



Kingfisher Talking points

seafish
Kingfisher
Information Service

January 2019



Fishing industry helping to deliver a safe and clean seabed

Fishing vessel trawl sweeps are playing an active part in clearing the seabed – they're positive news for the fishing industry.

There are several reasons why fishermen should care about fishing vessels being commissioned to undertake specialist trawl sweeps.

Firstly, they make fishing safer. Secondly, they reduce the risk of objects or debris damaging fishing gear. And thirdly, they offer reassurance that fishing grounds are clear and can be fished again.

Trawl sweep operations are carried out on the seabed after pipeline installation, decommissioning works or other offshore operations. That's because some items left on the seabed may create risks for vessel safety – due to structure size or connection into the seabed, they're essentially immovable. Other items may damage fishing gear or ruin catch.

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So, with a trawl sweep, a fishing vessel tows a chain mat and fishing gear across a specified area to:

- remove items of debris on the seabed (scaffolding poles, concrete blocks, wires and the like)
- flatten large clay berms created during pipeline installations or other operations
- highlight any remaining 'snags' (for future removal) or confirm the area is safe for fishing.

If the trawl sweep shows the area clean and clear, a clearance certificate is issued by the SFF or NFFO. If snagging happens, the position is reported back to operators and they have to do remedial work to remove the 'snag', and then have another trawl sweep done.

Sweeps and surveys compared

If operators have already surveyed these areas, isn't a trawl sweep redundant? No, not at all.

Surveys performed by the offshore industries are visual, relying on interpretation. Often they only reach to 75m.

A trawl sweep covers larger areas of seabed (for example, a whole 500m safety zone). And due to the sweep pattern, varying angles of coverage and various trawls used (chain or finer gear), the sweep is extensive.

As a result, on trawl sweeps of abandoned wellhead sites, for example, around 10% of sweeps show a snagging.

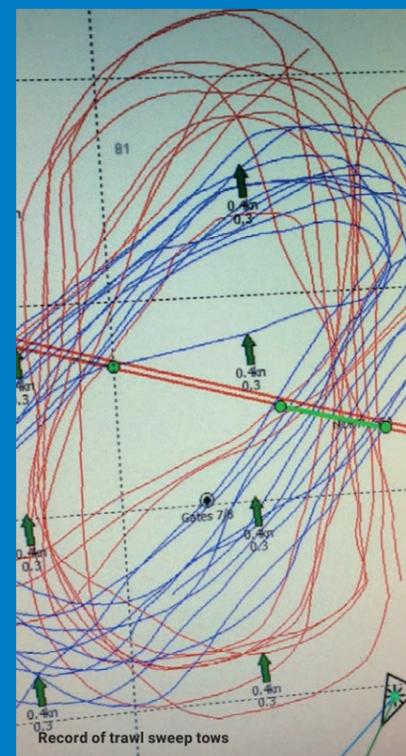
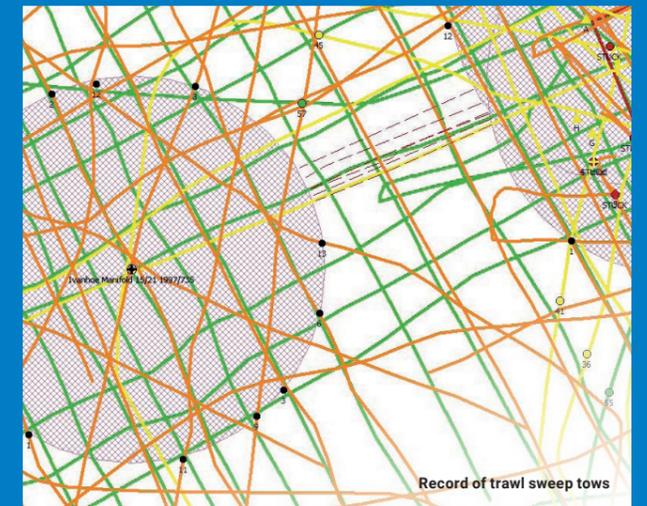
When doing trawl sweeps, the SFF and NFFO will only issue clearance certificates for operators if they're satisfied the area is clean, clear and safe. So, in effect, they give the fishing industry greater control over safety and risk, rather than leaving it in the hands of other marine users.

