will be used in the early stages of the MCZ development, underpinning the initial selection of search location.

pMCZ Highly mobile species
<i>Dipturus batis</i> (Common Skate)
<i>Cephus grylle</i> (Black Guillemot)

### Geological and/or geomorphological features

Geological and geomorphological features refer to the physical structures (landforms, rocks, sediments) and the processes that shape them. Sites with these features will be chosen where they represent Northern Ireland’s geological history and are of international geological importance or contain exceptional geological features or are threatened and/or rare. The types of feature considered for protection was adapted from guidance produced by JNCC, SNH and Natural England, and are detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4** List of Geological/geomorphological features

Geological/geomorphological features
Glacial process features <sup>5</sup>
Marine process features <sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> No sites for the location of this feature has yet been determined.

<sup>5</sup> Adopted from ‘The Marine Conservation Zone Project: Ecological Network Guidance’ JNCC and Natural England. 2010

Mass movement features <sup>5</sup>
Features indicating past change in relative sea level <sup>5</sup>
Geological process features <sup>5</sup>
Seaward extension features <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Adopted from 'Marine Protected Areas in Scotland's Seas: Guidelines on the selection of MPAs and development of the MPA network' Marine Scotland, Scottish Government, SNH and JNCC. 2011

## Annex I

**Table 1.1** Priority Marine Feature (PMF) Habitats considered to be afforded protection under existing MPA network in the Northern Ireland inshore region - these cover the range of representative and threatened, rare or declining habitats in Northern Irish waters.

HABITAT	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
Coastal saltmarsh	UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Bann Estuary SAC, Murlough SAC, North Antrim Coast SAC and Strangford Lough SAC (notified features are Annex I 'Atlantic salt meadows [ <i>Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae</i> ]' and ' <i>Salicornia</i> and other annuals colonising mud and sand').
Fragile sponge and anthozoan communities on subtidal rocky habitats	UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Rathlin Island SAC, Maidens cSAC and the Skerries and Causeway cSAC (notified feature is Annex I 'Reef').
Blue mussel beds (intertidal)	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	Although this habitat is currently present within existing ASSIs and is afforded indirect protection, the ASSI feature list will be amended to include this habitat as a notified feature.
Intertidal mudflats	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Ballymacormick Point ASSI, Carlingford Lough ASSI, Killough Bay & Strand Lough ASSI, Outer Ards ASSI, Tyrella & Minerstown ASSI, Murlough SAC and Strangford Lough SAC (notified feature is Annex I 'Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater all of the time').
Intertidal under-boulder communities	UK BAP NI Priority	Although this habitat is currently present within existing ASSIs and is afforded indirect protection, the ASSI feature list will be amended to include this habitat as a notified feature.
Littoral chalk communities	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	Although this habitat is currently present within existing ASSIs and is afforded indirect protection, the ASSI feature list will be amended to include this habitat as a notified feature.
Maerl beds	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Red Bay and Rathlin Island SACs (notified feature is Annex I 'Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time').

HABITAT	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Sabellaria alveolata</i> reefs	UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Tyrella & Minerstown ASSI (notified feature is 'Intertidal mudflats and sandflats').
Saline lagoons	UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection through the existing ASSI network (Inner Belfast Lough, Killough Bay & Strand Lough, Larne Lough, Lough Foyle, Strangford Lough Parts 1&3).
Seagrass ( <i>Zostera</i> ) beds	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I 'Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time' and 'Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide' and Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough ASSIs; notified feature is 'Intertidal mudflats').
Sheltered muddy gravels	UK BAP NI Priority	Although this habitat is currently present within existing ASSIs and is afforded indirect protection, the ASSI feature list will be amended to include this habitat as a notified feature.
Subtidal chalk	OSPAR T&D UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Rathlin Island SAC and the Skerries and Causeway cSAC (notified feature is Annex I 'Reef').
Tide-swept channels	UK BAP NI Priority	This habitat is currently afforded protection under Rathlin Island SAC, Maidens cSAC and the Skerries and Causeway cSAC (notified feature is Annex I 'Reef'). However, this does not consider the tide-swept sand/gravel habitat types which will be covered by the PMF Habitat of Sublittoral Sand.



