

Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture



CONSULTATION

On the Establishment of a new Marine Nature Reserve along the east coast of the Isle of Man.

For all enquiries:

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1. Summary

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (**'the Department'**) is seeking views on the establishment of a new Marine Nature Reserve (MNR) to protect key habitats in Bulgham Bay and Cornaa, which hold important blue carbon and conservation value. As part of this consultation, the Department is asking for feedback on the following proposals (proposed) measures:

- The designation of a single-feature Marine Nature Reserve and to establish an Eelgrass Conservation Zone (ECZ) to protect a newly discovered seagrass bed (hereafter referred to as eelgrass) in Bulgham Bay.
- An extended Marine Nature Reserve to include the saltmarsh habitat at Cornaa, with statutory protection extending up to the high-water mark.
- An extended Marine Nature Reserve, up to Maughold Head, to include additional habitats of high conservation value.

In addition, the Department is making stakeholders aware of proposed changes to the boundaries of existing eelgrass conservation zones, within existing MNRs, to reflect changes in their extent, and is seeking the views of directly impacted stakeholders in relation to these changes.

We invite your views on these proposals and their potential impact.

1.1. DEFA have statutory responsibility to protect eelgrass beds under the Wildlife Act 1990

- The Wildlife Act, via MNR designation, provides a mechanism to establish Eelgrass Conservation Zones (ECZs), and which is the current mechanism used to enhance eelgrass protection, by enabling provisions under the MNR byelaws.

1.2. Eelgrass beds are known to be vulnerable to anthropogenic (human) disturbance, for example from fishing gear which comes into contact with the seabed and from vessel anchoring.

1.3. However, for the Department to designate a ECZ it first needs to establish an MNR.

1.4. A previously unreported eelgrass bed was recently discovered in Bulgham Bay (just north of Laxey) and has now been surveyed. This eelgrass meadow is currently outside of the established MNR network.

1.5. In addition, recent surveys of known eelgrass beds have indicated that existing eelgrass conservation zones (ECZs) require re-defining, and in most cases expanding, to reflect the current distribution of eelgrass habitat.

Why are Blue Carbon habitats important?

- 1.6. As part of its Climate Change and Net Zero commitments, the Department has funded research into key blue carbon habitats within Manx waters to ascertain how much carbon is stored and accumulated by marine systems. These results have shown that both eelgrass beds and saltmarshes around the island are net carbon sinks.
- 1.7. Additionally, these habitats provide other ecosystem services such as helping to protect the shoreline from storms and providing habitat for other species to forage, reproduce and live.

Why is the Department consulting?

- 1.8. The Department is seeking views from interested stakeholders and the public on proposals to expand existing ECZ's, informed by recent surveys, and to establish a new MNR on the east coast of the Isle of Man to protect habitats that have both blue carbon and conservation value.
- 1.9. This consultation takes the form of a series of questions where consultees may provide feedback. On completion of the consultation, results will be analysed, and a short report will be produced within 3 months summarising the findings of the consultation and the Department response. Consultation responses are advisory and will be used to inform the decision-making process.

2. Background

Coastal Habitats as Carbon Sinks and Biodiversity Hotspots

- 2.6. Recognising that site-specific evidence and research is necessary, the Isle of Man Government committed to undertaking blue carbon research as part of the Climate Change Plan¹ and established the Manx Blue Carbon Project².
- 2.7. Coastal habitats such as saltmarshes and eelgrass beds have long been known as important sinks of atmospheric carbon. This means that these habitats are important to protect as part of our journey to net zero, as they actively remove some of the carbon dioxide that we produce.
- 2.8. The Manx Blue Carbon Project's research, with scientific partners at Bangor and Swansea Universities, in collaboration with the National Oceanography Centre (**NOC**) in Southampton, is currently underway. The aim of this research includes a calculation of carbon burial (or sequestration) of key coastal habitats around the Isle of Man.
- 2.9. Preliminary findings of the Blue Carbon research project collected by Swansea University/NOC is provided in **Appendix 1**, and these have helped inform this current consultation.
- 2.10. To summarise, initial results indicate that saltmarsh and eelgrass beds within the coastal zone of the Isle of Man are indeed important carbon sinks, and therefore protecting such habitats from disturbance may maximise the potential to store carbon and help the Isle of Man mitigate against climate change and meet net zero targets.
- 2.11. In the longer term, results from the Blue Carbon Research Project will inform the Department, and the wider Isle of Man Government, on the most important locations within the Isle of Man territorial sea that warrant protection as part of a Blue Carbon Management Strategy, as required by the Isle of Man Government Climate Change Plan.
- 2.12. In addition to their blue carbon value, such habitats support biodiversity and provide other vital ecosystem services such as nutrient and pollution cycling and coastline protection.

