



Wester Ross Marine Protected Area

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History of the Scottish MPA Network

Pre 2010

Only able to designate MPAs under EU directives which only protect a limited number of species and habitats



Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

Ramsar Sites

Other area based measures

Black throated diver - ©Laurie Campbell/SNH

Post 2010

Able to designate sites of national importance



Nature Conservation MPA (NC MPA)

Demonstration and Research MPA (D&R MPA)

Historic MPA (HMPA)

Flame shell bed - ©Graham Saunders/Marine Scotland

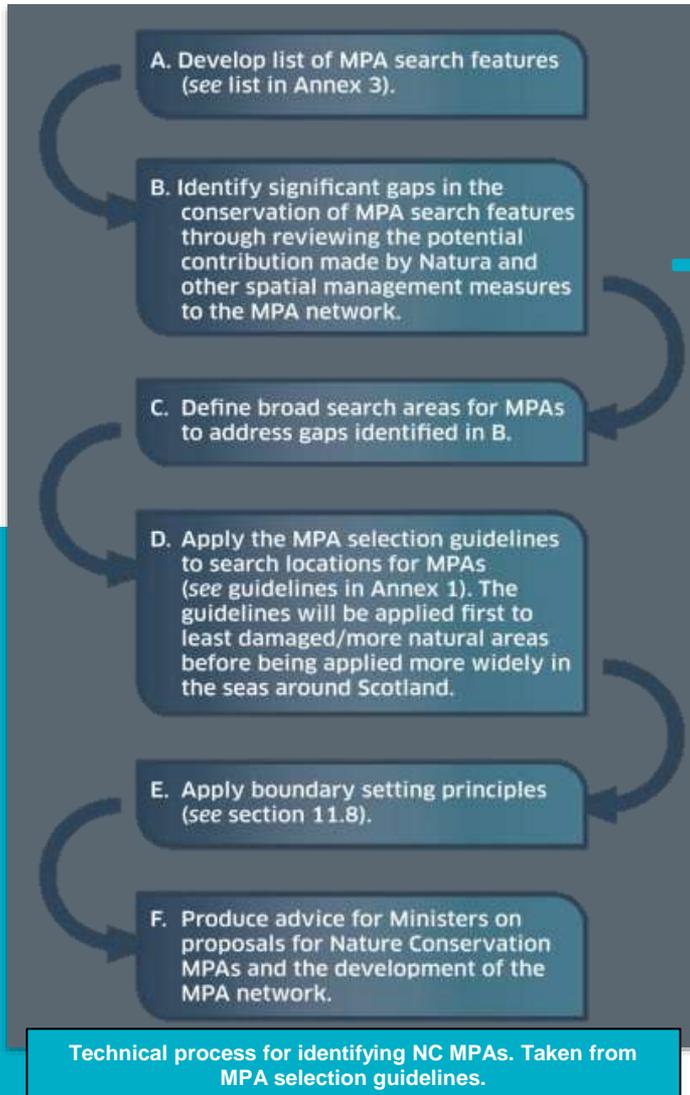
The Scottish MPA Network

HPMAs

Introduction of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

Process for identifying NC MPAs

Selection was a feature specific process. MPA search features (biodiversity features) and equivalent geodiversity interests (geodiversity features) informed the selection of NC MPAs.



