Why Protect the Marine Environment?

The past 50 years have seen global declines in the health of our seas, which not only reduces species and habitats, but also the economic and social benefits we enjoy.

Threats to the marine environment include habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, over-fishing and climate change.

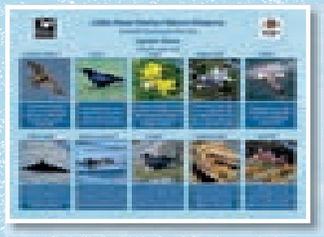
By protecting areas of the sea as marine reserves we can conserve and restore healthy habitats, providing refuges for spawning and nursery grounds for juveniles to help replenish the areas outside. This helps maintain commercial and recreational fisheries, with Ramsey Bay MNR being a good example of how conservation and careful management can boost stocks of king and queen scallops over time.

Linked with the UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man status, the designation and careful management of MNRs can lead to the sustainable development of coastal areas; enhancing our experiences, economy and tourist appeal.

The Isle of Man territorial sea is a shared resource used by commercial fishermen, recreational anglers, a wide variety of commercial, leisure and scientific interests, as well as the Manx community.

People who use the sea regularly have a wealth of knowledge which can complement the scientific information collected by DEFA and our partner organisations and we welcome input from anyone with information, ideas and experiences to share.

How to get more involved with your local Marine Nature Reserve



Spotter Sheets

Print off a 'species spotter sheet' for each MNR from our website and use it when exploring your local Marine Nature Reserve. The QR code on this leaflet will take you there, or use: **www.gov.im/MNR**

#MyManxMNR

Share your MNR experiences and the wonderful world of everything marine by submitting your images online using the hashtag **#MyManxMNR**

Blueways Trails

The Blueways Trails offer a sense of what goes on around the Isle of Man's seas and shorelines by providing multi-activity exploration of our historic and diverse coast. On land, on and under the water; from snorkel safaris to maritime history, from wildlife watching to geology, there is much to discover on the Blueways. **https://www.visitisleofman.com/blog/read/2018/06/discover-the-islands-blueways-b139**

Raad ny Foillan

Manx Gaelic for *'The way of the gull'* ; take a wander along the island's coastal footpath. At almost 160km/100 miles in length it's the perfect way to see our coastline. Details can be found here: **https://www.visitisleofman.com/things-to-do/activities/walking-and-hiking/raad-ny-foillan-coastal-footpath**

Other Species to Spot

- Bottlenose dolphins (mostly winter)
- Risso's dolphins (mostly summer)
- Basking sharks (mostly summer)
- Various birds, including: stonechat, sparrowhawk and kestrel.

Information For Anglers

The best time for sea fishing is between April and September with plankton populations blooming in the warmer months. This attracts sand eels, shoals of mackerel, herring, pollack, cod, grey mullet, and tope. There is good bass fishing up to the end of October and in winter you're likely to find codling, saithe and dogfish in Manx waters.

Location: Port Soderick

Type: Rock fishing

Amenities: This secluded site offers free parking although the nearest amenities, including public toilets, are a few miles away in Douglas.

Location: Scarlett Rocks and Derbyhaven

Type: Rock, breakwater and shore fishing

Amenities: Car parking plus a wide range of amenities including shops, public toilets, pubs and eateries.

Does Your Catch Measure Up?

Although you don't need a licence for saltwater angling remember to observe minimum landing sizes for each species. These are displayed on boards at all main harbours or find it online, along with other useful fishing information, at: **www.gov.im/recreationalfishing**

Additional Protected Areas

Around the Manx coast there are 11 Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) and 1 National Nature Reserve (NNR). These designated areas of land, which include the intertidal zone, have legal protection due to their special fauna, flora, geological or physical features.

ASSIs are areas of private or public land whose owners/occupiers require consent from DEFA before undertaking activities that may damage its special features. **All coastal ASSIs are accessible to the public.**

NNRs are areas protected via specific byelaws to ensure that reserve visitors behave responsibly.

The nearest protected area to Little Ness MNR is: **Santon Gorge & Port Soldrick ASSI.**

https://www.gov.im/protectedsites

For further information about Marine Nature Reserves contact DEFA Fisheries on: 01624 685857 fisheries@gov.im or use the QR Code.

DEFA, Thie Slieau Whallian, Foxdale Road St. John's, Isle of Man, IM4 3AS

Little Ness Marine Nature Reserve

Kemmyrk Bea-Varrey Nesh Beg

Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs)

What is a Marine Nature Reserve?

Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) are a type of marine protected area, usually established to conserve particular species and habitats, or enable their recovery, and where the most damaging activities and impacts are excluded. Marine Protected Areas are a well-established method for achieving these objectives and have been successfully used worldwide.

Manx Marine Nature Reserves

There are 10 MNRs around the Isle of Man, forming a network that has been developing since 1989. Some areas, such as the first protected site, at Port Erin, and Ramsey Bay Marine Nature Reserve, have been well-studied and are examples of how conservation can benefit commercial and recreational fisheries and the marine environment. Manx MNRs now cover 430km^2, around 52% of the 0-3 nautical mile area, or 11% of the whole territorial sea.

Little Ness MNR

Little Ness MNR is relatively small at 10km^2, but one of our most important sites because of its very high species diversity. It is primarily a horse mussel reef, which forms an extensive mound on the seabed, and is host to many other species; indeed Little Ness is amongst the most species-rich of its kind in Europe. Horse mussel reefs are particularly vulnerable to towed fishing gear, which break up the structure, and which is very difficult to recover. These reefs once covered more of the Manx seabed, but have declined in recent decades, so the protection of Little Ness, and similar reefs in Ramsey Bay MNR, is particularly important.