Coastal Habitats as an area of importance for Marine Conservation

- 2.13. The United Kingdom has, with the agreement of the Isle of Man Government, extended several international conventions to the Island (e.g., the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the OSPAR Convention), whose aims are to conserve and protect species and habitats, including the waters of the North Atlantic and, where possible, restore and/or minimise human interference of habitats and ecosystems. Additionally, the Isle of Man has UNESCO Biosphere status which encourages people to work sustainably with nature, rather than simply exploiting it.
- 2.14. With respect to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Isle of Man Government developed and implements its own Biodiversity Strategy³. This sets out the island's objectives in relation to the protection and conservation of aquatic and terrestrial species and habitats and is subject to ongoing development as the convention evolves.
- 2.15. For example, the original CBD, outlined in the 2011 Aichi Targets, and included in the Manx Biodiversity Strategy, set a target of 10% of marine areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services to be protected by 2020. This target was achieved by

¹ <https://www.netzero.im/media/pkmcnfm/isle-of-man-climate-change-plan-2022-2027.pdf>

² <https://netzero.im/latest/the-isle-of-man-s-blue-carbon-project-leading-the-way-in-marine-carbon-exploration/>

³ <https://www.gov.im/about-the-government/departments/environment-food-and-agriculture/environment-directorate/ecosystem-policy-team/wildlife-biodiversity-and-protected-sites/biodiversity-strategy-and-delivery-plan/>

the Isle of Man via the designation of the Manx Marine Nature Reserves in 2018. [More information on Manx Marine Nature Reserves.](#)

- 2.16. Coastal habitats around the Isle of Man have multiple examples of habitats that are both locally and internationally important for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Eelgrass is recognised as a priority species and appears on the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats.
- 2.17. Physical disturbance, nutrient enrichment, marine pollution, disease, increased turbidity, introduction and competition from invasive non-native species and natural cycles, are all factors which affect eelgrass beds and can threaten the extent and quality of this habitat. Physical disturbance occurs on both intertidal and subtidal beds. It may be caused by trampling, dredging, the use of fishing gear and anchoring).
- 2.18. Saltmarshes are also important coastal habitats from both carbon capture and storage and biodiversity perspectives. The Manx saltmarshes, such as found at Cornaa, have been shown to have higher concentrations of carbon stored than any other marine habitat on the island. These habitats are rare on the Island and are very vulnerable to a number of threats including coastal development and changes in catchment and/or coastal hydrodynamics.
- 2.19. In the wider context of the OSPAR region (the NE Atlantic), both saltmarshes and eelgrass beds are recognised as priority habitats and are considered threatened and/or declining.
- 2.20. A recent target of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was agreed by member nations and adopted in December 2022 at the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which was agreed by 196 countries at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP15).
- 2.21. The new framework sets a global mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and includes an ambitious target for the Parties to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of the global ocean (marine and coastal areas, approx. 108 million km²) by 2030, through a network of Marine Protected Areas (**MPAs**) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (**OECMs**). This target is often referred to as "30by30".
- 2.22. Whilst the CBD is a *global* commitment and does not place obligations on any one jurisdiction to achieve "30by30" in its territory specifically, the Department recognises that additional statutory protections within the Isle of Man territorial sea should be considered as part of the Island's domestic responsibility under this global target.
- 2.23. The proposed measures reflect the Isle of Man Government's commitment to effectively conserving and managing ecologically important habitats through a well-connected network of protected areas under the UN convention on Biological Diversity

As noted, the Isle of Man is signatory (extended via the UK) to various international conservation agreements. As such, the island has made a legally binding commitment to comply with them as required, or as it considers appropriate.

Under international law the UK is, as Sovereign State, responsible for the Isle of Man's compliance with the obligations under relevant international instruments that apply to the Isle of Man.

The Isle of Man is responsible for complying with those international obligations and must ensure appropriate domestic legislation, and other provisions or measures as necessary, are in place to ensure compliance.

Protecting Manx Eelgrass Beds

- 2.24. Currently there are six known eelgrass beds within Manx coastal waters. These are located along the east coast of the Isle of Man in bays protected from the prevailing south-westerly winds. These meadows are located at Carrick Bay, Derbyhaven, Fort Island, Laxey Bay, Ramsey Bay and Bulgham Bay.
- 2.25. Four of these eelgrass meadows have been protected under the Wildlife Act and eelgrass conservation zones have been established for a number of years. The Derbyhaven bed, which was recently discovered, lies within an MNR, but is not within an existing ECZ. Bulgham Bay eelgrass meadow, also recently discovered, is currently not designated, neither within an MNR, or an ECZ.

