



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

# Allonby Bay

Consultation factsheet for candidate Highly Protected  
Marine Area (HPMA)

Date: July 2022



Figure 1: Allonby Bay MCZ © Natural England - Lydia Tabrizi

## Introduction

This factsheet outlines why Allonby Bay has been identified as a candidate HPMA, providing an overview of the ecological importance, where this area is located and our current knowledge of the activities within the area. This factsheet may be updated with additional evidence after consultation if this area is designated.

## Where is the candidate HPMA located?

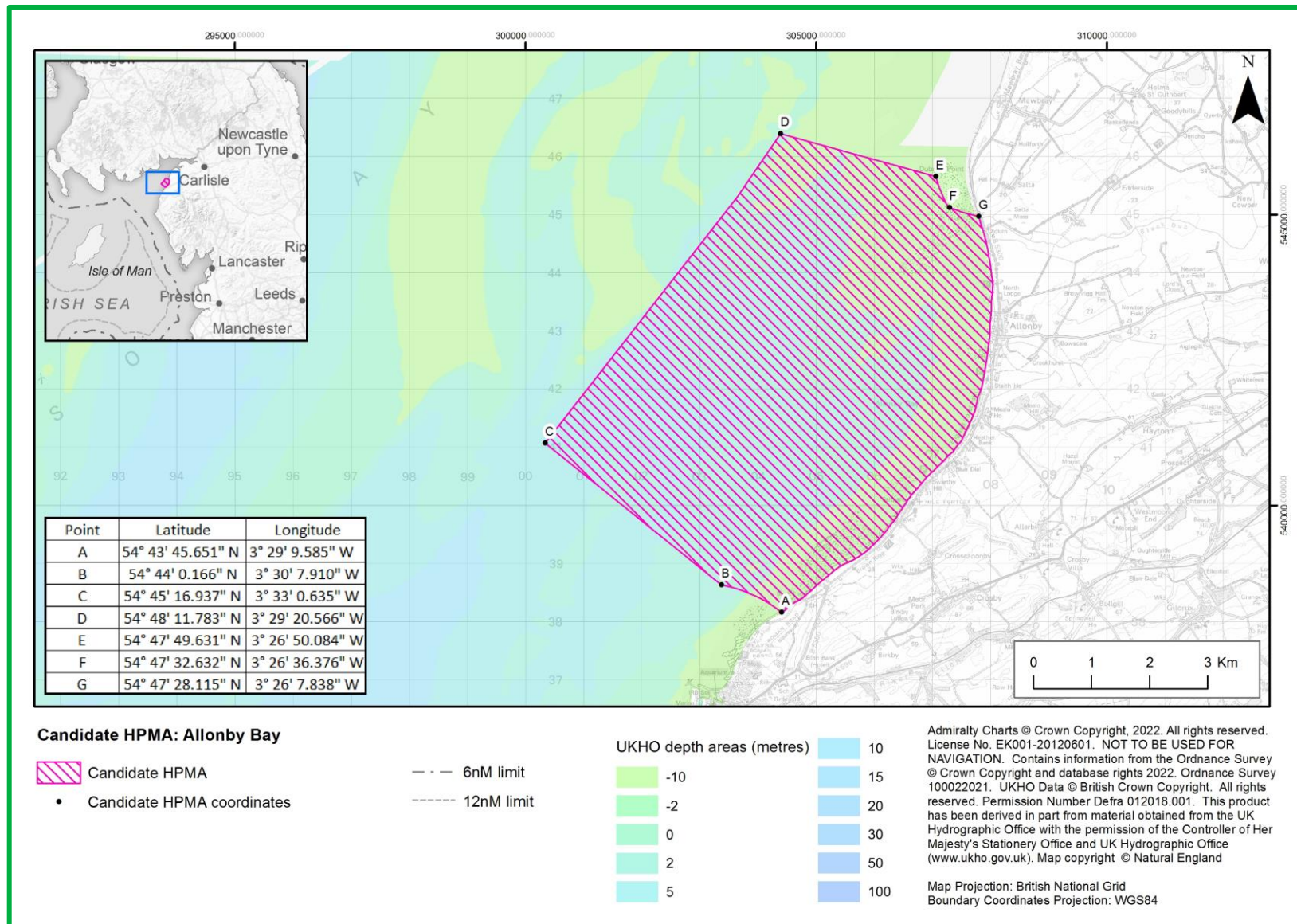
Allonby Bay is an inshore candidate HPMA situated in the Irish Sea, covering the southern region at the mouth of the Solway Firth and extends approximately 8km seaward from the shoreline between Maryport and Mawbray.