Little Ness Marine Nature Reserve

Little Ness MNR extends from Douglas Bay in the north, to Little Ness in the south and out to one nautical mile. Marine Drive overlooks the reserve, and is a well-known area for watching Risso's and bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise and minke whale.

Important habitats within Little Ness MNR

Horse mussel reef • Maerl beds • Cliffs
Nursery ground • Spawning ground

Horse mussel reef

Each horse mussel attaches to the seabed, or neighbour, with strong hair-like threads, called byssus. Over time, as mussel numbers increase, the live animals and empty shells build-up and create biogenic reefs. The reef structure has many crevices providing hiding places for juvenile fish and many other species, and the shell surfaces are colonised by sponges, soft corals, tube worms and barnacles. Within Little Ness MNR, 296 different species have been identified in a single bucket sample, demonstrating the importance of this habitat for marine life.

Horse mussel reef © Caroline & Phil Roriston

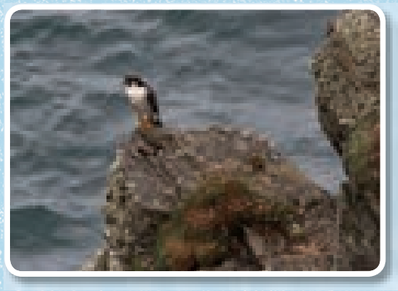
Maerl: an unusual pink, stony algae

Scallop on maerl © Jim Self

Maerl is technically a coralline red 'seaweed', and creates a colourful fine-branching layer on the seabed. The structure creates a unique habitat with lots of nooks and crannies, and supports high species diversity, with shellfish, anemones, urchins, shrimp, crabs, worms and fish found on it. Maerl is an important nursery ground and refuge for juvenile queen scallops and whelks - two important commercial species in Manx waters. Maerl beds play a part in slowing the effects of climate change, by depositing calcium carbonate and acting as a 'blue carbon store'. Excess carbon dioxide emitted by human activities can be taken up by coastal habitats, such as maerl, seagrass and kelp beds, and their destruction leads to captured CO_2 being released back into the atmosphere, so it is vital to conserve them for many reasons.

Coastal habitats and wildlife

Marine Drive, overlooking Little Ness MNR, provides important coastal habitats for many animal and plant species. Exposed, hard cliffs provide nesting areas for birds such as shags and peregrine falcons, while maritime grasslands support various salt-tolerant plants such as spring squill and Danish scurvy-grass. There are also areas of coastal heath, scrub and exposed rock which provide an abundance of wildlife niches for common lizards, which bask along the roadside, and butterflies such as the dark-green fritillary and the wall-brown.


Peregrine falcon © Peter Callister

MNR General Restrictions

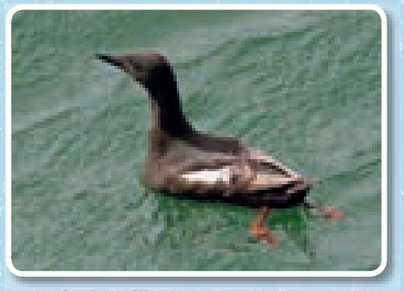
No mobile fishing gear (dredge or trawl)
No extraction or deposit of materials
No damage to protected habitats or species
No anchoring in eel grass areas

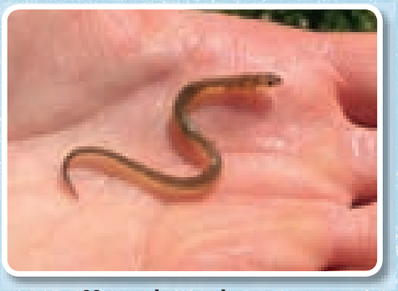
Important species within Little Ness MNR

Horse mussel • Spiny scallop • Sea birds (Various)
European eel • Whales and dolphins

Seabirds

Coastal cliffs provide a breeding ground and refuge for seabirds such as black guillemots *(Cepphus grille)* and fulmars *(Fulmarus glacialis)* which feed out at sea for crustaceans and sand eels. Coastal birds, such as choughs *(Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax)*, use the shore line to forage. Protecting areas of high biodiversity supports natural food webs, without which apex predators, like peregrine falcons *(Falco peregrinus)*, would not be able to survive.


Black guillemot © James Cubbon


Manx glass eel © DEFA

European eel

European eels spend most of their life in freshwater, but spawning and early life stages occur in the Sargasso Sea. Adults reproduce only once and, after hatching, larval eels undergo passive migration towards Europe, growing in size, and taking nearly a year to arrive. Young eels, called glass eels, are found in Manx coastal waters in spring before travelling up rivers, such as the Dhoo, where they spend the next 5-20 years. Their complex life cycle makes them vulnerable to overfishing and other human activities, and the European eel is now considered 'critically endangered'.

Whales, dolphins and sharks

Marine Drive is a well known area for whale watching. There can be sightings all year round but peak activity on the east coast depends on species and their seasonal prey abundance. Minke whales are most common in September and October, Risso's dolphins in the summer and bottlenose dolphins in winter.

Basking sharks are less frequently seen here compared to the west coast, but keep your eyes peeled between May and September.

Risso's dolphins © DEFA