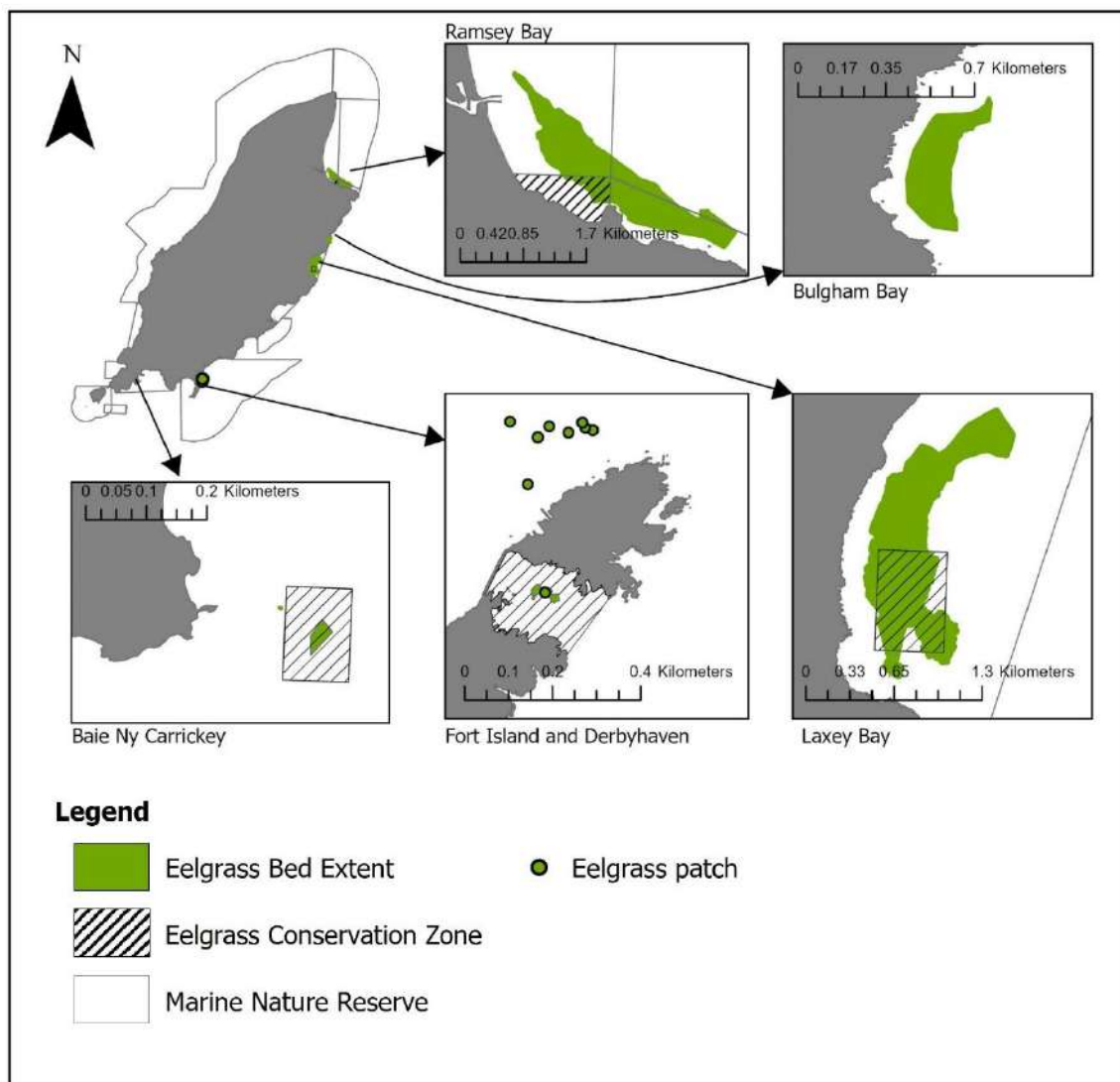


Figure 1 Showing distribution of Eelgrass Beds around the Isle of Man

This map shows the locations of eelgrass habitats around the Isle of Man, highlighting the boundaries of the eelgrass conservation zones. It features eelgrass habitats in the following areas: Ramsey Bay, Bulgham Bay, Baie Ny Carrickey, Fort Island, Derbyhaven, and Laxey Bay. The map also indicates areas where eelgrass habitats extend beyond designated conservation zones.

- In **Ramsey Bay**, eelgrass has expanded outside of the eelgrass conservation zone into the conservation zone, as well as into the rocky shore zone and fisheries management zone.

- **Bulgham Bay** currently has eelgrass habitat outside of any protected areas.
 - In **Baie Ny Carrickey**, there is a small patch of eelgrass outside the eelgrass conservation zone.
 - **Derbyhaven** contains multiple eelgrass patches, but none are within a conservation zone.
 - **Laxey Bay** has seen a significant northern expansion of eelgrass outside its protected area.
- 2.26. Since 2018, following the designation of coastal MNRs within the three-mile area, which are a type of MPA, the total area of the Isle of Man territorial sea under statutory protection equates to approximately 10%, whilst the total area of terrestrial land afforded protection equates to approximately 20%.
- 2.27. By designating the new MNR to protect the Bulgham Bay and Cornaa blue carbon habitats, the Isle of Man has an opportunity to increase the extent of marine protections and demonstrate that the Isle of Man Government is working towards consistency with the CBD targets, thereby fulfilling our commitments as a signatory, and our ambition to be recognised as a responsible jurisdiction on the international stage.
- 2.28. Designation of a new and extended ECZ's will have byelaws associated with them that will prohibit certain activities such as anchoring and potting. The [byelaws](#) presently in place for other MNR's and ECZ's will be applied to the extended and new ECZ's

Creation of a new Marine Nature reserve

- 2.29. The Department has a statutory responsibility to protect eelgrass under the Wildlife Act. The Act provides for the establishment of Marine Nature Reserves, within which eelgrass conservation zones can be established and which enables additional protections via the MNR Byelaws. The newly discovered Bulgham Bay eelgrass bed is outside of any established MNR and as such a new MNR needs to be established in order for an ECZ to be designated.
- 2.30. The east coast of the Island, between Laxey Bay and Maughold Head, has long been recognised as an area with several features of marine conservation interest. Apart from the eelgrass and saltmarsh habitats already mentioned, the area is home to the rare Iceland, or black clam bivalve, one of the oldest living organisms in the world. Additionally, the cliffs and shoreline of Maughold Head are home to the largest colony of cormorants on the island and an important habitat for other seabirds, including puffins. The grey seal is also often found along this stretch of coast which contains several important haul-out sites.
- 2.31. The Department is currently considering extending the MNR network to ensure protection of the Bulgham Bay eelgrass meadow and Cornaa saltmarsh. Three proposed options for designation have been identified and following consultation with stakeholders and the Manx public, it is anticipated that a new MNR will be designated, with a minimum objective of protecting the eelgrass bed at Bulgham Bay.
- 2.32. Designation of the new MNR will enable the Department to apply existing byelaws to restrict practices that may be damaging to habitats of high conservation and blue carbon value. This will include the restriction of certain fishing practices within the MNR and ECZ's. It is envisaged that the specific restrictions applied to the Bulgham MNR ECZ will be consistent with the measures that are already in place for existing ECZs in other MNRs.