MPA search features

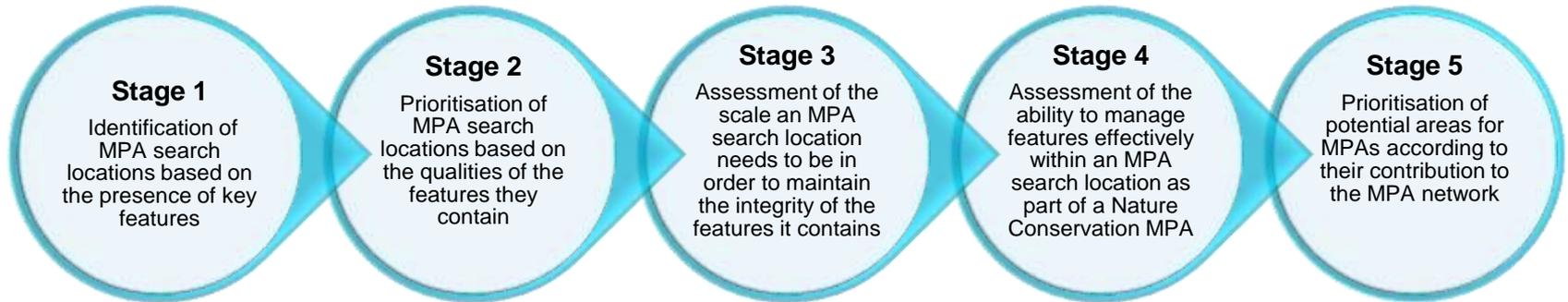
Species, habitats and large-scale features of importance for nature conservation or ecosystem function in Scotland's seas that will benefit from spatial protection. They are mostly drawn from the list of Priority Marine Features (PMFs).

Reviews

A series of reviews were undertaken ahead of site selection to determine

- the contribution of existing protected areas and other area based measures and gaps
- Areas of Scotland's seas considered to be Least Damaged/More Natural and whether they encompassed MPA search features

Site Selection



1 Stage 1 Guidelines

- 1a – Presence of key features
- 1b – Presence of features considered to be under threat and/or rapid decline
- 1c – Functional significance for the overall health and diversity of Scottish seas.

2 Stage 2 Guidelines

- 2a – The search location contains combinations of features, rather than single isolated features, especially if those features are functionally linked.
- 2b – The search location contains example(s) of features with a high natural biological diversity.
- 1c – The search location contains coherent examples of features, rather than smaller, potentially more fragmented ones.
- 2d – The search location contains features considered least damaged/ more natural, rather than those heavily modified by human activity.
- 2e – The search location contains features considered to be at risk of significant damage by human activity.

Prioritisation was undertaken at a network level to ensure areas being selected collectively made the best contribution to achieving an ecologically coherent network.

Stage 5: Ecological coherence

Socio-economic

considerations were assessed when two or more areas contributed the same ecological value

Assessed against 5 criteria:

- 1 **Representative** of the features in the network
- 2 Provides **replication** of features in the network
- 3 Reflects the known **geographical range and variation**
- 4 Provides **key linkages** between features in the network
- 5 Contributes to the **resilience** of the network

Wester Ross MPA protected features (Biodiversity)



