

How to find information on your local Marine Protected Areas and Priority Marine Features

Scotland's Marine Protected Area (MPA) network is intended to support our statutory obligations under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, the Habitats Regulations and the UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010.

Scotland has a goal of protecting at least 30% of our seas by 2030. However, despite over a third of Scottish waters being officially designated as MPAs, most are unprotected from damaging activities and less than 5% of our inshore seabed is protected from bottom-trawling and dredging.

Priority Marine Features (PMFs) are a list 81 of habitats and species of conservation importance. The Scottish Government will consult on protection measures for some of the 11 PMFs most impacted by bottom-trawling.

This guidance is intended to support individuals and communities in learning about the features and species of their marine areas ahead of and during the consultation on MPA and PMF management measures.

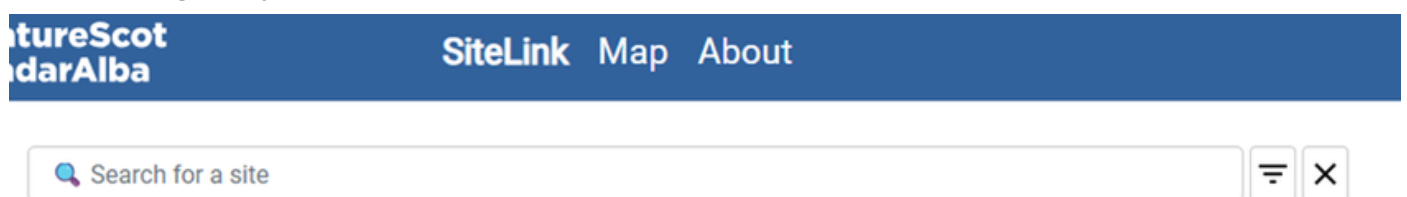
Contents

1. How to find your local MPA sites and use Sitelink
2. How to use NMPI
3. How to find information on your local MPA on NMPI
4. How to find information on Priority Marine Feature (PMF) sites
5. Other useful links and resources

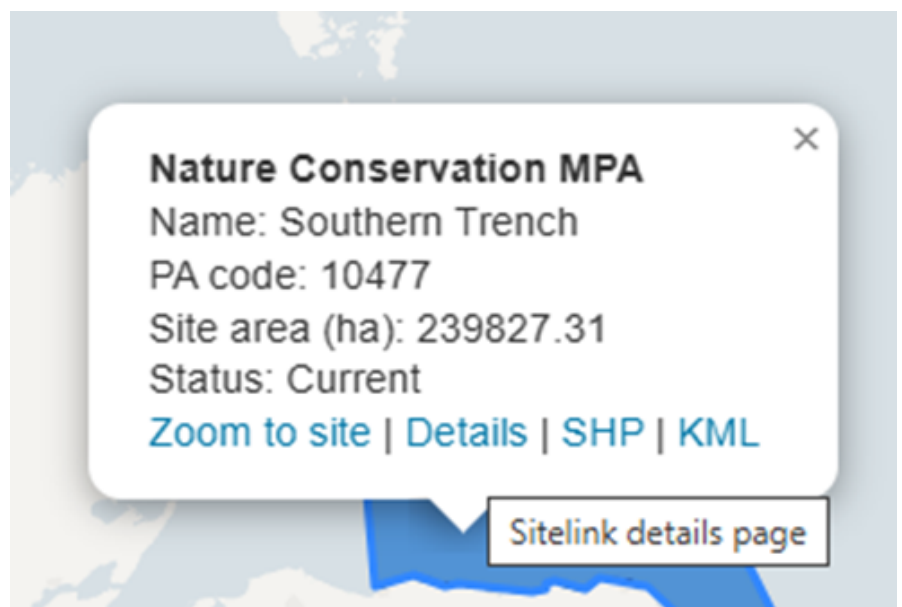
How to find your local MPA sites and use SiteLink

To find MPA sites: Through SiteLink, a website run by NatureScot, you can see Scotland's network of marine and terrestrial designations. This also contains various pieces of information about each designation, such as why the site was designated and NatureScot's conservation advice for the site. The link to SiteLink is: <https://sitelink.nature.scot/map>