DEFA is committed to work to ensure that valuable biodiversity resources of the island are properly managed and effectively conserved for future generations by increasing the percentage of land and sea under protection.

DEFA's Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the proposal are;

- Objective 1.** To expand existing, and where necessary, create new, Eelgrass Conservation Zone's to reflect recent survey data, thereby enhancing protection of Manx eelgrass.
- Objective 2.** Consequently, to establish a new Marine Nature Reserve north of Laxey along the coastline, including Bulgham Bay, to protect key Blue Carbon and high conservation value habitats.
- Objective 3.** To increase land and sea under protection across the Isle of Man. To afford statutory protection to important marine habitats and valuable marine ecosystems from human impacts, in line with the Island's domestic and international obligations and responsibilities whilst balancing the needs of all stakeholders. To increase statutory protection of areas of conservation interest in accordance with the Departmental plan. This objective is reflected in Options/Proposals 2 and 3: MNR extension to Cornaa and Maughold respectively.

Overview of Options and Proposals for the new MNR

- 2.33. The Department has prepared three options (proposals) for consideration by interested stakeholders in relation to the new MNR.
- 2.34. The options have been developed with consideration and analysis of –
 - 2.34.1. Recent survey data collected by the Manx Eelgrass Group (MEG) and other volunteers.
 - 2.34.2. Government and independent conservation survey data (various datasets).

Option 1 – Establishment of New MNR to protect Bulgham Bay Eelgrass bed only

- 2.35. This option (Figure 2) would create a new MNR designation in the southern part of Bulgham Bay only, solely to protect the eelgrass meadow located there.

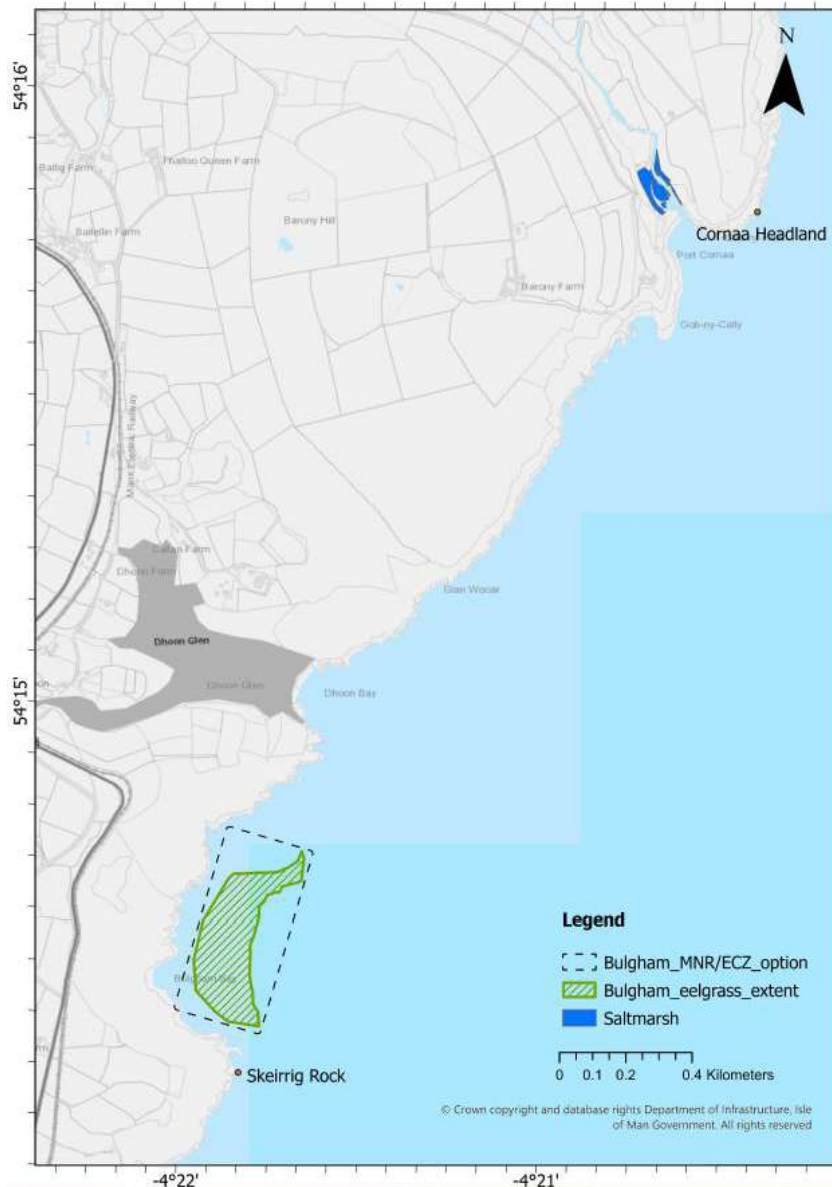


Figure 2. Option 1 Proposed MNR in southern Bulgham Bay (hatched box only) - Option one displays a map of the east coast of the Isle of Man, focusing on Bulgham Bay. The map highlights the location of the Bulgham eelgrass bed and outlines a proposed Marine Nature Reserve (MNR) / Eelgrass Conservation Zone (ECZ). The boundaries of the proposed MNR/ECZ are shown as a rectangular box around the extent of the eelgrass bed.