Burrowed Mud



Cirralittoral muddy sands communities



Flame shell beds



Kelp and seaweed communities



Maerl beds



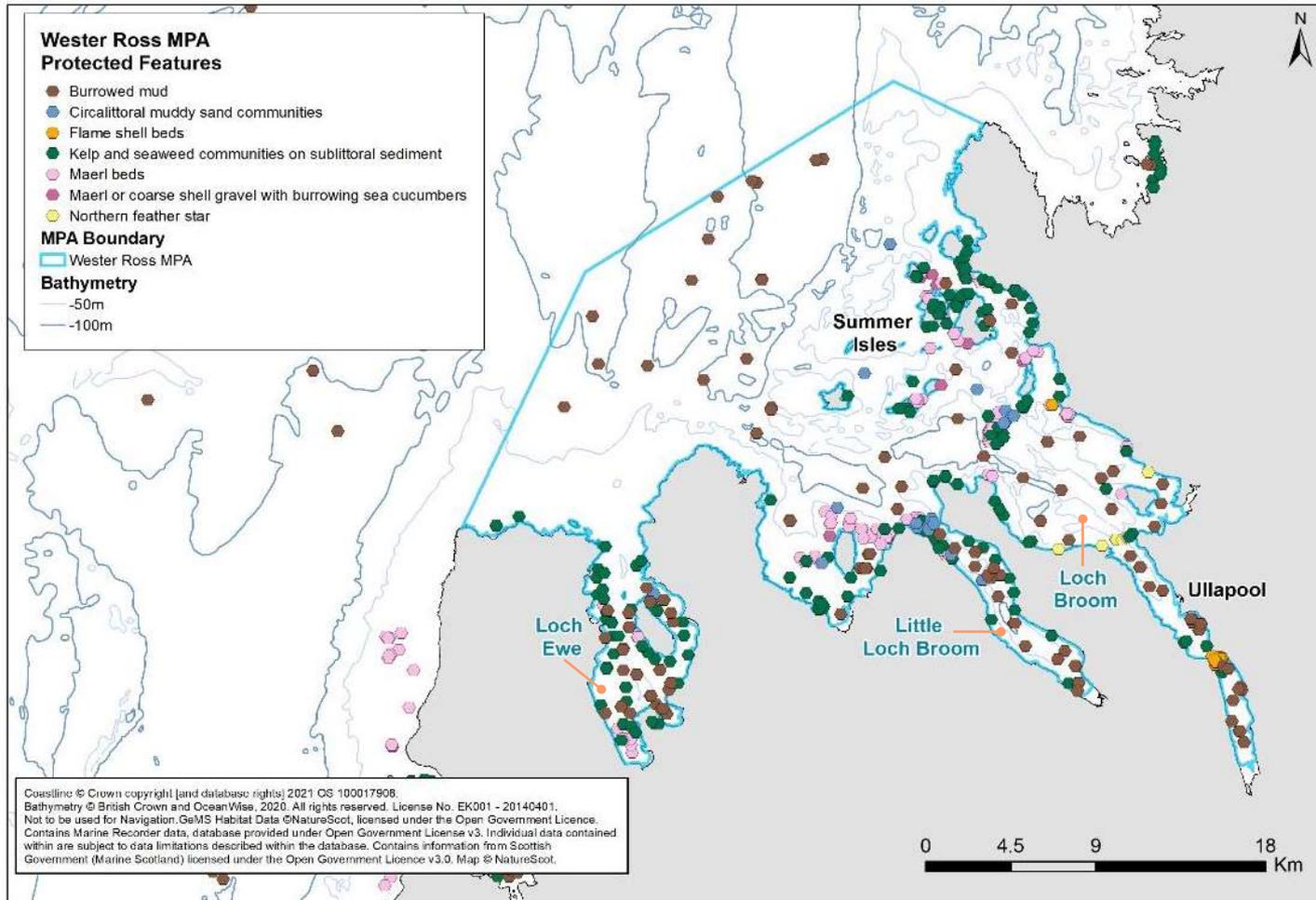
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers



Northern feather star aggregations on mixed substrata

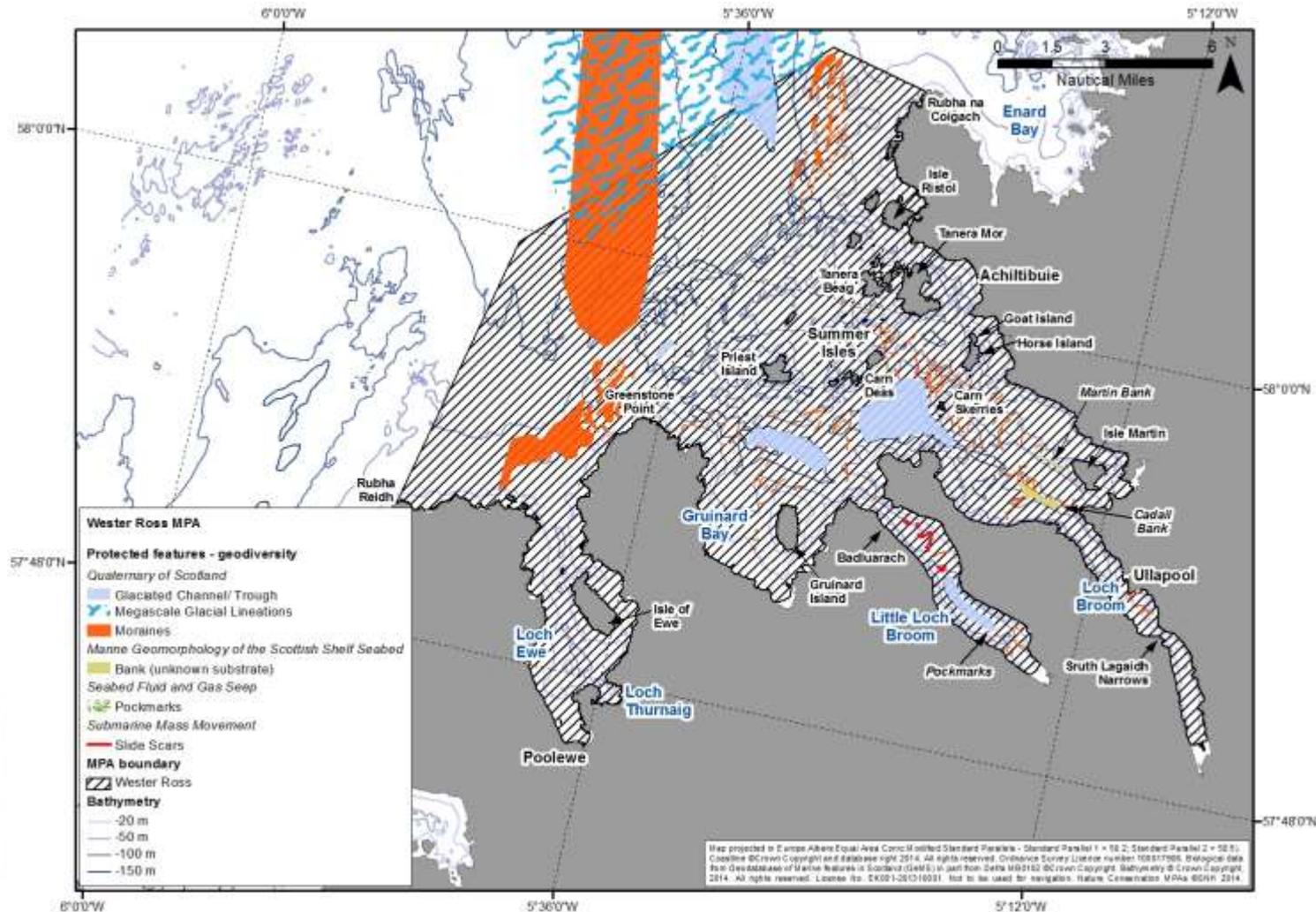
Important to note: Our understanding of the distribution of protected features is a continuous process

Biodiversity protected features distribution



Important to note: The whole of the MPA is encompassed by the *Summer Isles to Sula Sgeir Fan* key geodiversity area

Geodiversity protected features distribution



Conservation Objectives (COs)

COs are set for each feature of a NC MPA and reflect the desired quality. They are based on our understanding of the condition of the features and either **conserve** or **recover** objectives are set.

Burrowed mud - conserve

Cirralittoral muddy sands communities - conserve

Flame shell beds - **recover**

Kelp and seaweed communities on sublittoral sediment - conserve

Maerl beds - **recover**

Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers - conserve

Northern feather star aggregations on mixed substrata - conserve

2014 NatureScot Commissioned Report (no. 764)

In 2014 a study analysed available data for both maerl beds and flame shell beds inside the Wester Ross MPA to identify key areas within the site that would benefit from management actions to help support their recovery.

Roles in MPA management



Marine Scotland

Responsible for managing Scotland's seas. MS are provided with formal advice from NatureScot and JNCC that is used to help inform management decisions. They are also the lead authority for monitoring compliance with fisheries management measures and issuing marine licences for activities that require one.

