



## IWT policy on MPAs

Definition of MPAs according to the IUCN

A Marine Protected Area (MPA) “is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values”.

This definition includes several important aspects that are explained further in the Guidelines for Applying the IUCN Protected Area Categories to Marine Protected Areas<sup>1</sup>:

The “managed” part of the definition is key as it “assumes some active steps to conserve the natural (and possibly other) values for which the protected area was established; note that “managed” can include a decision to leave the area untouched if this is the best conservation strategy.” Most MPAs in Ireland currently lack these “active steps” needed to manage sites.

Conservation: “In the context of this definition, conservation refers to the in situ maintenance of ecosystems and natural and semi-natural habitats and of viable populations of species in their natural surroundings and, in the case of domesticated or cultivated species, in the surroundings where they have developed their distinctive properties.” While “nature” refers to “biodiversity, at genetic, species and ecosystem level, and often also refers to geodiversity, landform and broader natural values.”

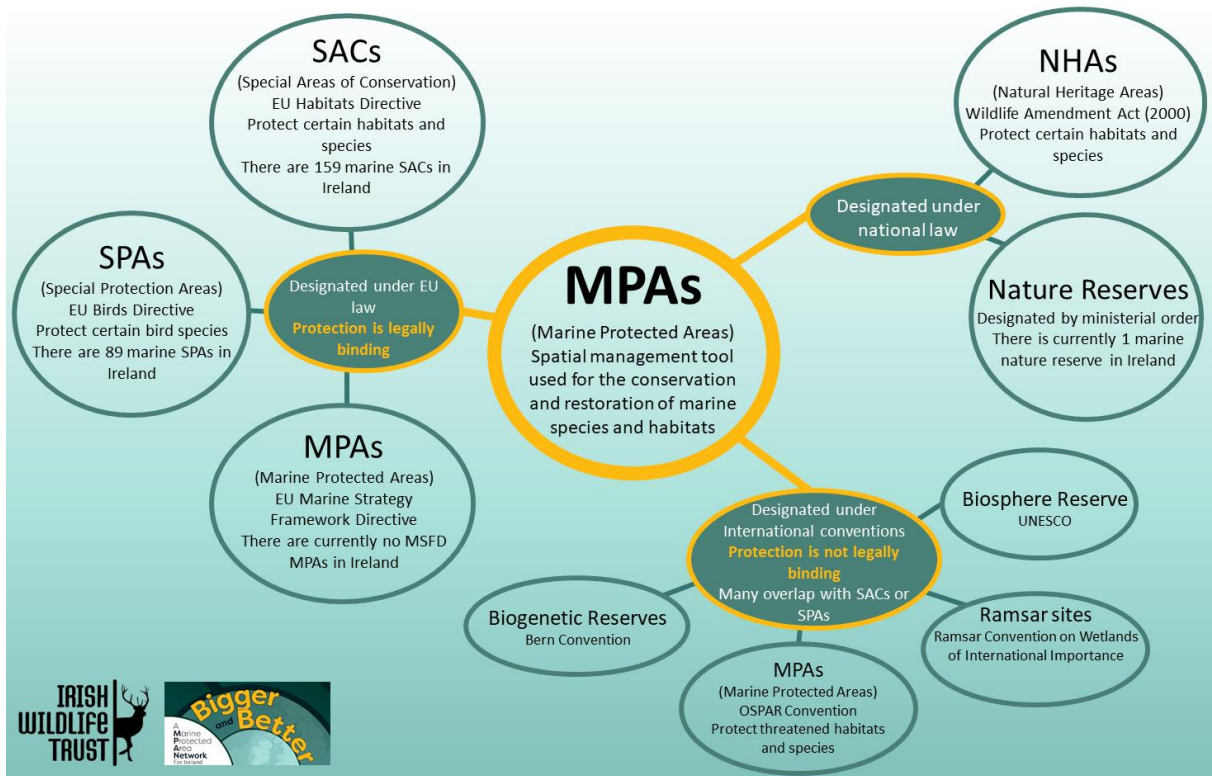
According to this definition, “temporary or permanent fishing closures that are established primarily to help build up and maintain reserve stocks for fishing in the future, and have no wider conservation aims or achievements are not considered to be MPAs.”

