

What do you know about off-shore Norfolk and marine conservation?

Most of us would have to admit to knowing little about either even though ignoring them will have consequences for the health of our seas and the plants and animals that depend on them – that includes us.

Do you know about Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)? The meaning is in the name, put simply they are areas of British waters legally designated as being in need of expert management to maintain, or recover in the case of damaged areas, the habitats of the animals and plants that live there. Pollution, overfishing and destructive fishing methods are just some of the reasons why such measures are needed.

Natural England (NE) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) are working together in this endeavour with NE responsible for English inshore waters out to 12 nautical miles, and JNCC for offshore waters (12 to 200 nautical miles). Defra (Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) is the government department charged with overall management.

Only about 50 MCZs are established yet around the UK, but many more are planned.

A more complete explanation of MCZs can be found on the Internet. Type into your browser: MCZ explanatory note.

The loss of marine habitat, some of it created by fishing methods that involve dragging weighted nets across the seabed, denuding the sea bed of plant life and indiscriminately removing any marine life that gets in the way, not only reduces breeding stocks, but destroys the special environments needed as nursery sites where fish can breed successfully. By nurturing these sites, not only does habitat return, but fish, crustaceans, and the invertebrate life that complete the circle are left in peace to breed and fill the void. Not just within the MCZ but, over time, spreading outwards into adjoining areas where controlled fishing continues, thus sustaining the level of fish stocks and the bio-diversity required to keep our seas healthy and fruitful.

This is a simplified version of MCZs and their purpose. Much more information is available online.

Norfolk Chalk Reef

Norfolk Wildlife Trust are raising awareness of Norfolk's wonderful wildlife in a programme called Living Landscapes which covers not only land-based flora and fauna, but also the almost unseen world beneath the waves off Norfolk's coast.

Use these links (you will need to copy and paste into your Internet browser) to watch fascinating footage about the Norfolk Chalk Reef in Wild Norfolk Living Seas.

You can learn a lot about Norfolk's coastal wildlife on land and underwater from these interesting films, and other YouTube clips listed to the right of the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XVPNbE4F-E#>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v1uHUBAnpQI#>

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