**Table 1.2** Priority Marine Feature (PMF) Limited/low mobility species considered to be afforded protection under the existing MPA network (SAC, ASSI) in the Northern Ireland inshore region. These cover the range of representative and threatened, rare or declining species in Northern Irish waters.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Ascophyllum nodosum</i> <i>ecad var mackayi</i> ( <i>mackaii</i> )	Alga – Brown	NI Priority	Although this species is currently present within an existing ASSI (Strangford Lough Parts 2&3) and is afforded indirect protection, the ASSI feature list will be amended to include this as a notified feature.
<i>Carpomitra costata</i>	Alga – Brown	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reef’).
<i>Desmarestia dresnayi</i>	Alga – Brown	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Atractophora hypnoides</i>	Alga – Red	SOCC	Although this species is ephemeral and rare it is associated with craline algae. It is mainly a western species in the British Isles with records from the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, Galway and County Cork in the south of Ireland, a few records from Wales and south-western England. There are only four records from Northern Ireland: County Antrim from Rathlin Island SAC and Loughan Bay (Torr Head) and in County Down at Greenore Point and near the entrance of Strangford Lough (SAC/MCZ) and five from the Republic of Ireland.
<i>Cruoria cruoriaeformis</i>	Alga – Red	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Red Bay SACs; notified feature is Annex I habitat ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Schmitzia hiscockiana</i>	Alga – Red	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Schmitzia neapolitana</i>	Alga – Red	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Red Bay SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Stenogramme interrupta</i>	Alga – Red	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, Red Bay, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’ and ‘Reef’).
<i>Sabellaria alveolata</i>	Annelida	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Tyrella & Minerstown and Mournes Coast ASSIs; notified feature is ‘Intertidal sandflats and mudflats’)
<i>Bugula turbinata</i>	Bryozoa – an erect bryozoan	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Pentapora foliacea</i>	Bryozoa – Ross coral/Potato crisp bryozoan	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway and Rathlin Island SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Alcyonium hibernicum</i>	Cnidaria – Soft coral	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Arachnanthus sarsi</i>	Cnidaria – Anemone	NI Priority UK BAP NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’). Are we content with this?
<i>Aureliania heterocera</i>	Cnidaria – Emperor/Imperial anemone	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Caryophyllia inornata</i>	Cnidaria – Cup coral	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Caryophyllia smithii</i>	Cnidaria – Cup coral	NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Diphasia alata</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Diphasia nigra</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Edwardsia timida</i>	Cnidaria – Anemone	NI Priority UK BAP NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Halecium plumosum</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’). This has also been removed from the NI Priority List.
<i>Haliclystus auricula</i>	Cnidaria – Stalked jellyfish	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Lytocarpia myriophyllum</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Parazoanthus anguicomus</i>	Cnidaria – Anemone	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Parazoanthus axinellae</i>	Cnidaria – Yellow trumpet anemone	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reef’).
<i>Polyplumaria flabellata</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Stomphia coccinea</i>	Cnidaria – Anemone	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Tamarisca tamarisca</i>	Cnidaria – Hydroid	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Atelecyclus rotundatus</i>	Crustacea – Circular crab	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Sandbanks slightly covered by seawater all of the time’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Cestopagurus timidus</i>	Crustacea – Hermit crab	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified features are Annex I ‘Reef’ and ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Corystes cassivelaunus</i>	Crustacea – Masked crab	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and Red Bay SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Homarus gammarus</i>	Crustacea – European lobster	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’). This is also protected by fisheries management measures and populations are currently stable.
<i>Inachus leptochirus</i>	Crustacea – Spider crab	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’ and ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’). There are no recent records – this has been attributed to the difficulty of identification <i>in situ</i> .
<i>Munida rugosa</i>	Crustacea – Squat lobster	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I habitat of ‘Reef’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Palinurus elephas</i>	Crustacea – Spiny lobster	NI Priority UK BAP NIMF WANE	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reef’). In addition, this species is protected under the WANE Act and there are fishery protection measures in place (minimum landing size).
<i>Anseropoda placenta</i>	Echinodermata – Goosefoot starfish	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Red Bay and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Antedon petasus</i>	Echinodermata – Feather star	NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway and Rathlin Island SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Asterina phylactica</i>	Echinodermata – Cushion star	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Astropecten irregularis</i>	Echinodermata – Starfish	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Murlough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Labidoplax media</i>	Echinodermata – Sea cucumber	NI Priority	This species is recorded in one site in the existing MPA network although records are poor (only 3 records exist for this species from 1982-1985). It is likely that this species is already afforded protection through the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Leptasterias muelleri</i>	Echinodermata – Starfish	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens, Strangford Lough and Murlough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’ and ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’). This has already been removed from the NI Priority List.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Leptosynapta bergensis</i>	Echinodermata – Sea cucumber	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Paracucumaria hyndmani</i>	Echinodermata – Hyndman’s sea cucumber	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network through association with <i>Modiolus</i> beds (Skerries & Causeway and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Porania pulvillus</i>	Echinodermata – Cushion star	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Solaster endeca</i>	Echinodermata – Sunstar	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Thyonidium drummondii</i>	Echinodermata – Sea cucumber	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified features are Annex I ‘Reef’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’). <i>Thyonidium drummondii</i> is associated with Horse Mussel ( <i>Modiolus modiolus</i> ) beds.
<i>Glossobalanus sarniensis</i>	Hemichordata – Acorn worm	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Aequipecten opercularis</i>	Mollusca – Queen scallop	None	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, Red Bay, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs, notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’, ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Cerastoderma glaucum</i>	Mollusca - Brackish cockle	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Glynn ASSI and has recently been recorded in Strangford Lough SAC).
<i>Chlamys varia</i>	Mollusca – Variegated scallop	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature are Annex I ‘Reef’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).



SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Crenella decussata</i>	Mollusc – Bivalve mussel	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Cumanotus beaumonti</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	NI Priority	Although this species is ephemeral and rare it is indirectly protected through its food source. It feeds on the solitary hydroid <i>Corymorpha nutans</i> , which is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Murlough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Cuthona concinna</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’). In addition, this species feeds on the bryozoans <i>Sertularia argentea</i> , which is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Erato voluta</i>	Mollusca – Egg cowrie	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Eubranchus doriae</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	NI Priority	Although this species is ephemeral it is indirectly protected through its food source. It feeds on the hydroid <i>Kirchenpaueria similis</i> , which is present under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Palio dubia</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	NI Priority	Although this species is ephemeral and rare (this has not been recorded in Northern Ireland since the original record in 1978) it is indirectly protected through its food source. It feeds on the bryozoan <i>Eucratea loricata</i> , which is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’ and ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Pecten maximus</i>	Mollusca – King scallop	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Reef’, ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Thecacera pennigera</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	SOCC	Although this species is ephemeral with few NI records it is indirectly protected through its food source. It feeds on the bryozoan <i>Bugula plumosa</i> , which is widespread and already afforded protection under the existing SAC network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified features are Annex I ‘Reefs’ and ‘Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time’).
<i>Tonicella marmorea</i>	Mollusca – Chiton	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC, notified feature is Annex I ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’). In particular it is found under stones and boulders on muddy gravel).
<i>Amphilectus ovulum</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Antho brattgardii</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Axinella damicornis</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway and Rathlin Island SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Axinella dissimilis</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).
<i>Biemna variantia</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified features are Annex I ‘Reef’ and ‘Large shallow inlets and bays’).
<i>Clathria barleei</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I ‘Reefs’).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Eurypon coronula</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Hymedesmia cohesibacilla</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Hymedesmia rathlinia</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Hymenhabdia typica</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Iophon hyndmani</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs'). It has also been removed from the NI Priority List.
<i>Lissodendoryx jenjonesae</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Microciona elliptichela</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Mycale cf. contarenii</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC, notified features are Annex I 'Reefs' and 'Large shallow inlets and bays').
<i>Mycale lingua</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Mycale similaris</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough SAC; notified features are Annex I 'Reefs' and 'Large shallow inlets and bays'). It has also been removed from the NI Priority List.
<i>Myxilla cf. rosacea</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Plocamiancora arndti</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Pyura microcosmus</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority NIMF SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Spanioplion armaturum</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs, notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Spongionella pulchella</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Stelletta grubii</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Stryphnus ponderosus</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Tethya hibernica</i>	Porifera – Sponge	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Archidistoma aggregatum</i>	Tunicata – Sea squirt	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all of the time').
<i>Boltenia echinata</i>	Tunicata – Sea squirt	SOCC	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Diazona violacea</i>	Tunicata – Football sea squirt	NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Rathlin Island SAC; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Pycnoclavella stolonialis</i>	Tunicata – Sea squirt	NI Priority	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island, The Maidens and Strangford Lough SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').
<i>Synoicum incrustatum</i>	Tunicata – Sea squirt	SOCC NIMF	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (Skerries & Causeway, Rathlin Island and The Maidens SACs; notified feature is Annex I 'Reefs').