— Surveys often only reach to 75m.

— A trawl sweep covers larger areas of seabed (for example, a whole 500m safety zone).

What you need to know

- ▶ Trawl sweeps ensure offshore operators are held to account for leaving the seabed clean and clear.
- ▶ They're done by fishing vessels contracted by the NFFO and SFF.
- ▶ If a trawl sweep shows a 'snag', operators have to tell Kingfisher, so it can be shown on the next Bulletin, while they work to remove the item.
- ▶ If a clearance certificate is issued, the area is shown as clear on FishSAFE and opened up for fishing.



Decommissioning explained: platforms and pipelines

Before 2025, it is expected around 200 North Sea oil & gas platforms will be decommissioned – almost 100 of them are estimated to be in the UK sector and thousands of kilometres of pipelines. We answer your questions on what this means for fishing.

Platforms



Brent Delta Topside being decommissioned

Do all decommissioned platforms have to be removed?

The basic position is that all platforms should be fully removed, including topsides and substructures. But the age or size of some structures will make this unsafe or too technically difficult.

In these cases, operators may be allowed to leave part of a jacket structure or a concrete gravity base structure in place.

Who decides this?

Operators have to present their proposals to the UK Government – specifically the Offshore Petroleum Regulator for the Environment and Decommissioning Offshore Decommissioning Unit (OPRED ODU). They then consult relevant stakeholders.

Any justification for leaving substructures partially or wholly in place has to be presented by the UK Government to a European Committee (OSPAR) before any decision is made.

Do fishermen get consulted?

Yes, fishing interests have a say as part of the consultation process. Most operators will liaise with fishing bodies throughout the development of a decommissioning programme.

What part of a platform can be left behind?

It's done case by case. The 'footings' (the top of the piles of the platform) of a steel piled jacket platform can be left in; so too can concrete gravity bases. But in both cases, it has to be justified why this is the best solution. There may also be conditions and IMO regulations to comply with.

If footings are fully or partly removed, is the seabed cleared of hazards/debris?

Yes, debris is cleared around the base of the installations. Once clearance is completed, a clear seabed certificate is required to close out the decommissioning project. This usually involves a trawl sweep.

Do operators remain responsible for platforms left in full or part on the seabed?

Yes. And there are rules to ensure that funds are available even if a company goes into administration or are taken over.

When do platforms lose their safety zones during or after decommissioning?

A safety zone is established automatically around any platform which is above the sea at any state of the tide. But, essentially once it is removed below the water line, the safety zone is relinquished.

To ensure decommissioning can take place with the protection of a safety zone, operators generally apply to the HSE for a new 500m safety zone around the site during decommissioning. This is removed when the project is completed.

Platforms due to be decommissioned (full, partial, left in place)

APPROVED

Next 1-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years
Brent Alpha	Jacky	Brae Bravo
Brent Bravo	Brent Charlie	
Audrey		
Markham ST-1		
LOGGS (Vulcan UR, Viscount VO & Vampire OD)		

BEING CONSIDERED

Next 1-2 years	3-5 years	6-10 years
Ninian North	East Brae	Beatrice
Windermere	Brae Alpha	
Guinevere	Dunlin Alpha	
Tyne South		
Victor JM		

Platforms where structures may NOT be fully removed

APPROVED

APPROVED	BEING CONSIDERED
Murchison (footings)	Dunlin Alpha (concrete gravity base)
Miller (footings)	East Brae, Brae Alpha & Brae Bravo jacket (footings)
MCP-01 (concrete gravity base)	Ninian North (partial jacket removal) in-situ footing decom
NWH (footings)	Brent Bravo, Charlie & Delta (concrete gravity base)
Frigg (concrete gravity base)	Brent Alpha (partial jacket removal) in-situ footing decom
Piper Alpha (toppling)	

How does FishSAFE show decommissioned platforms?