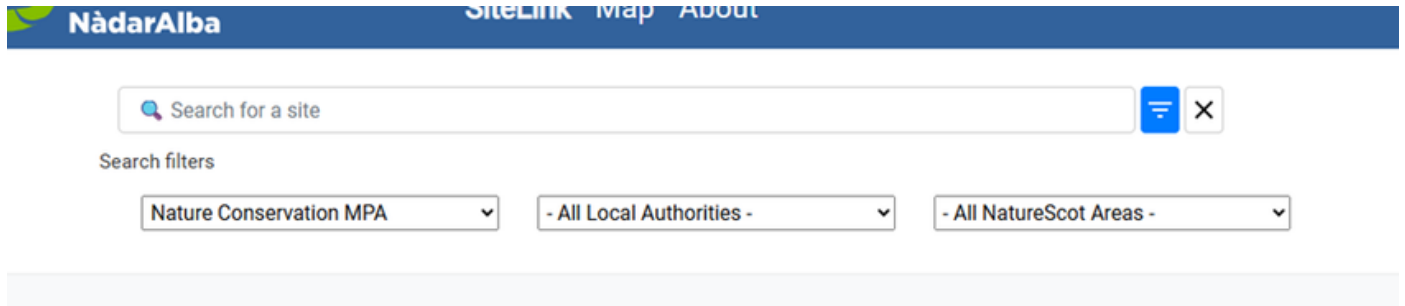
On the homepage of Sitelink, you can either search for a site you know the name of the site using the search bar, or click on 'Map' to see a map of designated sites. The box with three lines to the right of the search bar will also give you a list of both marine and terrestrial sites.



Map search: On the left of the page, you will see various kinds of designations, including Nature Conservation MPAs. To see these on the map, tick the small box to the right beside the name of the designation. Nature Conservation MPAs, which are dark blue to indicate they are managed by NatureScot, will be part of the upcoming consultation on management measures in MPAs. If you click on the MPA you are interested in and click on 'details' you will be taken to a page with information about the site.



Site list: when viewing the list of sites (accessible through the button just right of the search bar, you can filter by designation type, local authority, and NatureScot areas (which are more regional).



The screenshot shows the NàdarAlba website header with 'SiteLink', 'Map', and 'About' links. Below the header is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search for a site' and a blue search icon. To the right of the search bar is a blue button with a white filter icon and a close button (X). Below the search bar is a section labeled 'Search filters' containing three dropdown menus: 'Nature Conservation MPA', '- All Local Authorities -', and '- All NatureScot Areas -'.

Through each designation's page, you can see links to several documents. On SiteLink, you can access information (in the 'Documents and Links' box) about the MPA you have selected.

- **Site Summary** gives an overview of the features of the site and some of the species and habitats of conservation importance found there.
- **Assessment Against the MPA Selection Guidelines** gives some information on the species found in the site and why the site was selected as an MPA.

- **Conservation and Management**

Advice gives information from NatureScot on the features found in the site, what these features are sensitive to, and NatureScot's advice on how these areas should be managed, as well as conservation measures already in place. This tends to be a good document to find information on the various activities happening in an MPA. Some of the important sections in these documents are feature sensitivity and the tables of NatureScot's advice to support management for activities considered capable of affecting the protected features. Within feature sensitivities, some that may be listed which relate to fisheries management gear include physical disturbance from bottom-towed fishing gear, entanglement, and incidental bycatch.

Documents & Links

[Assessment Against the MPA Selection Guidelines](#) 

[Conservation and Management Advice](#) 

[MPA Boundary Map](#) 

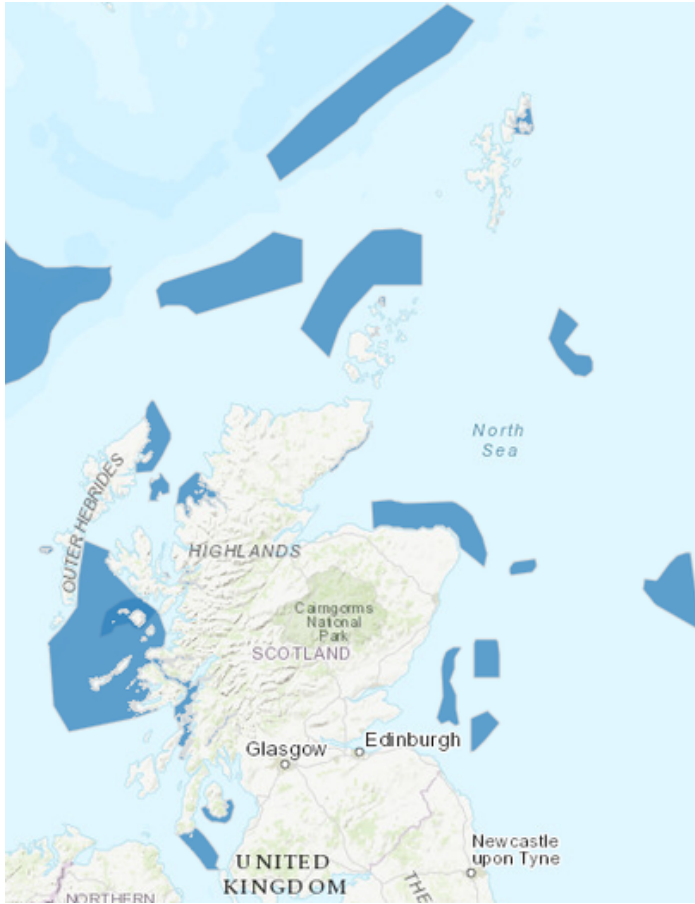
[MPA Data Confidence Assessment](#) 

[MPA Designation Order](#) 

[MPA Network Advice](#) 

[MPA Site Summary \(english\)](#) 

[NatureScot Web Site](#) 



If you scroll down on the main page for each designated site, you will also see the marine features for which the site is designated, as well as some casework NatureScot have had in relation to the site.

