

## Location and boundaries

This Marine Character Area (MCA) comprises the outer inshore waters extending from the northern Anglesey coastline to the limits of the Wales Inshore Waters.

- Boundaries are guided by bathymetry and sediment geology data.
- The waters are characterised by a moderate to low wave climate.
- The MCA includes a large section of the Skerries Transport Separation Scheme, as marked on the Marine Charts.
- It includes the majority of local Anglesey Seascape Character Areas 29: North of Anglesey and 30: North-west of Anglesey.
- Its outer boundary follows the limits of the Wales Inshore Marine Plan Area.

## Key Characteristics

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The <b>seabed drops steeply away</b> from the north coast of Anglesey, with water depth greater than 30m bathymetry, increasing to more than 80m in the north-west.
<b>Preserved glacial bedforms</b> found offshore. Fine sediment particles are suspended in the water resulting in a substrate of mostly exposed Precambrian rock and boulders with shallow patches of coarse gravel, pebbles and cobbles.
Robust fauna colonising the <b>harsh seabed environment</b> supporting a mixture of demersal fish species. <b>Marine mammals</b> are frequently sited.
<b>Sand scour limits the amount of life</b> found on the rocks particularly in the south. In lower energy areas <b>diverse reef communities</b> are found with many filter feeders.
<b>Strong/very strong tidal currents</b> and wave climate, particularly to the south west.
A <b>large number of wrecks</b> , including from both World Wars, representing a wealth of seafaring heritage.
<b>Wartime losses</b> include the <i>Apapa</i> which was <b>sunk by a U-boat</b> in 1917, and <i>HMS Westphalia</i> which was also sunk by a U boat.
<b>Lobster and crab potting</b> takes place closer to the shore, with <b>whelk potting, trawling</b> and <b>scallop dredging</b> occurring elsewhere.
<b>Glimpses of ferries</b> and the <b>Holyhead harbour breakwater</b> are signs of significant human activity in adjacent MCA 24, while <b>commercial shipping</b> can be seen passing further offshore.
<b>Recreational boats</b> can also be seen in coastal waters during the warmer months.
The Skerries are prominent seascape features viewed from this MCA, with the <b>Isle of Man</b> and <b>Holyhead Mountain</b> also visible in clear conditions.
In the south, visual relationships with the adjacent <b>rocky north coast of Anglesey</b> , with small bays and inlets, which contribute to character.
The box-like form of <b>Wylfa Power Station</b> forms a prominent man-made feature in views to the coast, standing out against a rugged and open coastal scene.

## Natural Influences

This MCA is composed entirely of open sea where the sea bed drops steeply away from the north coast of Anglesey due to erosive action from the high energy water. Bathymetry is more than 30 metres below chart datum for most of the MCA, increasing to more than 80 metres in the extreme north-west and in the south east near Holyhead Deep. There are very strong tidal currents, particularly in the south west near Holy Island and a tidal range of approximately four to four and a half metres, and a maximum significant wave height of up to seven metres.

On the seabed to the east, a thin layer of coarse gravelly quaternary sediment overlays mostly Precambrian carboniferous sedimentary bedrock, while fine sediment particles remain suspended in the high energy water. In the west of the MCA, there is a thick band of exposed bedrock north of the Anglesey. Also to the west, there is a dyke swarm of numerous dolerite bands running in a north-west to south-east direction, which likely originated from a single volcanic crater. The seafloor in this MCA shows a variety of interesting landform in a band running from east to west, thought to be glacial in origin and including preserved drumlins.

Seabed habitat is mostly deep rocky reefs and boulders. In the most tide-swept areas there is little epifauna due to scour from sand. In the less tide-swept areas a rich variety of filter feeders including sponges, corals, barnacles, mussels and anemones colonise the rock. Patches of highly mobile coarse shelly sand and cobble are found sporadically. On the surface, a number of marine mammal species can be sighted including harbour porpoise and Risso's dolphin. The waters close to the Skerries in the west are used as a feeding area for Arctic terns, supporting the international importance of the islands themselves for this species (as described in MCA 07).