It depends on the solution used for each platform:

Decommissioned but still fully in place

FishSAFE shows a central point for the platform and statutory 500m Safety Zone

Partly decommissioned (eg footings remain)

FishSAFE shows the remaining structures and a 200m Fishing Advisory Safety Zone

Fully decommissioned

Nothing shown (after seabed clearance confirmed)

Pipelines

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Trawl sweeps can be carried out over any rock dumped or exposed areas of pipeline.
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Are all pipelines removed during decommissioning?

No, sometimes they can be left in place, although they have to be made safe.

How is this decided?

Pipeline decommissioning plans are included with an operator's overall 'field' decommissioning proposal, and have the same consultation process, overseen by OPRED.

A similar assessment is required if concrete mattresses or grout bags may need to remain in place.

How are decommissioned lines made safe?

Pipelines decommissioned in situ may be trenched and buried or rock dumped to ensure they don't become a hazard to other sea users. Rock berms must be on a ratio of 3:1, which is deemed safe for overtrawl.

Any cut ends of lines will be made safe by lowering into the seabed or covering with rock.

As with platform decommissioning, clear seabed certificates are required to close out a decommissioning programme. Trawl sweeps can be carried out over any rock dumped or exposed areas of pipeline.

Do operators have to check decommissioned lines?

During the decommissioning close-out report, operators have to agree with regulators the survey and monitoring arrangements for any infrastructure left in place.

What happens if a decommissioned line is found to be a hazard in the future?

The operator must report the problem to the fishing industry, and work with regulators to understand what is required to make the pipeline safe. This could be by trenching and burying, rock dumping, or removing the pipeline altogether.

Are decommissioned lines mapped on FishSAFE?

Yes, they are shown as follows:

Trenched/buried

Displayed fully, stating 'disused' (FishSAFE is looking at ways to show the burial status)

Rock-covered

Displayed fully, stating 'disused' (FishSAFE is looking at ways to show sections covered by rock)

Part removed

Sections of pipe removed to shore are not displayed on FishSAFE, but remaining sections and cut ends are shown

Fully removed

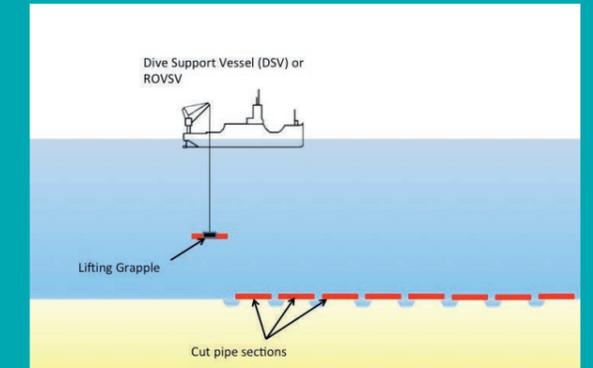
Nothing shown (after seabed clearance is confirmed)

—
Pipelines decommissioned in situ may be trenched and buried or rock dumped to ensure they don't become a hazard to other sea users.
—

Options for removing pipelines

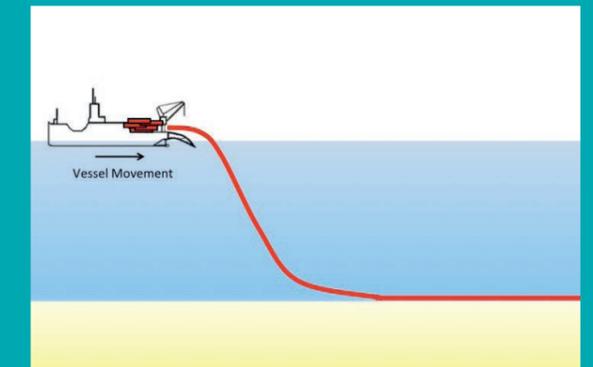
Option 1

Cut and Remove: using cutting equipment to cut the pipe into sections, which are then lifted on board a vessel or barge.