At 38.5km<sup>2</sup> it follows the mean high-water mark along the length of the enclosed shoreline, out to a maximum depth of 8m.

The map on the following page shows the current boundary of the candidate HPMA.

This candidate HPMA overlaps with both the Allonby Bay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and the Solway Firth Special Protection Area (SPA), as well as a small section of the Solway Firth Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A map showing these Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in relation to the candidate HPMA can be found in Annex 1.

# Map of Allonby Bay candidate HPMA





## What habitats and species are found in this candidate HPMA?

Allonby Bay consists of a mix of habitats, characteristic of an environment that is subject to dramatic currents and tides. The seabed here consists of a range of rocky habitats and sediment dominated habitats, including mudflats, sandbanks, reefs, peat and clay exposures, and biogenic reefs.

The nutrient-rich sediments, dense mussel beds and intertidal rocky habitats in this area attract large densities of shore birds including species such as curlew and oystercatcher. The biodiverse subtidal habitats here provide a food source for fish species, such as flat fish and nursery areas for other species such as bass, cod and herring. In turn, these fish species attract diving, foraging seabirds including guillemots, gannets and razorbills.



Within the candidate HPMA is part of one of the best examples of honeycomb worm reefs in the UK. Honeycomb worms create a complex sediment network of tubes attached to rock, which provides vital habitat for a range of species including crabs and molluscs.

## Why have we identified this as a candidate HPMA?

Allonby Bay's habitats and species have the ability to provide a range of ecosystem services. The area contains 17.5km<sup>2</sup> (45% of the candidate HPMA) of 'blue carbon' habitats which capture and store carbon and includes intertidal sand, muddy sand and subtidal sands, therefore the protection and recovery of these areas are important nature-based solutions to tackling climate change. Furthermore, the extensive honeycomb reefs and blue mussel beds can provide both water purification and important coastal erosion protection.

The rich sediments and intertidal rock habitats attract important migratory, non-breeding bird species with large groups of around 16 different species congregating along the shoreline. The area also provides nursery and spawning habitats for a range of commercial species including cod, plaice, sole and herring.

Overlapping with an existing MCZ of the same name, and with partial overlaps of two other MPAs, the designation of Allonby Bay as a pilot HPMA would allow us to understand the added benefits the protection of a HPMA can provide in these scenarios.

Furthermore, with limited disturbance identified, this area is considered to represent a more natural ecosystem providing an important opportunity to safeguard biodiversity and to help us further understand the ecological impact of the removal of any remaining pressures. Protected features which exist both within the HPMA and existing MPAs will be subject to the higher conservation objective proposed for HPMA's in the overlapping area.

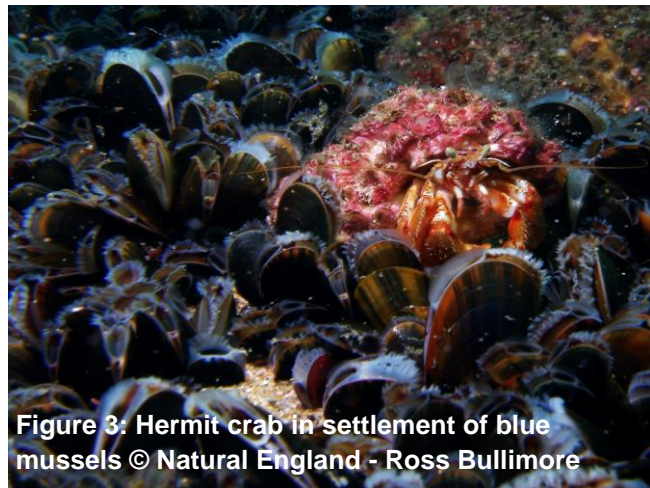


Figure 3: Hermit crab in settlement of blue mussels © Natural England - Ross Bullimore