**Table 1.3** Priority Marine Feature (PMF) Limited/low mobility species excluded from consideration as a focus for MCZ designation and justification for exclusion. These cover the range of representative and threatened, rare or declining species in Northern Irish waters.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Ahnfeltiopsis devoniensis</i>	Alga – Red	NI Priority	This species has been excluded as originally was thought to be a type locality but is now known that it originates from Canada.
<i>Gelidiella calcicola</i>	Alga – Red	NIMF SOCC	This species has been excluded as there is only one record from 1980s for this species and this lies outside the existing MPA network. Further work on its current status and distribution is needed before consideration as an MCZ feature.
<i>Anemonactis mazeli</i>	Cnidaria – Anemone	NIMF SOCC	This species has been excluded as there is only one record from NISS (1982-85). The site was re-surveyed in 2006-08 and the species was not found.
<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>	Cnidaria – Stalked jellyfish	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are only two records from 1980s for this species and these lie outside the existing MPA network.
<i>Arrhis phyllonyx</i>	Crustacea – Amphipod	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as it is a pelagic species thought to inhabit deep offshore waters. There is limited knowledge on its distribution in Northern Irish waters making site based protection likely to be unsuitable.
<i>Amphiura securigera</i>	Echinodermata – Brittle star	SOCC	Records of distribution are limited (only three records exist for this species from 1982-1985 and all are outside the MPA network). Further work on its current status and distribution is needed before consideration as an MCZ feature.
<i>Hippocampus guttulatus</i>	Fish – Spiny seahorse	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR WANE Schedule 5, 6 & 7	This species has been excluded as there are no recent records of its presence in Northern Irish waters. There are two historical records for this species – a female in 1893 and a male in 1961.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Hippocampus hippocampus</i>	Fish – Short snouted seahorse	UK BAP NIMF OSPAR T&D WANE Schedule 5, 6 & 7	This species has been excluded as there are no records (recent or historical) of its presence in Northern Irish waters.
<i>Philinoglossa helgolandica</i>	Mollusca – Opisthobranch	SOCC	This species has been excluded as there is limited information on its distribution (this is a tiny shell-less mollusc found in shell gravel and is a meiofaunal community constituent). There are no records of this species on Marine Recorder for Northern Ireland.
<i>Embletonia pulchra</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	SOCC	This species has been excluded as it is under-recorded, ephemeral and rare and is not associated with a particular habitat or food source therefore site based protection is likely to be unsuitable. There are no records of this species on Marine Recorder.
<i>Hero formosa</i>	Mollusca – Nudibranch	SOCC	This species has been excluded as it is ephemeral and rare therefore site based protection is likely to be unsuitable. It is believed that the most recent record for this was 1988 however there are no records of this species on Marine Recorder.
<i>Phakellia rugosa</i>	Porifera – Sponge	SOCC	This species has been excluded as there are only rare and historic records for its presence and may no longer be present in Northern Ireland. This species is at the southern extent of its range in Northern Ireland therefore site based protection is likely to be unsuitable. No records of this species on Marine Recorder.