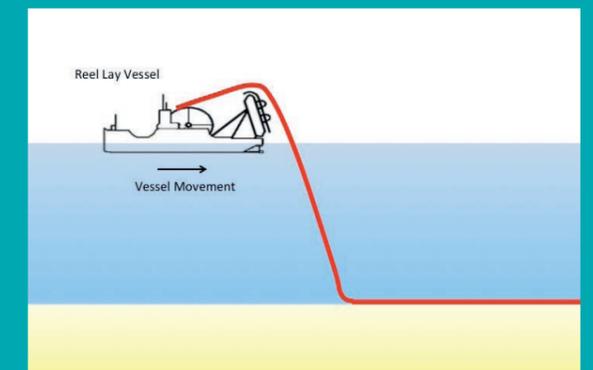
Option 2

Reverse S-Lay: the pipeline is pulled up onto a vessel or barge with a tensioner, and cut on the back deck.



Option 3

Reverse Reel: the pipeline is reeled onto a spool in the reverse process of when it was installed.



S-Lay pipeline vessel, 'Solitaire'

MPAs: a two-minute guide

They're an alphabet soup of regulations, but help is at hand to show how you're affected by Marine Protected Areas.

Marine Protected Areas, or MPAs can confuse, frustrate or cause practical difficulties for fishing - there's a mass of different abbreviations and regulations, and no single source of user-friendly information.

There's help on the horizon, though. Kingfisher has kicked off a project to collate all the positional data and fishing management measures for each MPA, and deliver it in a format easy to access on land or at sea.

Outputs from the two-year project will include:

- a website with simple, user-friendly maps showing the impact on fishing in each MPA
- fishing plotter files, allowing fishermen to import and view each MPA and key information about fishing restrictions.

Before that's ready, one way to find the information you need is to understand who's responsible for management measures in different areas.

The key facts

MPAs protect anything from habitats to fish, seabirds and dolphins, so not every MPA has restrictions on fishing. For example, currently, out of 57 offshore MPAs, only four have fisheries management measures, although more are expected to come. And where restrictions do exist, they may not cover the whole MPA.

In addition, restrictions may apply only to certain types of fishing gear. For example, demersal fishing or scallop dredging may be ruled out in a particular area, but static gear allowed.

In short, MPAs may not affect you, but you do need to check. To do this, it's useful to know who's responsible for applying the fisheries management measures:

- beyond 12 nautical miles, fisheries measures are implemented through the Common Fisheries Policy and enforced by the MMO, Marine Scotland, Welsh Government and DAERA
- in Wales and Northern Ireland, the Welsh Government and DAERA, respectively, are responsible for management measures out to 12nm
- from 6-12nm from the coast, management measures are made through local byelaws. They're enforced by the MMO in England and by Marine Scotland in Scotland
- inside 6nm, management measures are also made through byelaws, but enforced by relevant IFCAs (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Groups) in England and RIFG (Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups) in Scotland.