## Taking a whole site approach to protection

HPMAs will take a 'whole site approach', therefore the whole marine ecosystem within the HPMA boundary will be designated for protection. The proposed protected feature description for pilot HPMAs as will be listed in the designation order is:

*'The marine ecosystem, habitats and species of flora and fauna, abiotic elements, and their supporting ecosystem function and processes, including the seabed, water column and sea surface, within the site boundary.'*

The features this candidate site would protect include the types of species and habitats that have been recorded in Allonby Bay candidate HPMA which are listed below. However, this is not an exhaustive list.

This candidate HPMA contains a range of broadscale habitats including blue carbon habitats, together with their associated communities. Features include:

- High energy littoral rock
- Moderate energy littoral rock
- Low energy littoral rock
- Features of littoral rock (rockpools / ephemeral algae)
- Littoral sand and muddy sand
- Littoral mixed sediments
- Littoral biogenic reefs
- Features of littoral sediment (ephemeral algae)
- High energy infralittoral rock
- Moderate energy infralittoral rock
- High energy circalittoral rock
- Moderate energy circalittoral rock
- Sublittoral coarse sediment
- Sublittoral sand
- Sublittoral mud
- Sublittoral mixed sediments
- Sublittoral biogenic reefs

As well as these habitats, a range of species, including birds, marine mammals and multiple species of fish and shellfish are also likely to use this area.

Further details on the specific habitats and species recorded in this candidate HPMA can be found in the ecological narrative located in Annex H.

## Conservation objectives

A designation order covering a HPMA will set out the protected features and the conservation objectives applicable within the HPMA site boundary. The proposed conservation objective for all pilot HPMA's, including Allonby Bay is:

*“To achieve full natural recovery of the structure and functions, features, qualities and composition of characteristic biological communities present within HPMA's and prevent further degradation and damage to the marine ecosystem subject to natural change.”*

## Which activities are likely to be affected?

Pilot HPMAAs will prohibit extractive, destructive, and depositional uses, allowing only non-damaging levels of other activities. Our current understanding about the sectors and activities which are thought to be taking place in the candidate HPMA is based on the best available evidence at the time and therefore may not present a comprehensive view of all activities taking place in this area. We are gathering additional evidence through the consultation to better understand activities in the area and potential impacts of HPMA designation on these and other activities. Specific information gaps have been identified in the Impact Assessment together with additional information on the activities set out below.

### Commercial fishing

#### UK vessels

Our evidence, based on Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data and sightings data, suggests that the following gears are used within the site:

- Bottom trawls
- Otter trawls (bottom)
- Pots

The VMS data suggests a small annual average of UK vessels (<5), greater than 12m in length, used this area between 2017 and 2019, mainly landing at Maryport harvesting mostly common shrimp.

Sightings data, used to better understand the under 12m fleet without VMS, indicates a small number of vessels, less than 12m in length, also used this area, specifically potting for European lobster, edible crab and whelk, landing in Fleetwood; Workington, Milford Haven and Scarborough.



## **Non-UK vessels**

As Allonby Bay candidate HPMA is completely within 6nm of the English coastline, non-UK vessels are not expected to be fishing in this area.

## **Displacement of commercial fishing**

Existing byelaws may restrict the displacement of the demersal trawl into the adjacent area, however, from the current evidence there is no indication that dredge activity cannot be displaced into the adjacent area except the potential increase in travel time and costs.

## **Recreational sea fishing**

Shore based recreational angling is likely to be popular along this coastline, however limited data on extent of this activity is available at this time. Evidence is not available to suggest the level of displacement of angling activity, however as this is a tourist destination with the potential for high angling activity and low intensity boat angling, some displacement is possible.