NatureScot

Statutory responsibility to provide advice to relevant authorities on activities or operations that could cause potential impacts to protected features and conservation objectives and management of MPAs (up to 12 nautical miles).



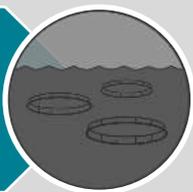
JNCC

Provides guidance and advice to Marine Scotland and others on MPAs out with the territorial waters (beyond 12 nautical miles).



Relevant and competent authorities

They ensure that the activities they regulate, permit or license do not risk the achievement of the Conservation Objectives set for an MPA



Management of MPAs

MPAs are multi-use sites and activities are still allowed to take place as long they are compatible with the MPA achieving its conservation objectives.

Management is delivered through a combination of tools including:

- Fisheries management measures
- Licensing/consenting some marine activities
- Codes of good practice

Fisheries management measures

Fisheries management measures are spatial and/or temporal management tool to further the conservation objectives of MPAs and are implemented through Marine Conservation Orders (MCOs) for NC MPAs. They are enforced by Marine and Fisheries Compliance (Marine Scotland).

NatureScot advice

Provided at site consultation in Management Options documents – to be updated by Conservation & Management Advice documents

3 categories of advice:

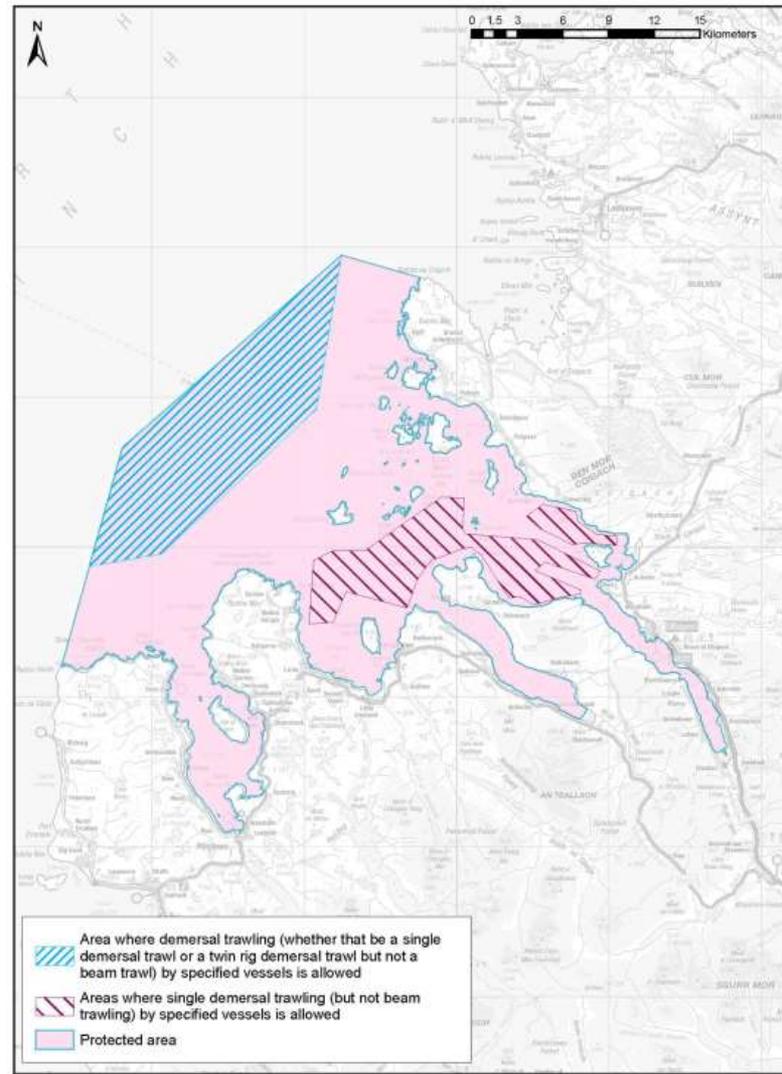
management to **remove or avoid pressures**;

management to **reduce or limit pressures**; or

no additional management required.