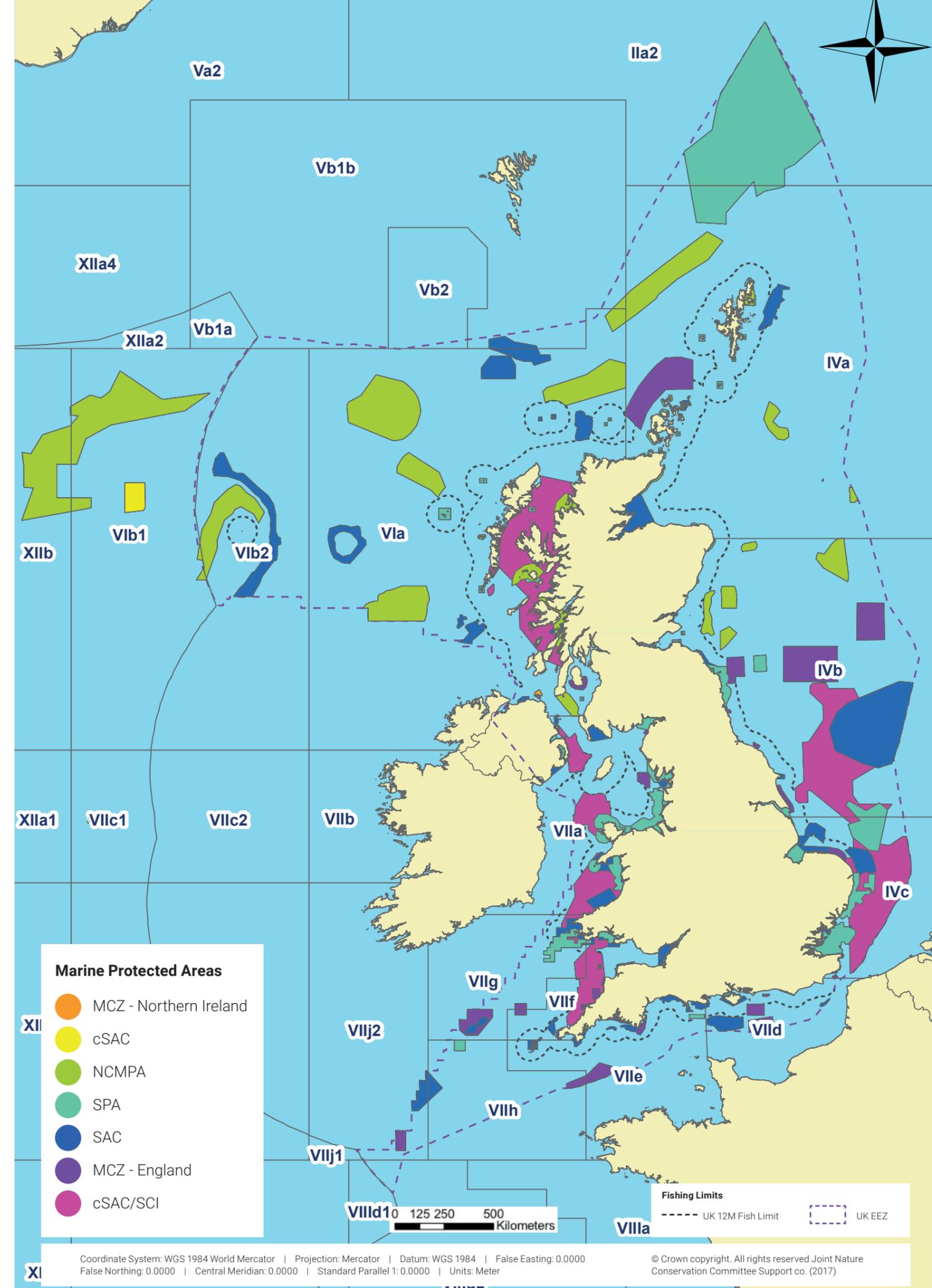
With over 310 MPAs, covering almost a quarter of UK waters, they're hugely important for fishermen to know about, even though clarity is hard to come by.

We'll update you on the MPAs project in future. Until then, remember who's responsible in the different zones – it's a useful navigation aid in this complex area.

MPAs in UK waters

MPAs come about through different laws and international agreements, so they go by various names. Most common in the UK are:

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs):** designated by the Habitats Directive, and important for conserving habitats and certain species of plants and animals (other than birds)
- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs):** designated under the Birds Directive, so focused on protecting birds
- **Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)** and the Scottish equivalent, **Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas (NCMPAs):** designated under UK laws (eg the Marine and Coastal Access Act in England and Wales and offshore in Scotland and Northern Ireland), and intended to protect species, habitats, or geological / geomorphological features.



Subsea crossing points are on the rise

The influx of wind farms has increased the number of crossing points closer to shore. It's important you know the positions and potential risks.

You can't take aerial photos of the seabed, but if you could, there'd be a big difference between now and 10 years ago: there are more and more points where cables and other assets cross.