2.36. This option achieves eelgrass protection in Bulgham Bay, and minimises the impact upon fisheries stakeholders, but does not protect other features of conservation interest or Cornaa saltmarsh.

Option 2 – Designation of new MNR between Skeirrig Rock and Cornaa Headland.

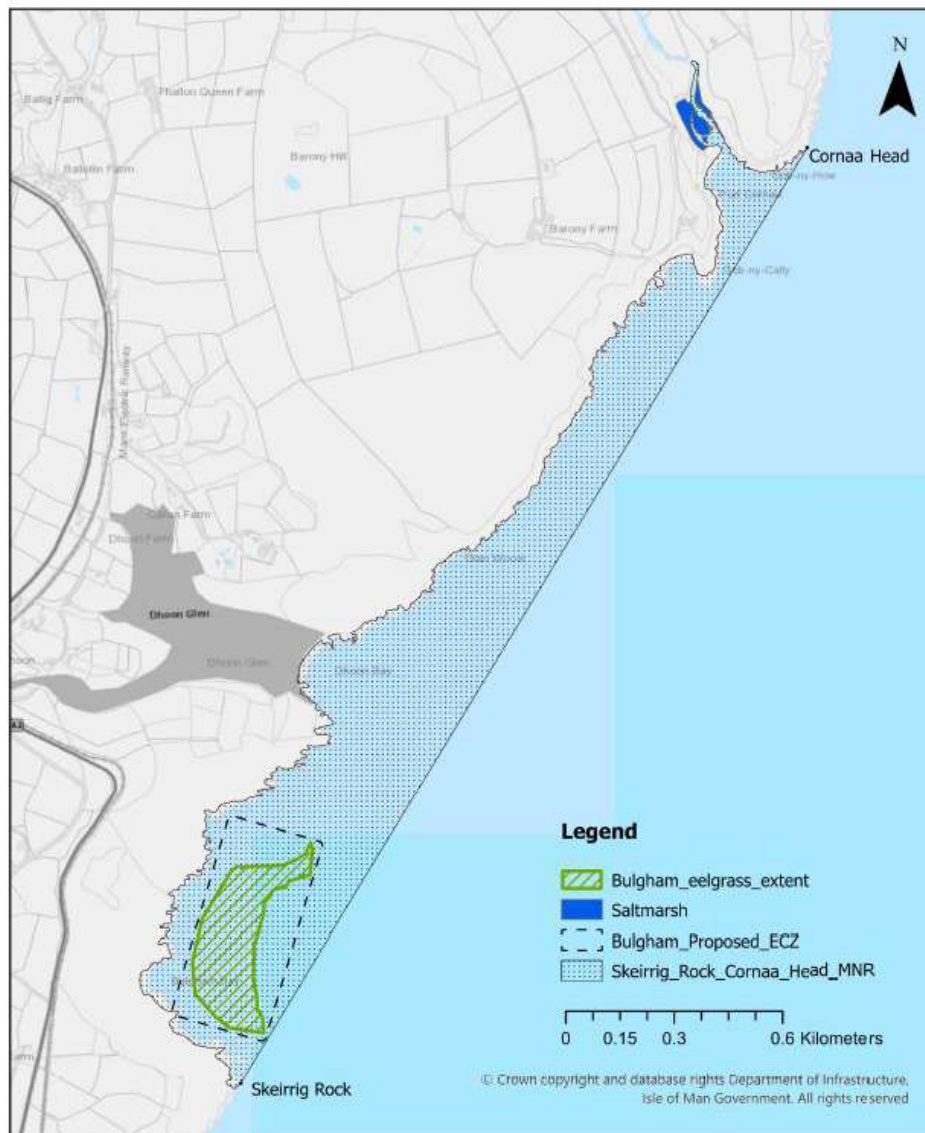


Figure 3. Option 2: Proposed new MNR between Skeirrig Rock and Cornaa Headland - Option two is a map of the east coast of the Isle of Man showing the Bulgham eelgrass bed in Bulgham Bay and the Saltmarsh in Cornaa Bay, both protected by the proposed MNR from Skeirrig Rock to Cornaa Head. There's also a rectangular hatched box around the Bulgham eelgrass bed which is the proposed ECZ.

- 2.37. This option would provide protection for the whole of Bulgham and Cornaa Bays ensuring both the eelgrass meadows in Bulgham Bay and the saltmarsh at Cornaa can be better protected.
- 2.38. This option provides maximum protection for all blue carbon habitats in the region.
- 2.39. This option will also provide protection for the Iceland clams found along this coastline. This species is particularly vulnerable to damage from mobile bottom fishing gears.