## Cultural/social influences

This is a historic shipping channel as evidenced by the many wrecks, with a trend in patterning of shipping losses in the northern part of the MCA, with vessels passing east-west or entering/ exiting the deep water of the northern end of St George's Channel. The waters near the Skerries (MCA 7) are rough and produce a significant navigational hazard, marked by the islets' prominent lighthouse. In the west of the MCA, a line of sight between the waymarks of North Stack foghorn and South Stack lighthouse (MCA 09) guides vessels crossing the Irish Sea to and from the ports of Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire.

As with much of the sea around north Wales, this area had a heavy military presence throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The importance of the shipping lanes made them prime hunting ground for enemy submarines, and necessitated the cover they were given in regular patrol patterns of the defending aircraft and airships based at Welsh airfields during both World Wars. Wartime losses include the *Abgeri*, which was torpedoed on Christmas Day 1917 whilst sailing from Dacca to Liverpool, and several aircraft lost whilst on patrols or convoy protection duties over the Irish Sea. Many of the downed planes were based at airfields on the Welsh Coast. Each downed aircraft is designated as a Protected Place under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1989. There is some modern day military presence from the routine operations of RAF Valley on Anglesey, continuing the area's military presence.

The overriding character is this MCA is one of transit, as these waters receive a considerable amount of marine traffic. This includes large commercial shipping travelling to Liverpool and north-west England, as well as ferries travelling to and from Holyhead harbour and Liverpool. To manage the high level of shipping traffic, a traffic separation scheme (TSS) off the Skerries is in place to keep boat traffic in 'lanes'.

Other than shipping, the MCA is also used for commercial fishing including Queen Scallop dredging, beam trawling (heavy and light), light otter trawling, long lining and whelk potting. Recreational boats and charter fishing boats are found closer to Anglesey and are seen particularly in the warmer months. Submarine power cables are found in the northern part of the area, crossing to Dublin.

## Aesthetic and perceptual qualities

Much of the MCA is remote open sea, with identifiable landmarks visible in clear conditions including the Skerries islands and Point Lynas on the rocky Anglesey AONB-designated coast to the south. The Skerries lighthouse and the beacons of Holyhead Harbour provide orientation and contribute to the distinctive character of the seascape, standing out particularly at night. The box-like form of Wylfa Power Station forms a prominent man-made feature in views to the coast across MCA 06, standing out against a rugged and open coastal scene.



*Point Lynas and view of the open sea within this MCA with the Isle of Man on the distant horizon © John Briggs*

Commercial tankers and cargo ships are seen offshore following the traffic separation scheme off the Skerries and markers in sea are visible. The views of Holyhead Mountain, Holyhead town/harbour, the Skerries and low-lying Anglesey become clearer towards the south of the MCA, diminishing the sense of remoteness felt further away from the land. There are particularly strong visual and functional relationships between this MCA and MCAs 06, 07 and 08.