**Table 1.4** Priority Marine Feature (PMF) Highly mobile species excluded from consideration as a focus for MCZ designation and justification for exclusion

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Balaenoptera borealis</i>	Cetacea – Sei whale	UK BAP NI Priority Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Globicephala melas</i>	Cetacea – Pilot whale	Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as, although there have been some occasional (historical) sightings, there is no evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Grampus griseus</i>	Cetacea – Risso’s dolphin	UK BAP NI Priority Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 WANE Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as, although there have been numerous sightings in Northern Irish waters, it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Lagenorhynchus albirostris</i>	Cetacea – White-beaked dolphin	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 WANE Schedule 5 NIMF	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Mesoplodon bidens</i>	Cetacea – Soweby’s beaked whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 25 years.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Mesoplodon mirus</i>	Cetacea – True’s beaked whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Physeter macrocephalus</i>	Cetacea – Sperm whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i>	Cetacea – Striped dolphin	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as, although there have been strandings, there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>	Cetacea – Minke whale	UK BAP NI Priority Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as, although present in Northern Irish waters, it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	Cetacea – Blue whale	UK BAP NIMF Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>	Cetacea – Fin whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Cetacea – Common Dolphin	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 WANE Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as, although there are sightings off Portrush and Islandmagee, it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Eubalanea glacialis</i>	Cetacea – Northern right whale	UK BAP OSPAR T&D Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 25 years.
<i>Hyperoodon ampullatus</i>	Cetacea – Northern bottlenose whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 NIMF	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Lagenorhynchus acutus</i>	Cetacea – Atlantic white-sided dolphin	UK BAP NIMF WANE Schedule 5 Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>	Cetacea – Humpback whale	UK BAP Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as, although there occasional sightings in Northern Irish waters, it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Orcinus orca</i>	Cetacea – Orca/ Killer whale	UK BAP NI Priority Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 WANE Schedule 5 NIMF	This species has been excluded as, although there have been occasional sightings in Northern Irish waters, it does not show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	Cetacea – Harbour Porpoise	NI Priority, UK BAP, NIMF, OSPAR T&D, WANE, Habitats Directive	This species is already afforded protection under the existing MPA network (The Skerries and Causeway SAC). Other pSACs around the entire UK are being investigated by JNCC
<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	Cetacea – Bottle-nosed dolphin	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2 WANE Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as, although sightings are recorded all around the coast in all seasons, it does not display any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site based protection.
<i>Ziphius cavirostris</i>	Cetacea – Cuvier's beaked whale	UK BAP NIMF Habitats Directive Annex IV Habitats Regs Schedule 2	This species has been excluded as there have been no sightings in Northern Irish waters in the last 30 years.