The terms “**considered**” and “**recommended**” are also used specifically in fisheries management advice

The Wester Ross MPA was part of the phase 1 implementation of fisheries management measures based on the sensitivity of its features. The MCO came into force on 23 March 2016. Note within the rest of the pink ‘Protected Area’ there is a prohibition on towed bottom-contacting gear



Map taken from Wester Ross MPA Marine Conservation Order (MCO) 2016

Community-led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Programme

The programme provides resources, training and access to equipment to help improve our understanding of the distribution of Scotland's species and habitats.

The data provided by communities is fed into national databases to support decision making and help deliver the [Scottish MPA Monitoring strategy](#).

Monitoring

Nine NatureScot surveys of Wester Ross MPA since 2000. Most recently 2017 & 2018.

PAST AND FUTURE MONITORING

Past

DDV surveys in July 2018, on maerl beds, northern feather star aggregations and other benthic habitats (complementing earlier studies)

High resolution sonar dataset collected in 2020 under CHP – study dredge scar decay over time.

Future

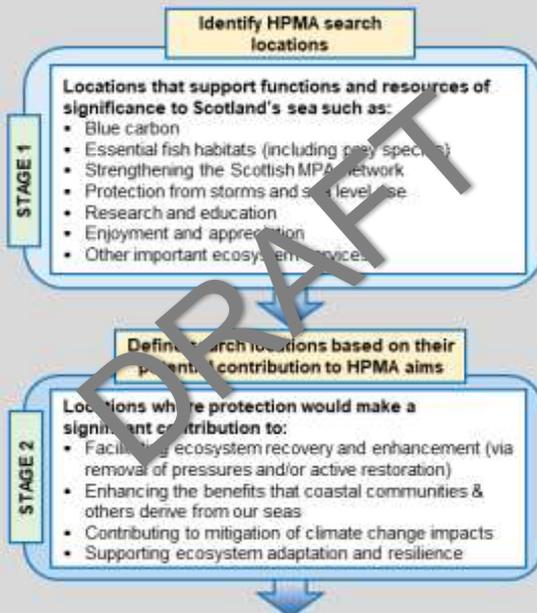
Dive surveys on flame shell beds including sites recently identified by scallop divers, establishing baselines for future monitoring work.

DDV on flame shell beds and Northern feather star aggregations as well as a limited number of grab sampling of the flame shell beds planned in May for comparison with previous surveys.

Highly Protect Marine Areas (HPMAs)

INDICATIVE HPMA TIMELINE

Draft and subject to change



Other programmes of work

Other programmes of work - existing, underway and proposed - will all further the conservation of Scotland's species and habitats -

- Existing fisheries management measures in place adjacent to the Wester Ross MPA
- PMF review project - providing protection to the 11 most sensitive PMF habitats outside of MPAs
- Introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy; Scottish Seabird Conservation Strategy; UK dolphin and porpoise Conservation Strategy

Useful links

General documents

- Scottish MPA Selection Guidelines
- Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas: Draft Management Handbook
- Scottish MPA Network – Parliamentary Report 2012
- Scottish MPA Network – Parliamentary Report 2018
- MPA FAQs

Wester Ross site-specific information can be found of NatureScot's **Sitelink**

Information and data

Sitelink – NatureScot information source (including site documents, and data confidence assessments)

Flickr – images

DAMs – footage and images

Natural Spaces – provides open access to NatureScot's main spatial datasets as data downloads (including GeMS which provides data on the distribution of PMFs).

NMPi – Marine Scotland interactive mapping tool that provides spatial information relating to the marine environment and activities. Select data can also be downloaded from the site.

Scotland's Marine Assessment 2020 – Provides an assessment of the state of Scotland's seas. Regional assessments are also provided.