## **Anchoring**

No significant areas of anchoring or mooring areas have been identified within the Allonby Bay candidate HPMA.

## **Existing relevant management measures**

This is not an exhaustive list of fisheries management measures relating to this area, instead highlights where specific existing restrictions may be relevant to the designation of a pilot HPMA (i.e. existing closed area or prohibition of existing gear types).

- [Seabass commercial fishing restrictions](#) – MMO
- [NWIFCA Byelaw 6: Protection for European Marine Site Features](#) – NWIFCA

- [NWSFC/NWSFC Byelaw 3: Prohibition of Seine Netting](#) – NWSFC/NWSFC
- [NWIFCA/ CSFC Byelaw 3: Size Limit of Boats Allowed Inside the District](#) – NWIFCA/CSFC

## Activities which may be taking place at non-damaging levels

Management measures for activities that are not extractive, destructive and depositional, most likely non-licensable and/or recreational, will depend on existing activity in the site and the sensitivity of the species or habitat to activities taking place in that area. Examples of non-licensable activities that may threaten biodiversity include motorised recreation, wildlife watching and land-based recreation. Some of these activities currently occurring in the sites could be damaging to the species and habitats. This consultation will help us improve our evidence about activities occurring in the sites, which will help SNCBs to develop the conservation advice for the sites and enable any necessary management measures to be determined. Management may be voluntary. For example, some activities might benefit from voluntary codes of conduct such as diving (to encourage divers to avoid resting on the seabed, removing species or touching features), dog walking (to avoid disturbing species) or powerboating (to encourage users to reduce their speed).

## Additional information

[Link to SNCB ecological advice](#)

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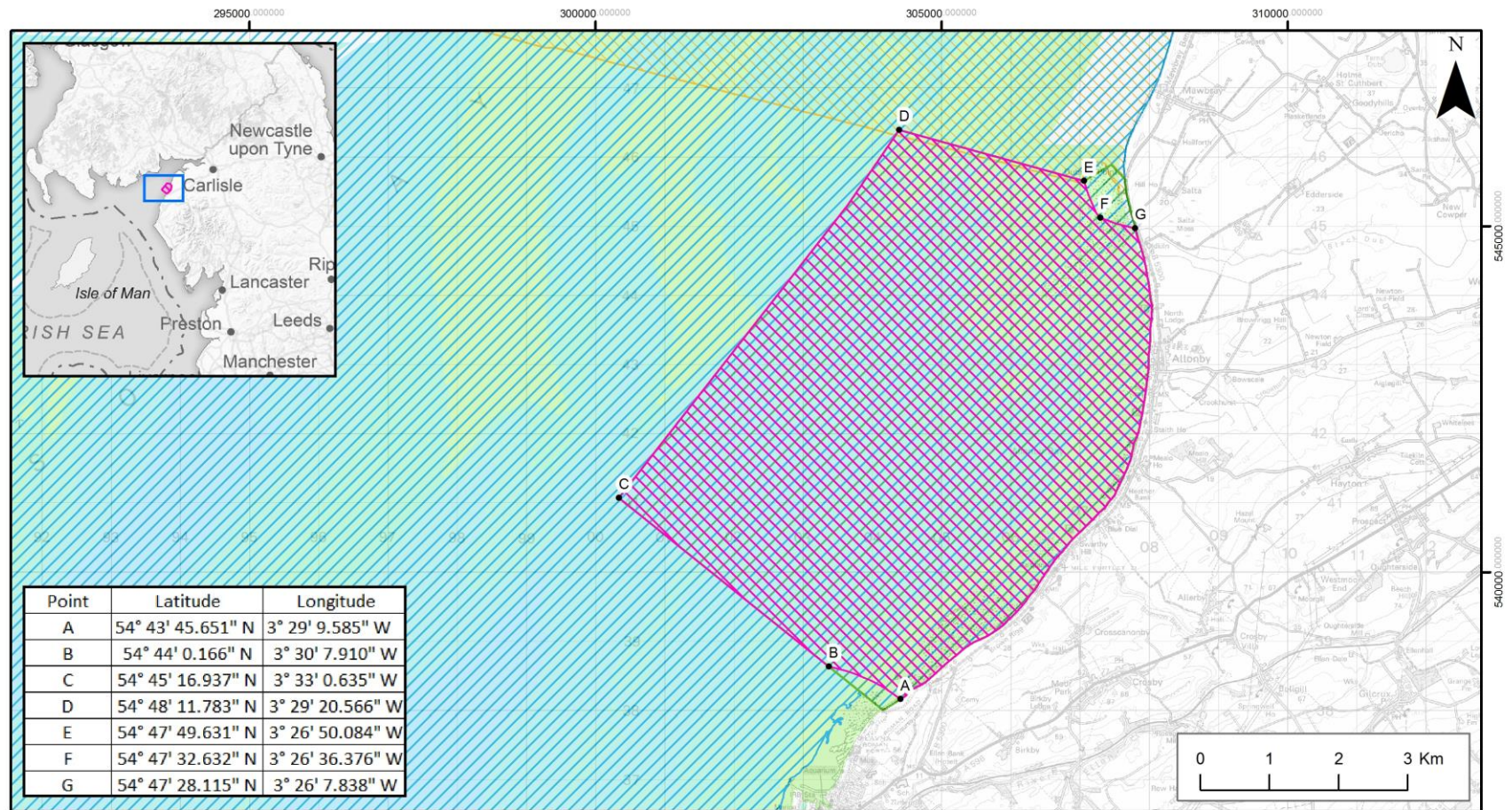
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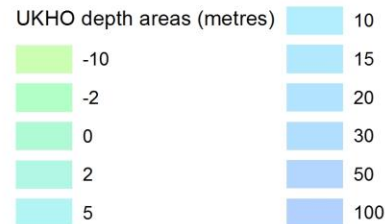
# Annex 1: Allonby Bay candidate HPMA map with existing MPA