The IUCN identified six different categories of MPAs ranging from strict nature reserves, where no extractive or otherwise damaging activities should take place, to multi-use MPAs that allow some low-level non-industrial sustainable natural resource management. An ideal MPA should have different zones with a no-take marine reserve at the centre and a larger buffer zone that allows low-level, sustainable and non-impacting activities such as low intensity lobster potting.

Legally protected MPAs in Ireland can be in the form of special areas of conservation (SACs), special protection areas (SPAs), or any MPAs to be designated under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (see graphic below).

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<sup>1</sup> Day J., Dudley N., Hockings M., Holmes G., Laffoley D., Stolton S. & S. Wells, 2012. Guidelines for applying the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories to Marine Protected Areas. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. 36pp



## MPAs in Ireland – status April 2020

### What are the benefits of MPAs?

Well-managed MPAs are a proven tool for the protection and restoration of the marine environment. They increase biodiversity and resilience, can enhance commercial fish & shellfish stocks inside and outside their boundaries, and even have a role to play in carbon sequestration and climate change adaptation.

### How much of our marine region needs to be protected?

A “coherent network of representative MPAs” is a requirement under the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Ireland has also committed to protecting 10% of its marine waters by 2020 under the Convention on Biological Diversity. We believe that nature needs half – in order for habitats to recover and provide essential ecosystem services to humankind we need to protect 50% of our marine region in a network of MPAs while the other 50% are managed sustainably. Furthermore, half of the MPA network should be comprised of no-take zones<sup>2</sup>. We should aim to protect at least 30% of our seas by 2030.

### What is the ideal designation process?

A top-down designation process that includes stakeholder input is important but at the same time a bottom-up mechanism is essential in the long-run to enable local community input. All management decisions must have a clear overarching steer from government to protect and enhance ecosystems by restricting ongoing activities that prevent the recovery of biomass, productivity or biodiversity of sites.

<sup>2</sup> <https://natureneedshalf.org/>



The designation process should therefore allow for bottom-up MPAs to be designated in law by communities where there is a will to do so. Sites should then ideally be managed on a whole-site basis to allow for recovery of broadscale ecosystem processes (e.g. essential fish habitat, increased carbon sequestration). This is particularly relevant to the recovery of productivity, biomass and diversity of broadscale habitats such as muds, sands, or gravels.

How should activities be managed inside MPAs?

An effective network of MPAs consists of sites that are well positioned, representative, connected, monitored, enforced and well researched. They require robust legislation, properly resourced and empowered local stakeholder groups with balanced representation, and strong governance structures from national to regional level that is accountable to the law. Ideally, every site should have a management plan with adequate conservation objectives that are underpinned by local laws and monitored by local stakeholder groups at a regional level as well as the NPWS at a national level. Successful monitoring and enforcement of the MPA network will require additional funding for the NPWS as the current budget does not allow for adequate nature protection.

No-take marine reserves, which prohibit all extractive and damaging processes, are the gold standard that urgently need to be implemented in Irish waters, but there are also roles to play for many types of multi-use MPAs in meeting our targets (e.g. Natura 2000 sites). The biosphere approach of surrounding multiple core sites with a buffer zone and managing them as one (e.g. Dublin Bay) is a big step in the right direction. A good mixture of multi-use MPAs and no-take zones is important to achieve a balance of conservation needs while still accommodating low-impact fisheries in rural communities. In short, harmful and/or industrial-scale activities are not compatible with MPAs while all other activities must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

In the UK, fisheries were successfully managed through Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. Local stakeholder groups are essential for bottom-up management but laws must be in place to make sure the local groups have a legal duty to implement management measures to meet conservation objectives.

Commercial diving for shellfish is a great sustainable alternative to dredging. Diving for scallops contributes to 5% of all Scottish scallop landings and dived scallops have a higher value due to demand from high-end restaurants and environmentally conscious consumers. The environmental impact of this fishery is limited to biomass extraction of the target species only. If well-managed and operated by licensed vessels, a dive fishery in Ireland could thrive inside multi-use MPAs.

Well-managed MPAs mean healthy seas that are clean, productive and diverse. This attracts water-sports enthusiasts, recreational anglers, divers, whale watchers and bird lovers. Rural communities in Ireland could benefit greatly from increased tourism and most recreational activities are completely compatible with MPAs, if managed appropriately with limited disturbance to wildlife.