MPAs can also be seen on several other websites, including NatureScot's Open Data site (pictured left).

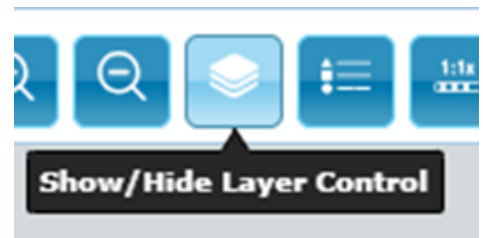
To find PMF sites: The best way to see PMF sites at the moment is through NMPI, the Scottish Government's interactive marine map. Details of how to use this are below.

How to use NMPi

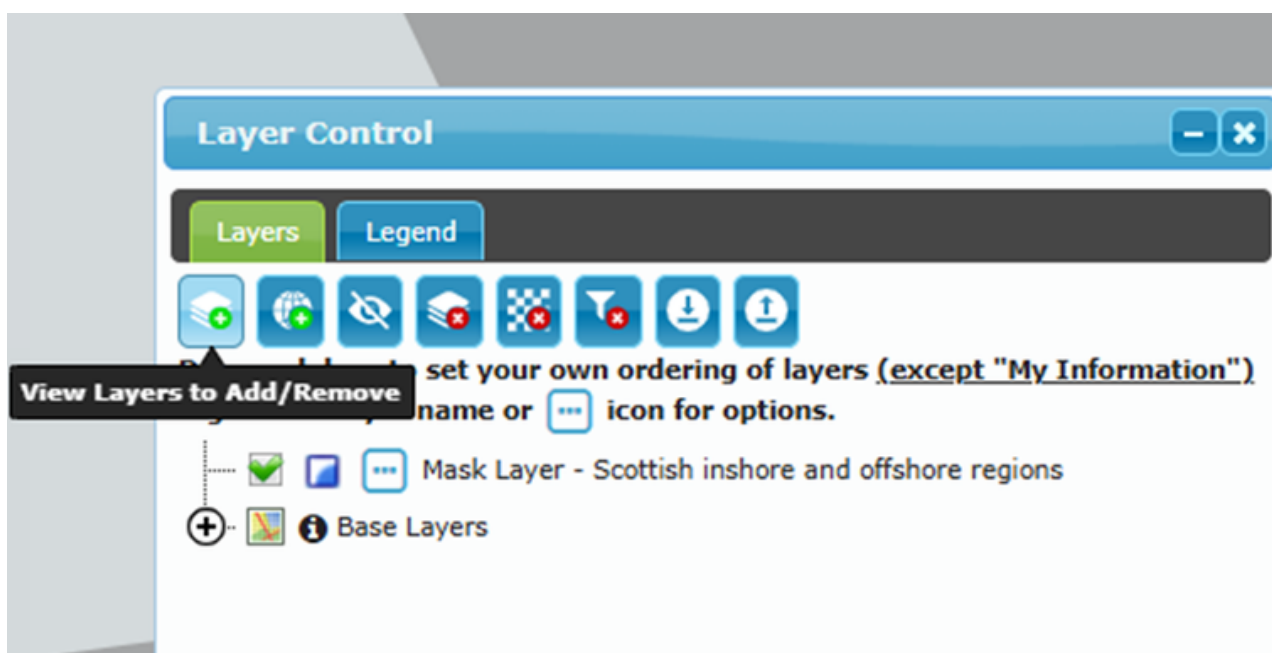
Link to NMPi: <https://marinescotland.atkinsgeospatial.com/nmpi/>

NMPi stands for National Marine Plan interactive. This website enables access to spatial information relating to the marine environment and marine activities, and is used to assist in the development of national and regional marine planning.

The main control panel for NMPi is in the top left of the screen, which includes tools to zoom in/out, measure distance and area, and to show layer control. The layer control box (pictured below) is used to show different marine features. If you don't see the layer control box in the bottom right corner, click this button that says show / hide layer control.



Once you can see the layer control box in the right corner, click the button that says '*view layers to add/remove*'. This adds the layers to your layer control box. To see the layers on the map, click the box beside their title in the layer control box so that a green arrow appears.