Crossing points for oil & gas pipelines and telecoms cables have been around for decades. But since 2003, over 30 offshore wind farms have been positioned off the coast of the UK, with each one having 1–4 export cables connecting to shore. This means some areas of our coast have numerous crossing points.

Crossing agreements

Whenever cables or other assets have to cross each other, the owners complete a 'crossing agreement' which stipulates aspects like the crossing angle and if protection is needed. The owner of the first cable on the seabed generally has the say over what happens.

The arrangements for each crossing point will depend on the type of cable crossing or being crossed, the location and the condition of the existing cable. As with the rest of the system, operators will be keen to protect cables, other assets and fishing vessels.

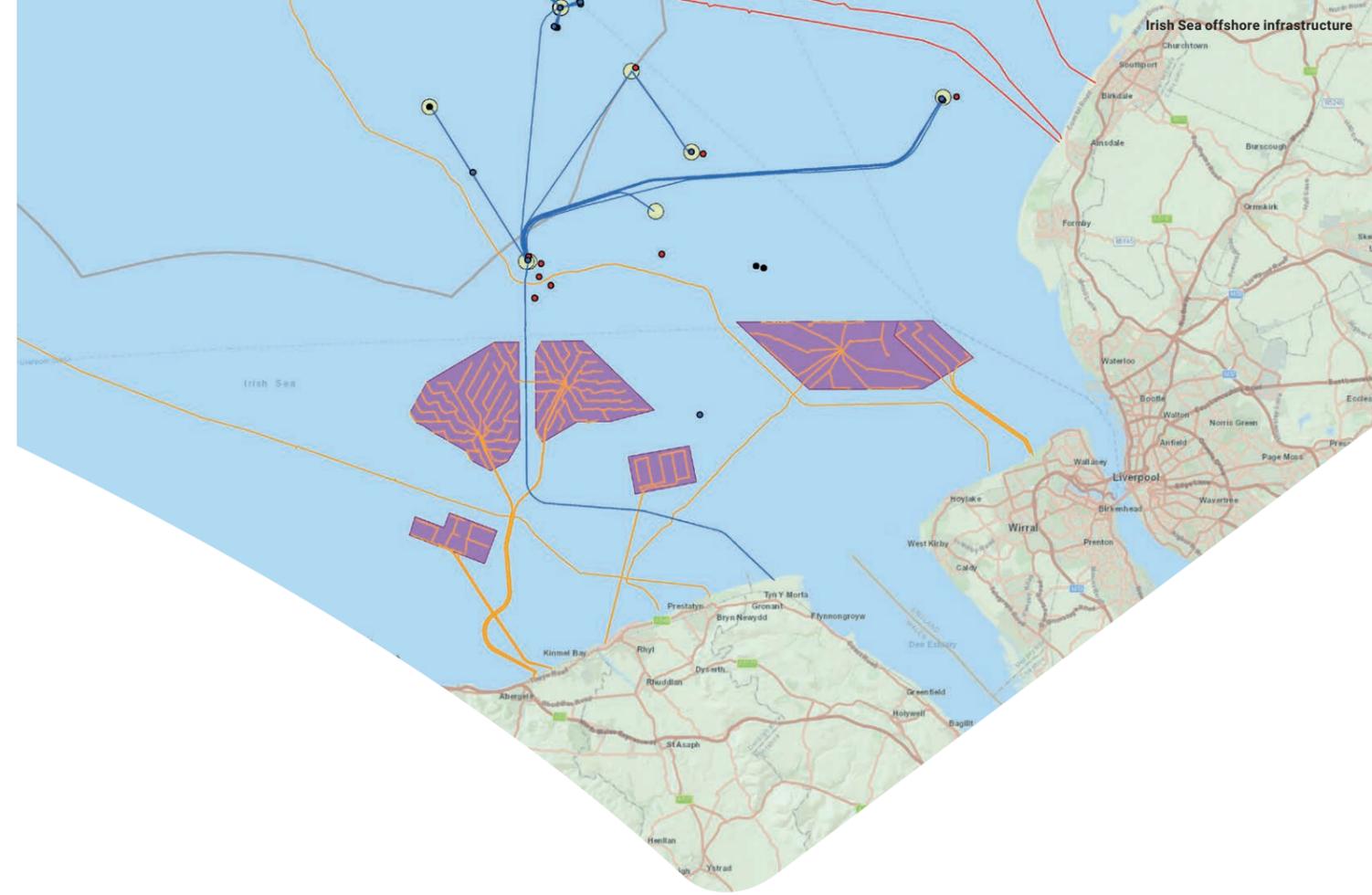
In some cases, cables can simply be laid over the location of the existing cable and buried. But not always.

