Introduction

27 new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ ) which span the waters around the English coast have recently been created, to help protect our rich marine life such as Coral Reefs, Oyster Beds and Seahorses from damaging activities to ensure their features are conserved. The UK has one of the world's richest marine environments and these new sites will join over 500 Marine Protected Areas (MPA) that already exist to safeguard our rich marine environment and keep our seas sustainable, healthy and productive for future generations.

Marine Environment Minister George Eustice has also announced plans to designate two more phases of MCZs over the next three years to complete our contribution to a network of marine protected areas. A consultation on the next phase is expected to be launched in early 2015.

Following a thorough consultation, it was decided that four sites would not be designated in this phase. These include Stour and Orwell and Hilbre Island. A decision will be made on designation status for the proposed Hythe Bay site early next year and the North of Celtic Deep site will be considered in the next phase.

Making the announcement, Marine Environment Minister George Eustice said:

We are doing more than ever to protect our marine environment. Almost a quarter of English inshore waters and nine per cent of UK waters will now be better protected. It is important to remember MCZs are only one piece of the jigsaw.

Action will be taken to ensure that the new sites are properly protected from damaging activities, taking into account local needs. Restrictions will differ from site to site depending on what features the site intends to protect. Activities, for example fishing, will only be regulated if they cause harm to wildlife or damage habitats that are being conserved in the MCZ.

Designating MCZs to contribute to a network of Marine Protected Areas is a Government commitment under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to ensure that our marine environment is protected for years to come.