Option 3 - Establishment of a new MNR between Bulgham Bay and Maughold Head

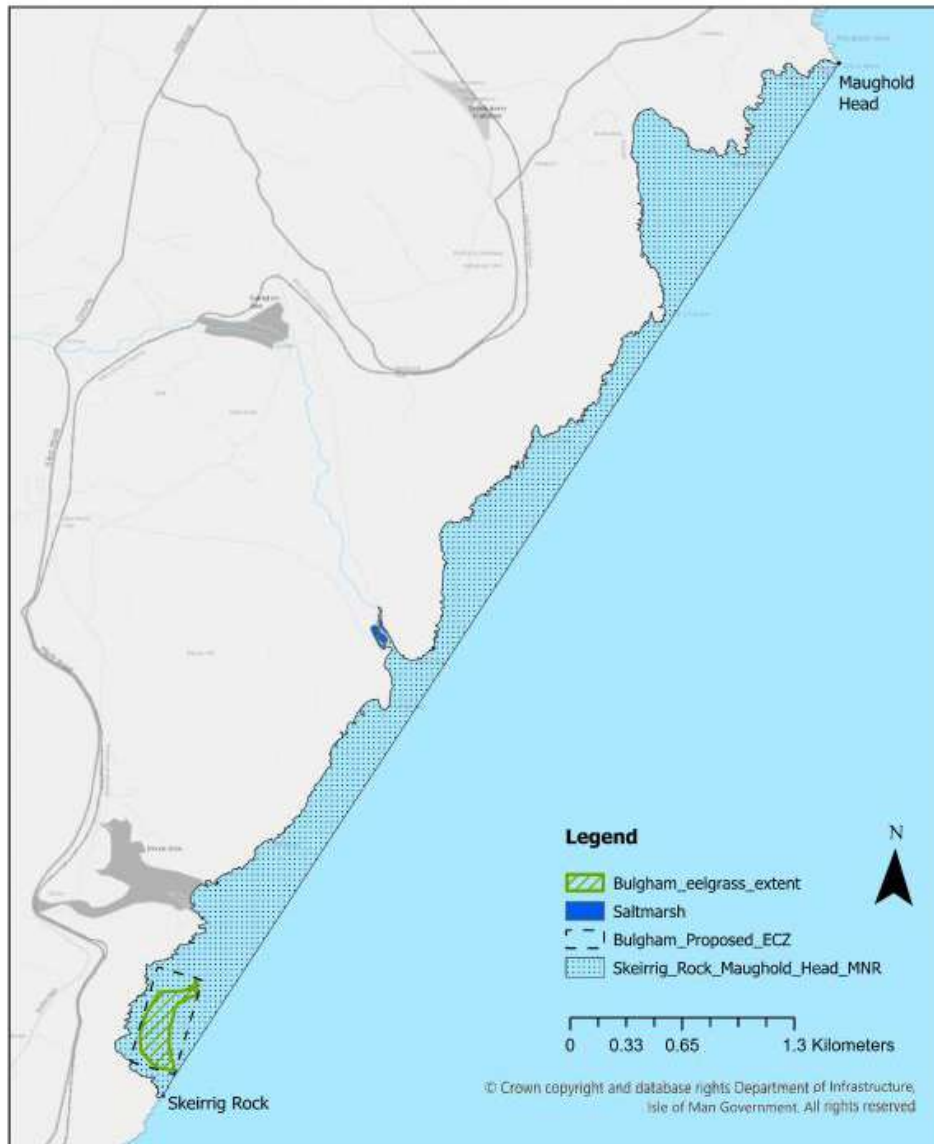


Figure 4 Option 3. Establishment of a new MNR between Bulgham Bay (Skeirrig Rock) and Maughold Head - Option three is a map of the east coast of the Isle of Man showing the proposed MNR between Skeirrig Rock and Maughold Head. This new MNR includes the Bulgham eelgrass bed and its proposed ECZ box around it on Bulgham Bay and the Saltmarsh in Cornaa Bay.

- 2.40. This option provides total protection for all blue carbon habitats in the area as well as for the Iceland clam.
- 2.41. This option would also include protection for grey seal haul out areas and coastal seabirds.
- 2.42. This option is likely to have the greatest impact upon local fisherfolk.

5 Expansion of Existing ECZs

5.1 Recent surveys of known eelgrass beds have shown that these beds have expanded beyond the previously established protected areas.

5.2 In line with its statutory duties under the Wildlife Act, DEFA will expand these existing ECZs and create new ECZs to reflect the most recent survey data and enable statutory protection for these important habitats to be updated.

5.3 ECZ's have restrictions imposed on activities such as anchoring and fishing gears which come into contact with the seabed. These restrictions are enforceable via bylaws under the Wildlife Act 1990, and as conditions of the Isle of Man Sea fishing licence (in respect of fishing gear restrictions).

5.4 Figures 5-7 depict the eelgrass zones that will be created/expanded to more accurately reflect recent survey data. It can be seen from Figure 5 that a new associated meadow has been found to the north of St Michael's Island (referred to previously as Derbyhaven Bay bed).

5.5 It is important to note that these figures represent the maximum potential ECZ's based on extent data from multiple surveys ranging in confidence levels. The ECZ's areas may change as result of targeted consultations and comments received in this consultation.

