

Summary of Responses

Consultation on the establishment of a new Marine Nature Reserve along the east coast of the Isle of Man

17 Mar 2025 - 28 Apr 2025

Photo Credit: Dr Lara Howe

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Isle of Man Government
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**Isle of Man
Government**

Reillys Ellan Vannin



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As a whole-nation UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, our shared vision and aim is to work across the economy, environment and society for a sustainable future.



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Reiltys Ellan Vannin

The consultation

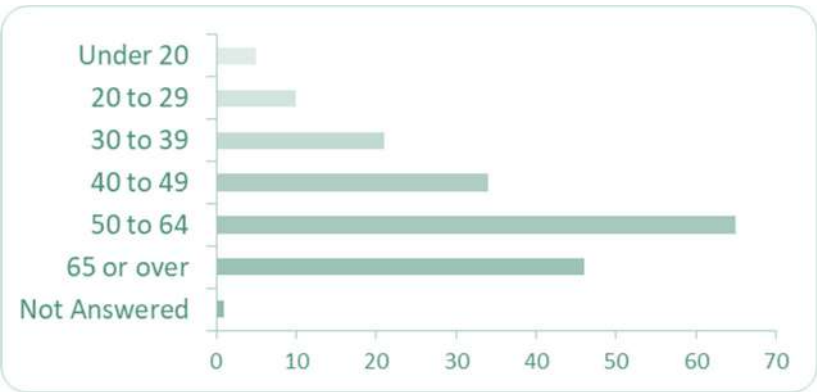
The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) held a consultation on the establishment of a new Marine Nature Reserve along the east coast of the Isle of Man. The consultation was open for 6 weeks and closed on the 28 April 2025.

The consultation asked a series of questions in relation to the extent of a new MNR along the east coast of the Isle of Man as well as additional measures to protect vulnerable blue carbon habitats, such as eelgrass. Recent surveys have shown eelgrass has expanded from current eelgrass conservation zones (ECZ) or were not previously included in them. The consultation was hosted by the Isle of Man Government Consultation Hub.

Responses received

A total of 182 responses were received via the online consultation portal. A further 3 responses were received outside of this route. Of received responses, 98% were from the Isle of Man.

Of general note, the age demographic of respondents was heavily skewed towards older members of the population, with 60% of the respondents being over 50 years of age. Respondents under the age of 30 represented only 8% of the total and may suggest that Government needs to seek out better mechanisms for engaging the younger population in public consultations (Figure 1).



A breakdown of the type of consultee shows the majority of responses were from members of the public with no affiliation: accounting for 90% of total responses. Environmental and non-governmental organisations were the next highest category representing 2.75% and fisheries related consultees represented approximately 2%. However, DEFA recognises that organisational responses are typically submitted on behalf of groups of stakeholders and multiple individuals.

Option	Total	Percent
Member of the public	164	90.11%
Private company (not fishery or marine related)	2	1.10%

Individual related to fisheries	3	1.65%
Company related to fisheries	1	0.55%
Association or representative organisation related to fisheries	1	0.55%
Environmental or other Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)	5	2.75%
Public body	1	0.55%
Other (please specify)	5	2.75%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

Summary of responses

DEFA sought views on the location and extent of a potential new MNR on the east coast. The respondents were asked to comment on three spatial options to enable protection of vulnerable habitats between Laxey Bay and Maughold Head. The consultation asked consultees to prioritise options over a range of conservation objectives.

There was a total of 177 responses to this question.

- Preference for **option 1** (Bulgham eelgrass zone designated as MNR) accounted for around **7%** of the total responses.
- Preference for **option 2** (Laxey Bay to Cornaa Head) accounted for approximately **4%**.
- The majority of responses were in favour of **option 3** (Laxey to Maughold Head) which accounted for **78%**.
- A further 5.5% of the responses chose none of the options and 4% did not answer this question.

Overall, there was strong support for increasing the level of protection for key conservation features along the northeast coast of the Island.

Views on DEFAs MNR and ECZ proposals

Views on a new MNR designation

There was significant support for the designation of a new MNR between Laxey and Maughold Head. Eleven (out of 177) respondents were completely against all but the minimum designation of the eelgrass bed, and a further 9 responses were supportive of increased protection, but only if restrictions on angling (rod & line) were not applied to those areas.

Many responses noted that the proposed MNRs were of generally high conservation value and that there was a need to increase protection of these habitats, specifically the grey seal haul-out areas, saltmarsh and eelgrass beds.