## Candidate HPMA: Allonby Bay

-  Candidate HPMA
- Candidate HPMA coordinates
-  Marine Conservation Zones
-  Special Protection Areas
-  Special Areas of Conservation

-  6nM limit
-  12nM limit



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Map Projection: British National Grid  
Boundary Coordinates Projection: WGS84



## Annex 2: Designated features of overlapping MPAs

The MPAs which Allonby Bay candidate HPMA overlap with are designated for the following features:

### Allonby Bay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

- Blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*) beds
- High energy intertidal rock
- Honeycomb worm (*Sabellaria alveolata*) reefs
- Intertidal biogenic reefs
- Intertidal coarse sediment
- Intertidal sand and muddy sand
- Low energy intertidal rock
- Moderate energy infralittoral rock
- Moderate energy intertidal rock
- Peat and clay exposures
- Subtidal biogenic reefs
- Subtidal coarse sediment
- Subtidal mixed sediments
- Subtidal sand

### Solway Firth Special Protection Area (SPA)

- A045 A Barnacle goose (*Branta leucopsis*) non-breeding
- A157 Bar-tailed godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) non-breeding
- A160 Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) non-breeding
- A140 Golden plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*) non-breeding
- A143 Knot (*Calidris canutus*) non-breeding
- A130 Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) non-breeding
- A040 Pink-footed goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*) non-breeding
- A054 Pintail (*Anas acuta*) non-breeding

- A162 Redshank (*Tringa tetanus*) non-breeding
- A001A Red-throated diver (*Gavia stellata*) non-breeding
- A137 Ringed plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) non-breeding
- A062 Scaup (*Aythya marila*) non-breeding
- Waterbird assemblage
- A038-B Whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) non-breeding

### **Solway Firth Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**

- H1110 Sandbanks which are slightly covered by sea water all the time
- H1130 Estuaries
- H1140 Mudflats and sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide
- H1170 Reefs
- H1220 Perennial vegetation of stony banks
- H1310 Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand
- H1330 Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*)
- H2130 Fixed dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('Grey dunes')
- S1095 Sea lamprey (*Petromyzon marinus*)
- S1099 River lamprey (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)