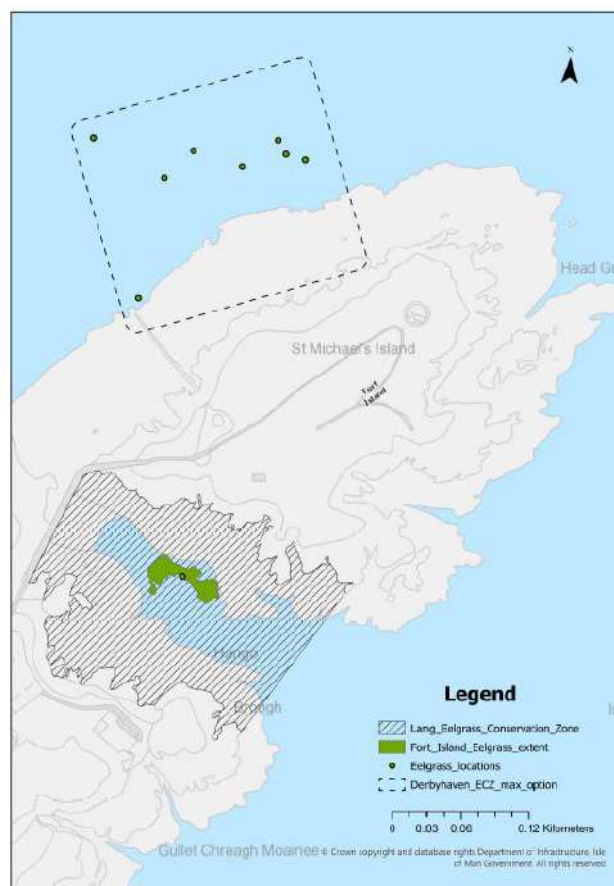


Figure 5. Established ECZ at Fort Island Gully (hatched area). Current known distribution of eelgrass (green and dots) - Map of St Michael's Island showing eelgrass patches to the northwest of the Island with a rectangular hatched box around these areas depicting proposed Derbyhaven eelgrass conservation zone. To the south of the island there's the Fort Island eelgrass bed extent and a hatched area covering the extent of the bay which depicts the existing eelgrass conservation zone.

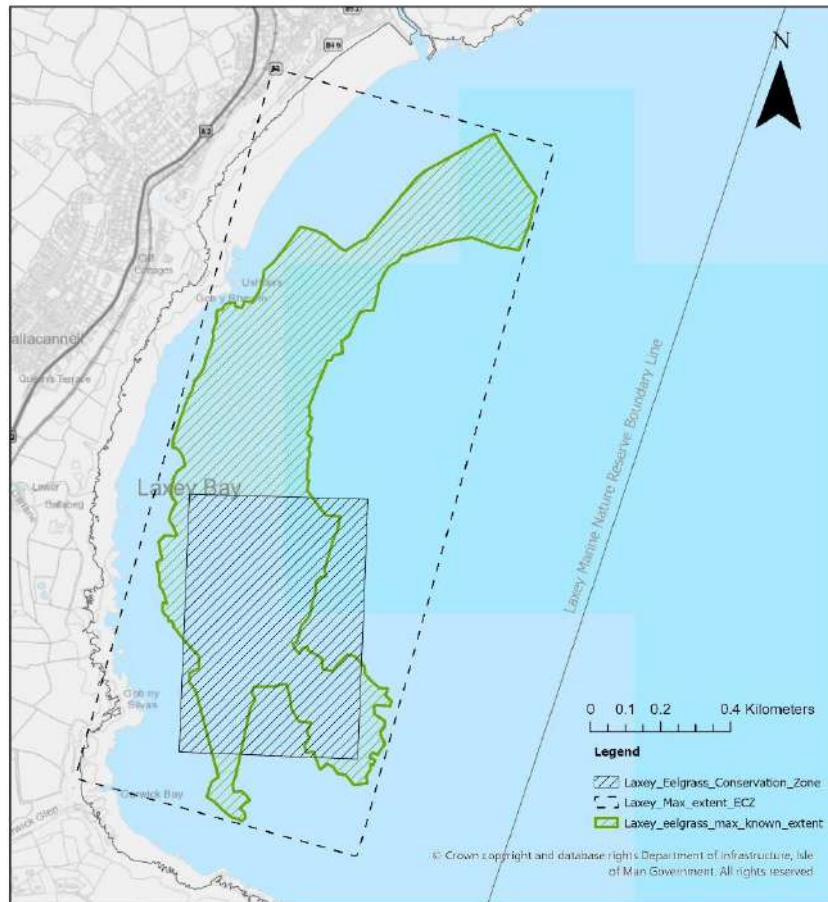


Figure 6. Established ECZ at Laxey Bay (hatched area). Current known distribution of eelgrass in green - This map shows Laxey Bay with the Laxey eelgrass bed and its maximum known extent. The current Laxey eelgrass conservation zone (ECZ) is represented by a hatched rectangular box, spanning from Lower Ballabeg to just past Gob ny Silvas. The eelgrass extent has expanded significantly beyond the current ECZ. A proposed new ECZ is shown as a dashed rectangular box, outlining the full extent of the eelgrass bed.

5.5 The established ECZ at Laxey Bay is shown in Figure 6. The ECZ currently protects less than half of the known distribution of this species in the bay.