<i>Amblyraja hyperborea</i>	Elasmobranch – Arctic Skate	IUCN Red List: Least Concern	This species has been excluded as it has not been recorded in NI waters (considered absent). There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Amblyraja radiata</i>	Elasmobranch – Thorny/Starry Ray	SOCC IUNC Red List: Vulnerable	This species has been excluded as there are no recorded catches in NI waters (considered absent). There is no evidence of site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	Elasmobranch – Basking Shark	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR T&D WANE Schedule 5 IUCN Red List: Vulnerable	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection. Current data indicates that the species uses the Irish Sea as a major transport route between two feeding grounds (off the west of Scotland and between the English Channel and Brittany). Also Northern Irish waters also appear to be used as a route between Scotland and Inishowen (Southern Ireland).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Leucoraja naevus</i>	Elasmobranch – Cuckoo Ray	IUCN Red List	Despite having a widespread distribution the main angling returns originates from the North Coast particularly in the vicinity of Skerries/Causeway SAC. We are not aware of any specific hotspots which would merit specific site protection measures. The Elasmobranch Position Statement shows the area north of the Copelands as a potential nursery hotspot which is coincident with the pMCZ for Ocean Quahog. It may be an option to add this feature to that specific site if additional evidence becomes available.
<i>Dalatias licha</i>	Elasmobranch – Kitefin Shark	UK BAP IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as there is no reliable commercial catch data and no recorded recreational catches in NI waters. There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Dasyatis pastinaca</i>	Elasmobranch – Common Stingray	IUCN Red List: Near Threatened (NE Atlantic)	This species has been excluded as it has not been recorded in NI waters (considered absent). There is no evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Galeorhinus galeus</i>	Elasmobranch – Tope	UK BAP NI Priority	This species has been excluded as, although relatively common, populations are fairly stable. This species can be included as an additional secondary feature for Strangford Lough as this site is a possible nursery ground.
<i>Isurus oxyrinchus</i>	Elasmobranch – Shortfin Mako	UK BAP NI Priority IUCN Red List: Vulnerable	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence of its occurrence in NI waters (no recorded catches).
<i>Lamna nasus</i>	Elasmobranch – Porbeagle Shark	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR T&D IUCN Red List: Vulnerable	This species has been excluded as this is a wide-ranging coastal and oceanic species, more common on continental shelves (considered a vagrant). Only one record of Porbeagle caught by a research vessel in NI waters. Limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Leucoraja fullonica</i>	Elasmobranch – Shagreen Ray	IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as this is more common along outer continental shelves (considered a vagrant). This is occasionally recorded in NI waters and there is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Mustelus asterias</i> <i>Mustelus mustelus</i>	Elasmobranch – Smoothhound (Starry and Common)	IUCN Red List: Least Concern	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence (lack of specimen fish) to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Prionace glauca</i>	Elasmobranch – Blue Shark	UK BAP IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence of its presence in NI waters (considered absent). This is a highly migratory species therefore site based protection is unlikely to be beneficial to wider populations.
<i>Raja brachyura</i>	Elasmobranch – Blonde ray	IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as their numbers appear to be stable or increasing and is subject to a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) in EU waters.
<i>Raja circularis</i>	Elasmobranch – Sandy Ray	UK BAP IUCN Red List: Vulnerable	This species has been excluded as there are no recorded catches in NI waters (considered absent). There is no evidence of site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Raja clavata</i>	Elasmobranch – Thornback Ray	IUCN Red List	Thornback rays have a patchy distribution around NI with anglers reporting diminishing catches. The Elasmobranch position report also details the mouths of Belfast Lough and Carlingford Lough as potential hotspots although there is low data confidence. Similar conclusion to Cuckoo Ray above
<i>Raja microocellata</i>	Elasmobranch – Small eyed Ray	IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as it is only occasionally recorded in NI waters (considered a vagrant). There is limited evidence to show any site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.



SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Raja montagui</i>	Elasmobranch – Spotted Ray	IUCN Red List	The Spotted Ray while appearing in Irish Sea trawls is mainly caught by anglers along the North Coast. We do not have sufficient data to identified specific site based measures for the protection of this species
<i>Raja undulata</i>	Elasmobranch – Undulate Ray	UK BAP NI Priority IUCN Red List: Endangered	This species has been excluded as it is rarely captured in NI waters (either scientific trawls or recreational catches) and is considered a vagrant. There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Rostroraja alba</i>	Elasmobranch – White/Bottlenose Ray	UK BAP OSPAR T&D IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as it is rarely observed in Northern Irish waters and there is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Scyliorhinus canicula</i>	Elasmobranch – Lesser spotted dogfish/Small spotted catshark	IUCN Red List: Least Concern	This species has been excluded as their numbers appear to be stable or increasing. There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Scyliorhinus stellaris</i>	Elasmobranch – Nursehound	IUCN Red List: Near Threatened	This species has been excluded as their numbers appear to be stable or increasing. There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Squalus acanthias</i>	Elasmobranch – Spurdog, Spiny dogfish	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR T&D IUCN Red List: Critically Endangered	This species has been excluded as data currently indicates there are no known spawning grounds in Northern Irish waters. If new evidence arises to warrant inclusion as an MCZ feature then this can be amended in the future.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Squatina squatina</i>	Elasmobranch – Angel Shark	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR T&D WANE Schedule 5 IUCN Red List: Critically endangered	This species has been excluded as it is rarely recorded in Northern Irish waters (this was last recorded in Northern Irish waters in 1945). Now understood to be locally extinct within Northern Ireland.
<i>Torpedo marmorata</i>	Elasmobranch – Marbled/Electric Ray	IUCN Red List: Data Deficient	This species has been excluded as there are no recorded catches in NI waters (considered absent). There is no evidence of site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Torpedo nobiliana</i>	Elasmobranch – Atlantic torpedo Ray or Dark Electric Ray	IUCN – Data deficient	This species has been excluded as it only occasionally recorded in NI waters (considered a vagrant). There is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Alosa alosa</i>	Fish – Allis Shad	SOCC NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II OSPAR T&D	This species has been excluded as there are no records of it being caught in NI waters and there is limited knowledge on its marine requirements (spawning takes place in freshwater).
<i>Alosa fallax</i>	Fish – Twaite shad	SOCC NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II	This species has been excluded as there is limited information on its distribution in NI waters. Freshwater sites in England and Wales have been designated as SACs for spawning grounds.
<i>Ammodytes marinus</i>	Fish – Lesser Sandeel	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no known aggregation sites or nursery grounds in NI waters thus limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	Fish – Common Eel	NI Priority NIMF OSPAR T&D	This species has been excluded as it is more commonly associated with freshwater rivers and loughs in NI. It is catadromous, spending their adult lives in freshwater or estuarine habitats and migrate to the ocean to reproduce (thought to migrate to the Sargasso Sea).