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity's (to which the Isle of Man is a signatory) 30 x 30 target for marine protected areas, was mentioned in many comments and how the proposals would go part way to achieving these ambitions. It should be noted that the Isle of Man currently has no formal policy

target on this objective, beyond its 2015 Biodiversity Strategy target of 10% (currently achieved) and so it should not be taken as the Isle of Man's target, but as an international target to which the Isle of Man can contribute to an extent yet to be agreed.

Several Wildlife Trusts (local and UK) responded to the consultation and were very supportive of the maximum proposed designation between Laxey and Maughold (option 3). A collective response was submitted by the North-west Wildlife Trust, the North Wales Wildlife Trust and Wildlife Trusts Wales which stated –

“The coast from Laxey Head northwards to Maughold Head is the longest stretch of Manx coastal waters with no legal protection, which is contrary to its long-held recognition as an area of international importance, including as an Important Marine Mammal Area for grey seal haul outs and pupping sites (ref: IUCN Marine Mammal Task Force), an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area for breeding chough, red-listed shag and other declining seabirds (ref: BirdLife International and RSPB) and as part of a candidate Ramsar Wetland of International Importance for its diversity of habitats and species, both above and below the waves (ref: UKOTCF). We are pleased that 33 years after this coastal area was first recognised as being of international importance, that the Department is now proposing its formal protection.”

Overall, responses which were not supportive of a designation from Laxey to Maughold Head cited concerns relating to the restrictions on commercial fishing activities. Several fishers and the MFPO submitted responses with concerns relating to fisheries access and “spatial squeeze”. The MFPO are supportive of protection of the eelgrass meadow in Bulgham but stated –

“Of course, we need to protect key ecological features within the marine environment, but we also need to make sure that blanket closures of areas are not brought in just to meet an artificial target of total area protected within our waters. That is just a lazy way of trying to meet international requirements or aims. Any closures must bear in mind the impact that this can have on adjacent areas. Similarly, the proposed closure to Maughold Head is totally unnecessary and would cover an area ten times in length to the Bulgham Bay ECZ.”

The MFPO also stated...

“We represent the Manx fishing industry and we have always supported the introduction of new MNR's where they are necessary to protect key ecological features. The Manx Fish Producers Organisation were key contributors to the introduction of Ramsey Bay MNR in 2011 and also the other 10 MNR's in 2018. The drawing up of the maps for the tranche of the MNR's was a joint approach from DEFA, Fisheries Department and the Manx Fish Producers Organisation. History shows that we are conservation minded. We support the protection and establishment of ECZ's but do not, in this case, support the extension of a new MNR all the way to Maughold Head. This is not required to protect Bulgham Bay and the salt marsh in Cornaa Bay -that can be done with smaller and more appropriate areas of protection. Unfortunately, in this case, this seems to be an opportunity to 'land-grab' and therefore we cannot support it.”

Views on re-zoning ECZs

Other issues raised by commercial fishers related to the extensions of ECZs and the crab/lobster potting industry. One vessel owner noted that the proposed extension to the Fort Island ECZ would interfere with their stock-pot storage. Another potter suggested that they should be allowed access to the low-water-mark around all of the island for setting pots.

There were several responses from the angling community who were generally in favour of increased protections, but concerns were raised in relation to additional prohibitions on angling in any ECZ extensions. In particular, there was considerable concern from the angling community of any further restrictions on angling in Ramsey Bay, specifically since the current ECZ does prohibit angling and that it may then be similarly included in any extension of it.

DEFA response

As a whole-nation UNESCO Biosphere reserve, it is important that we protect vulnerable habitats and contribute to the global effort to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by taking action in our local marine environment. The UNESCO Biosphere stated aims include sustainable development and how we live our lives in a way that sustains our economy, environment and society.

The Manx territorial sea provides an important revenue stream to various sectors such as fishing and tourism. Manx fisheries have been managed over many decades to provide a sustainable resource whilst protecting more vulnerable habitats and species. The established practice of DEFA working with the fishing community and conservation stakeholders, ensures that mutually beneficial outcomes are achieved between sustainable fishing objectives and conservation when practicable.

DEFA acknowledges and understands the concerns of certain stakeholder groups regarding the impacts of additional MNR designations on their fishing activities. It is important that DEFA and stakeholders continue to work together to implement local solutions that balance competing interests across our economy, environment and society.

Following the closure of the consultation, DEFA has undertaken further engagement with key stakeholder groups to understand in detail the concerns raised in the consultation, and to consider whether additional options may be able to deliver against conservation objectives whilst minimising or mitigating impacts.

DEFA will now take forward options for consideration by the Wildlife Committee and will take account of its scientific views and advice in relation to the proposals in the consultation.