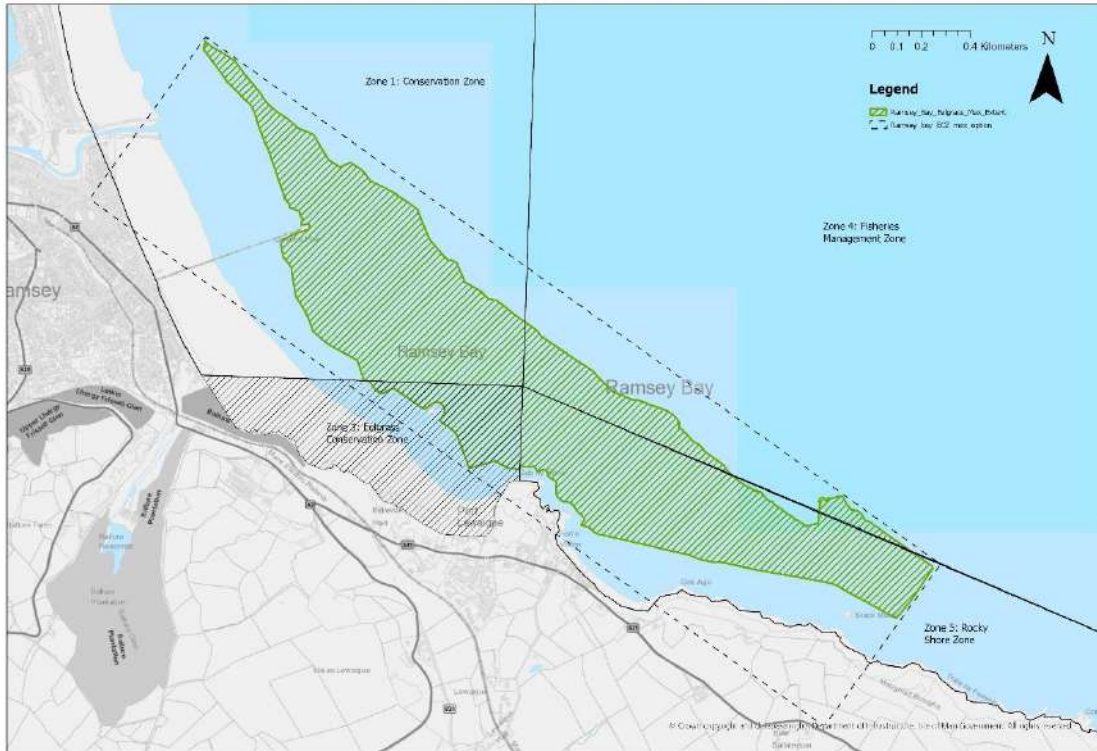


Figure 7. Established ECZ in Ramsey Bay (hatched area). Current known distribution of eelgrass meadow in green - This map of **Ramsey Bay** shows the extent of the **eelgrass bed** in the area. The current **eelgrass conservation zone** is depicted, with eelgrass extending significantly into this zone, as well as into the **rocky shore zone** and slightly into the **fisheries management zone**. A proposed new **eelgrass conservation zone** is shown as a dashed rectangular line, outlining the full extent of the eelgrass bed.

The map also highlights key zones:

- **Zone 1 (Northwest):** Conservation zone
- **Zone 1 (Southwest):** Eelgrass conservation zone
- **Zone 4 (Northeast):** Fisheries management zone
- **Zone 5 (Southeast):** Rocky shore zone

5.6 The eelgrass meadow in Ramsey Bay has increased significantly since protection was brought into place in 2011. It can be seen from Figure 7 that the species is now distributed across much of the south side of the bay in varying densities.

5. Consultation Questions

Section 1 - Consultee Information

Where do you normally reside?

Please tell us the first 3 digits of your postcode (e.g., IM2, IM9)	
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How old are you? (Please tick)

Age	
Under 20	
20-29	
30-39	
40-49	
50-64	
65 or over	

Which of the following are you? (Please tick)

Member of the Public	
Private Company (not fishery or marine related)	
Fisheries related (individual)	
Fisheries related (company)	
Fisheries related (association or representative organisation)	
Environmental or other Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)	
Public Body	
Other (please state)	

May we publish your response? (Please tick)

Please [read our Privacy Policy](#) for more details and your rights.

- Publish in full – the answers to section 1 along with full answers to the rest of the consultation may be published on the hub
- Publish anonymously – only your responses may be published on the hub (section 1 will not be published)
- Do not publish – nothing will be published publically on the hub (your response will only be part of a larger summary response document)

Publish in full	
Publish anonymously	
Do not publish	

Section 2 – Your views on DEFA’s objectives for blue carbon and biodiversity habitat conservation

The Department has outlined three objectives in relation to protecting blue carbon/biodiversity habitats (see Pg. 7)

What are your views on DEFA’s three objectives?

In your opinion, which of the objectives (if any) should be the priority consideration for the Department when considering proposals for protecting blue carbon/biodiversity habitats? Rank in terms of priority with 1 being high importance and 3 low importance.

<i>Objective 1</i>	
<i>Objective 2</i>	
<i>Objective 3</i>	

Please give reasons for your choice

Section 3 – Your views on DEFA’s proposed options

The Department has developed three options / proposals for introducing management measures and MNRs to protect coastal blue carbon/biodiversity habitats on the east coast, north of Laxey Bay.

Having considered the three options, which (if any) is your preferred option?

<i>Option 1 (Bulgham Eelgrass bed MNR only)</i>	
<i>Option 2 (Skeirrig to Cornaa MNR)</i>	
<i>Option 3 (Skeirrig to Maughold Head MNR)</i>	

Comments.

Thinking about your preferred option, is there any aspect of the proposal that you would change? Please explain what and why.

Section 4 – Impacts of proposals on recreational and commercial and other users of the new MNR and expanded ECZs.

The new MNR will have accompanying legislation and a management plan developed to assist with fisheries, tourism and recreational management that may impact negatively upon these habitats. At the very least these restrictions will prohibit anchoring within ECZs and the use of fishing gear which comes into contact with the seabed, and use of pots (etc.) in accordance with current [byelaws](#)

The department is keen to hear from individuals (or companies) who utilise both the proposed MNR and ECZ expanded areas for either commercial or recreational use. Please state below which sites and whether you utilise these areas for commercial or other activities.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Manx BC results summary

Useful Links

[Manx Blue Carbon Project](#)

[OSPAR Eelgrass information](#)

[Convention on Biodiversity 2030 targets](#)

[Manx Marine Nature Reserves](#)

[Manx Biodiversity Strategy](#)

[Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

List of notified consultees

Manx Fish Producers Organisation

Manx Wildlife Trust