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Aphanopus carbo</i>	Fish – Black scabbardfish	UK BAP NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.
<i>Clupea harengus</i>	Fish – Herring	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence on major aggregation sites in NI waters and that there are current fisheries closures in place to protect spawning grounds.
<i>Coryphaenoides rupestris</i>	Fish – Roundnose grenadier	UK BAP NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.
<i>Gadus morhua</i>	Fish – Cod	UK BAP NI Priority OSPAR T&D NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are existing fisheries conservation measures in place for its protection.
<i>Hippoglossus hippoglossus</i>	Fish – Atlantic halibut	UK BAP IUCN Red List: Endangered	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.
<i>Lophius piscatorius</i>	Fish – Angler fish	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Merlangius merlangus</i>	Fish – Whiting	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as the designation of MPAs is not an appropriate conservation measure for this species (distribution area is vast).
<i>Merluccius merluccius</i>	Fish – European Hake	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as it is a migratory species with no nursery or spawning grounds in NI waters.
<i>Micromesistius poutassou</i>	Fish – Blue Whiting	UK BAP NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence of major aggregation sites in NI waters. This species does form large pelagic aggregations but nothing substantial in the Irish Sea.
<i>Molva dypterygia</i>	Fish – Blue ling	UK BAP NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Molva molva</i>	Fish – Ling	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence of major aggregation sites in NI waters.
<i>Osmerus eperlanus</i>	Fish – Smelt	NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as other fisheries measures may be introduced to protect this (there is a proposal to create an offence under Foyle Fisheries Acts to take of kill smelt without a licence in the Foyle and Carlingford areas).
<i>Pleuronectes platessa</i>	Fish – Plaice	NI Priority, UK BAP, IUCN Red List	This species has been excluded as since fisheries conservation measures through CFP are in place to protect this species such as benthic release panels and mobile gear bans within certain SACs.
<i>Reinhardtius hippoglossoides</i>	Fish – Greenland halibut	UK BAP NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.
<i>Salmo salar</i>	Fish – Salmon	NI Priority OSPAR T&D NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II	This species has been excluded as the designation of MPAs is not an appropriate conservation measure for this species. Freshwater spawning habitats are currently protected in NI as SACs while SALSEA programme of research is currently investigating the migration and distribution of salmon at sea.
<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Fish – Brown/Sea trout	NI Priority	This species has been excluded as the designation of MPAs is not an appropriate conservation measure for this species.
<i>Scomber scombrus</i>	Fish – Atlantic Mackerel	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is limited evidence of spawning grounds within NI waters and no evidence of major aggregation sites in the Irish Sea.
<i>Solea solea</i>	Fish – Sole	NI Priority, UK BAP, NIMF	This species has been excluded as since fisheries conservation measures through CFP are in place to protect this species such as benthic release panels and mobile gear bans within certain SACs.
<i>Thunnus thynnus</i>	Fish – Atlantic Blue-fin tuna	UK BAP OSPAR T&D NIMF	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its presence in NI waters.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Trachurus</i> <i>Trachurus</i>	Fish – Horse Mackerel	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF	This species has been excluded as there is no evidence of spawning or nursery grounds and does not aggregate in significant numbers in NI waters.
<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	Pinnipedia – Grey Seal	NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II & V Habitats Regs Schedule 3 WO Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as it is already afforded protection within the existing MPA network (The Maidens ASSI; notified feature is Grey Seal).
<i>Phoca vitulina</i>	Pinnipedia – Common/Harbour Seal	UK BAP NI Priority Habitats Directive Annex II & V Habitats Regs Schedule 3 WO Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as it is already afforded protection within the existing MPA network (Strangford Lough and Murlough SACs; notified feature is Annex II species <i>Phoca vitulina</i> and The Maidens ASSI; notified feature is Common Seal).
<i>Caretta caretta</i>	Reptile – Loggerhead Turtle	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II and IV OSPAR T&D	This species has been excluded as it is rarely recorded in NI waters and there is no evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	Reptile – Green Turtle	NIMF Habitats Directive Annex II and IV WANE Schedule 5	This species has been excluded as there are no records of its occurrence in NI waters (considered absent) and there is no evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.

SPECIES	GROUP	CONSERVATION STATUS	JUSTIFICATION
<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>	Reptile – Leatherback Turtle	UK BAP NI Priority NIMF Habitats Directive Annex IV OSPAR T&D	This species has been excluded as it is occasionally recorded in NI waters and there is no evidence to show site fidelity which would be the rationale for site selection.
<i>Gavia stellata</i>	Bird - Red-throated Diver	Birds Directive, IUCN	Currently being considered at the UK level as part of the Marine SPA activities.
<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	Bird - Common Scoter	IUCN Red List	Currently being considered at the UK level as part of the Marine SPA activities
<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	Bird - European Shag	IUCN Red List	Currently being considered at the UK level as part of the Marine SPA activities
<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Bird - Slavonian Grebe	Birds Directive, IUCN	Currently being considered at the UK level as part of the Marine SPA activities
<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Bird - Common Eider	IUCN Red List	Protected under the ASSI network for wintering populations only and currently being considered at the UK level as part of the Marine SPA activities





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