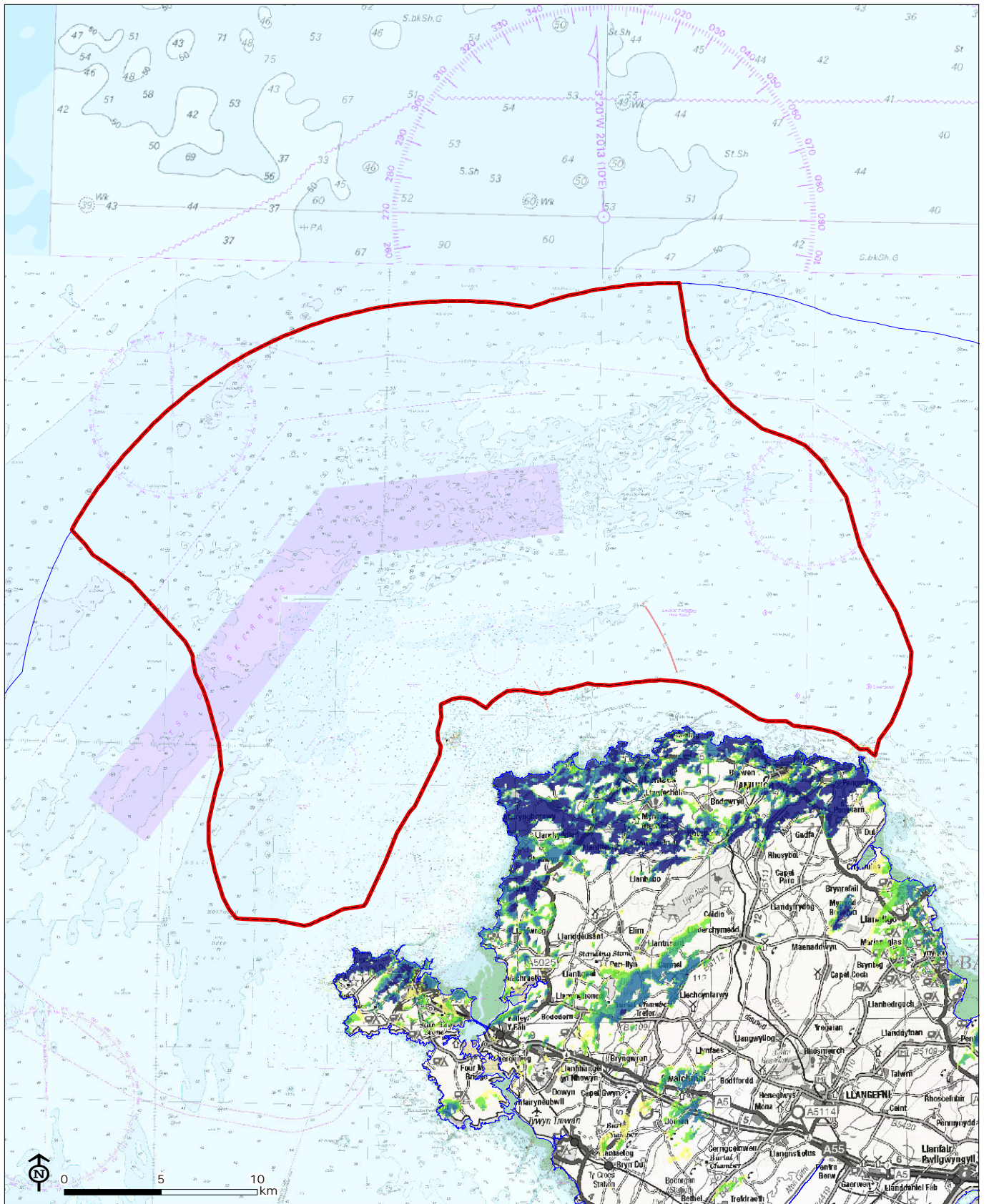
The Isle of Man is visible as feature on the horizon to the north on clear days, providing a sense of orientation. The Cumbrian fells may be seen to the north-east and there are also distant views to existing offshore wind farms to the east towards Liverpool Bay.

*The Visual Resource Maps (VRM) that follow provide a more detailed spatial representation of the visibility of this MCA from the surrounding land in Wales. Please refer to the technical report for an explanation of how these maps were generated and how they should be interpreted.*

*The first map shows land with views to this MCA, the darker shading indicating land where from which more of this MCA is visible.*

*The second map shows sea visible from land, the warmer colours being areas of sea that are visible from more places on land. This comes from a national assessment of Wales so the results do not relate specifically to this MCA, whose boundary is overlaid for location only. The four individual versions show how the results vary depending on how far inland hypothetical viewers are located.*

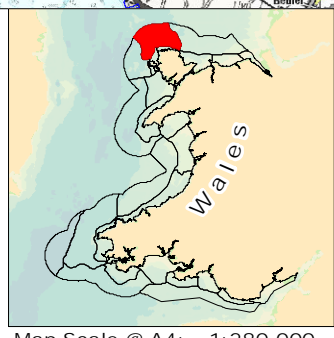




  05: North-West Anglesey Open Waters  
  Wales Inshore Marine Plan Area

Land with sea views (Percentile)

	< 20 (Lowest)
	21 - 40
	41 - 60
	61 - 80
	81 - 100 (Highest)



Wales National Seascape Assessment

Land with Views of:  
MCA 05: North-West Anglesey Open Waters

Source: LUC, NRW, OceanWise

Map Scale @ A4: 1:280,000

