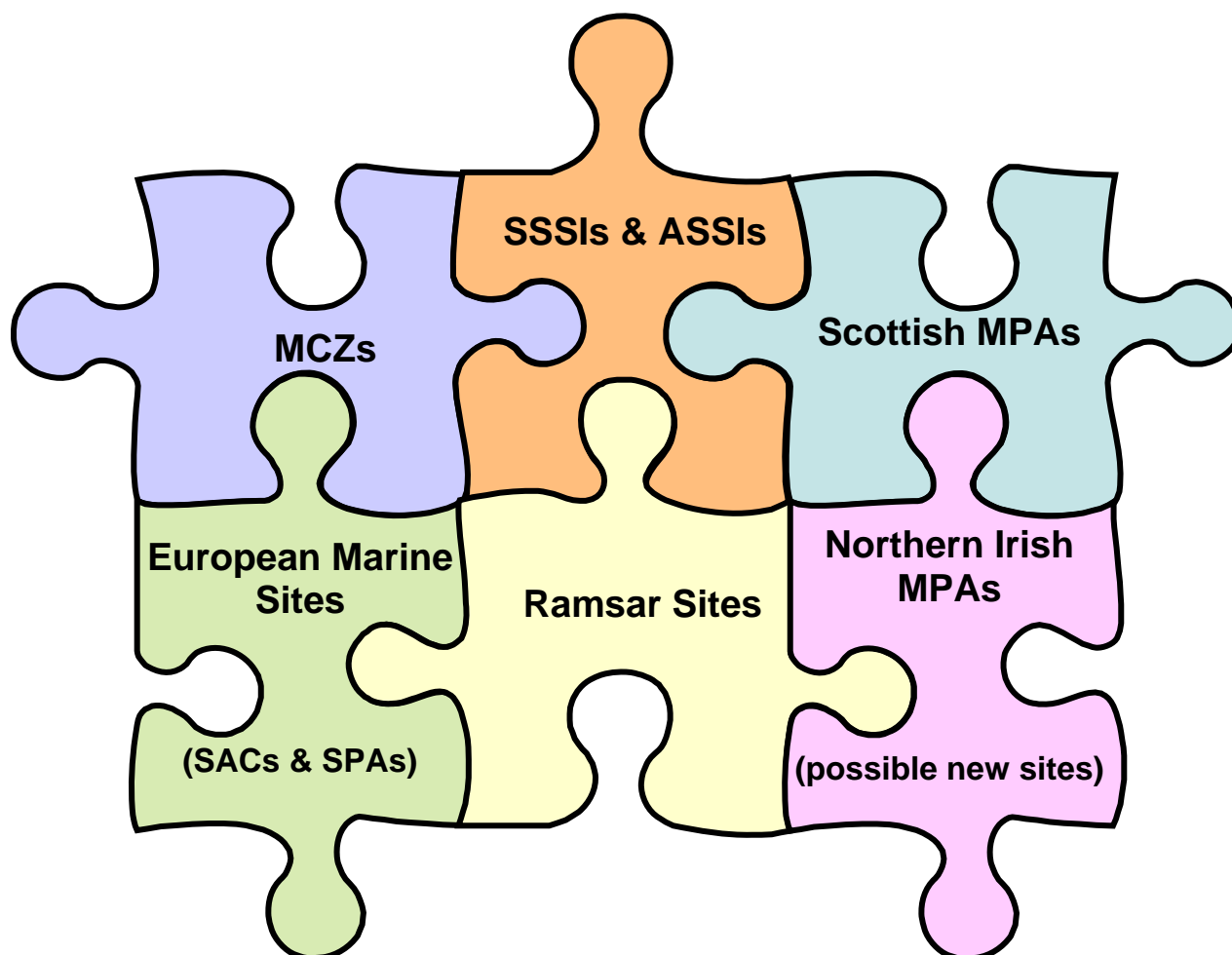


UK Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network

The UK has signed up to international agreements that aim to establish an 'ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)' by 2012. This means the network will be a collection of areas that work together to provide more benefits than an individual area could on its own. The UK MPA network will be made up of the designations illustrated below, including new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). In the inshore waters of England and the offshore waters of England, Wales and Northern Ireland the network will consist of MCZs, European Marine Sites, SSSIs and Ramsar Sites.



Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs):

- MCZs are a new marine protected area designation introduced through the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act.
- They will protect nationally important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology and sites will be selected to protect not just the rare and threatened, but the range of marine wildlife.
- The list of species and habitats to be protected under MCZs and site selection guidance (known as the 'ecological network guidance') is due to be issued in spring 2010.
- MCZs will not all be no-take zones; the management measures will be decided on a site-by-site basis and will depend on what the site has been designated for.
- They can be designated anywhere in English and Welsh inshore and offshore waters.
- In England recommendations for MCZs are being identified by four regional MCZ projects through a collaborative, stakeholder-led process.
- The Welsh Assembly Government intends to use the MCZ mechanism to designate a small number of highly protected MCZs in Welsh inshore waters.

- Lundy Island became the first MCZ in England in January 2010, due to provisions in the Act which change its designation from a Marine Nature Reserve to an MCZ.

European Marine Sites (SACs & SPAs):

- European Marine Sites is an umbrella term describing the marine areas of sites designated under the European Habitats and Birds Directives.
- These sites are called Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).
- SACs protect particular marine species or habitats of European importance and SPAs protect areas which support large populations of birds.
- These marine sites, together with terrestrial sites, form part of the European Natura 2000 network of internationally important protected areas.
- European marine sites are identified by statutory conservation agencies; JNCC and Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales, Scottish Natural Heritage and Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
- There are 81 SACs and 73 SPAs with marine components already established and another package of sites is currently being consulted on.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) (England, Scotland and Wales) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) (Northern Ireland)

- SSSI/ASSI sites are designed to protect the best examples of the UK's plants, animals or geological features.
- They are primarily land-based, but some sites extend below the low water mark.
- They are set up under national legislation; SSSIs under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and ASSIs under the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) 1985.
- An example of a SSSI is The Wash on the east coast which protects important mud flats, salt marsh and water birds.

Ramsar sites:

- Ramsar sites are designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, agreed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971.
- They are designed to protect wetlands defined as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres".
- They may also incorporate coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six metres at low tide lying within the wetlands.

Scottish MPAs:

- Following the introduction of the Scottish Marine Bill in April 2009 the Scottish Government have been working with Scottish Natural Heritage and JNCC to develop MPA criteria for all waters adjacent to Scotland. It is anticipated that more information on how a Scottish system of MPAs will be developed will be available shortly.

(Possible) Northern Irish MPAs:

- Northern Ireland will be introducing a Marine Bill to the Northern Ireland Assembly by 2012. This will outline proposals for nature conservation in Northern Ireland's territorial waters which may include plans for MPAs.