Often, concrete 'mattresses' or rock is needed to separate cables (for example, with power cables) or to provide extra protection. Depending on the crossing agreement, these mattresses – which weigh several tonnes each and can be around 6m in length, 3m wide and 0.20m deep – may create a snagging risk. Although designed to lay flat, they may stick up above the seabed.

The practical implications

At the moment, crossing points are not specifically mapped on KIS-ORCA data, though it's clear on the charts where cables cross.

There's discussion around the possibility of displaying crossing points that have rock berms, concrete mattresses or where other structures exist on the seabed or stick up above it. But given the possibility of pinchpoints at crossings, all cable crossings – even ones that don't involve mattresses or rock berms – potentially create a risk of snagging. Like cables, they're best avoided.



Crossing points examples

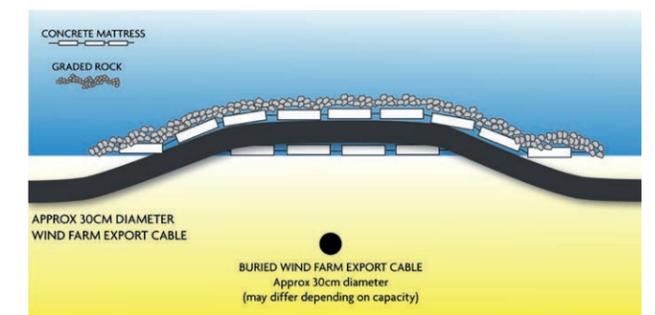
Cable crossing design and the use of additional materials can vary greatly. Where concrete mattresses are used, several may be installed at a single crossing point, with some crossings extending over 50 metres in length. The below illustrations are examples of what may be seen in the waters around the UK



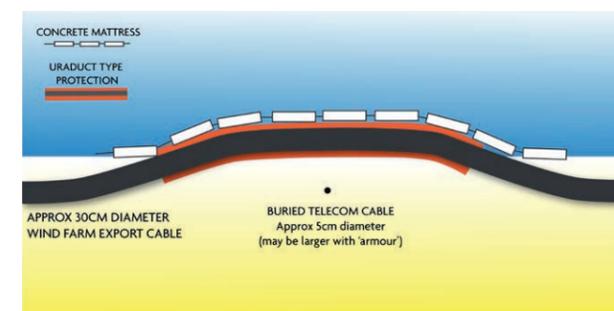
Telecoms over telecoms



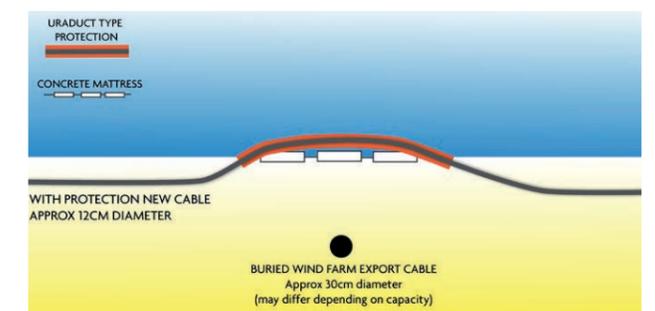
Two wind farm export cables



Wind farm export cable over telecoms cable



Telecoms over export cable



Stay up to date

Wind farms may create new hazards.
Always have the latest Kingfisher Bulletin
and fishing plotter data.



“Get the sail up...
let’s make use of
these turbines”

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