To find information on your local Marine Protected Area (MPA) on NMPi

Under '*healthy and biologically diverse*' in the Feature Information box, select '*Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Network*'. To find Nature Conservation MPAs, click the box titled '*Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) contributing to the MPA network*'. Clicking on the MPA on the map and selecting the name of the layer will show you the name of the MPA and some other information, such as the lead organisation responsible for the MPA.

Under the '*Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Network*' heading, you can also see other forms of designation, such as Ramsar sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, though their management will not be part of the upcoming consultation.

To see marine sites with preexisting fisheries management measures, select '*Marine Conservation Orders and fisheries management measures*'. Clicking on your site of interest, and '*Marine Conservation Orders and fisheries management measures*' in the feature information box will show you the type of protection already designed to this site.

Through NMPi, you can also find some other information about species recorded in Scotland's seas. For example, in the 'select layers to add' box, you can expand the '*Healthy and Biologically Diverse*' list, and open '*Habitats*' or '*Species*', and find species or habitats of interest, some of which are Priority Marine Features. Similar to above, you can find out more about the details of these records being made by clicking on a feature you are interested in, and click on the name of the feature in the 'feature information box'

The presence of various marine features should (in theory) add weight to arguments that marine areas should be protected.

To find information on Priority Marine Feature (PMF) sites

On NMPI, the proposed PMF sites, which will be consulted on, are under *'healthy and biologically diverse -> Improving protection for PMFs outside the MPA network – Consultation – 2025'*. This shows both options which will be consulted on – Option 1 covers more marine area and Option 2 covers less in most proposed sites.

Click 'add/remove layers' to add them to the map. To learn more about the background to each map layer, you can click the box with three dots beside the layer title in the layer control box and select *'show information'* or *'show metadata'*.

PMF point data

You can also see data from the previous consultation on PMFs in 2018. These are under *'Healthy and biologically diverse -> Improving protection for PMFs outside the MPA network – Preparatory work – July 2018'*. The layer titled *'reviewed Priority Marine Features and management status'* is particularly interesting as it shows point data for the 10 PMF species (excluding native oysters) which are to be consulted on, ie where these PMFs have been recorded previously. Not all of these recorded PMFs are covered by proposed PMF management measures, while some already have protection in place.

- Those marked by a green tick are in sites with some protection measures in place
- Those with a red cross do not have protection measures in place
- Those marked by a black cross are considered inaccessible to bottom-towed fishing gear.

To find out more about each marked PMF and its current level of protection:

1. Click on your chosen PMF on the map.
2. A box titled 'feature information' should pop up. One of the elements in the box should say '*PMF consultation – Reviewed Priority Marine Features and management status*'. Click on this title, and a list of PMFs recorded in that area should drop down.
3. Click on your chosen PMF and a table of information should be displayed to the right of the 'feature information' box. This contains information such as the year the PMF was recorded, the source of the data, and any management measures currently in place to protect it.

Feature Information

PMF Consultation - Reviewed Priority Marine Features and management status (Features Found: 10)

- pmf : Maerl beds
- pmf : Seagrass beds
- pmf : Maerl beds
- pmf : Maerl beds
- pmf : Maerl beds
- pmf : Maerl beds
- pmf : Maerl beds

Attribute	Value
pmf	Maerl beds
pmf_compon	Maerl beds
eunis_code	A5.51
current_bi	SS.SMp.Mrl
current__1	Maerl beds
orig_class	MNCR 04.05
orig_bioto	SS.SMp.Mrl
year	2010
accuracy	GPSUnk

Other useful links and resources

MPA report to Parliament 2024: Every six years Scottish Ministers must present a report to Parliament setting out information about Scotland's MPA network. The most recent of these was in 2024, and can be seen here: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/marine-protected-area-network-2024-report-scottish-parliament/>

Some other platforms can also show information and data about the presence of certain species or habitats. These include:

- **Seagrass spotter**, which maps the presence of seagrass globally (including in Scotland): <https://seagrassspotter.org/sightings/map>
- **WhaleTrack**, used for tracking sightings of whales and cetaceans <https://whaletrack.hwdt.org/sightings-map/>
- **NBN Atlas** holds a huge collection of species records, including from SeaSearch surveys. <https://nbnatlas.org/>
- **GEMS Priority Marine Features dataset** is another way to view recorded PMFs, including both species and habitats. <https://opendata.nature.scot/maps/0e722e3e911e424f8dacac5a587c0dfb/about>
- **DASSH** is an archive for marine species and habitats data. It is slightly more difficult to use than the other resources mentioned here, but gives records of species recorded during previous marine surveys: <https://www.dassh.ac.uk/dasshmapper>.