

Location and boundaries

This Marine Character Area (MCA) is formed of the westerly and southerly inshore waters surrounding the Llŷn Peninsula in north-west Wales.

- Its western outer boundary follows the boundary of the Wales Inshore Waters.
- All of the MCA is defined by moderate to low wave exposure, in contrast to the high levels which characterise the Llŷn coastline.
- The inner landward boundary is guided by the shallower bathymetry of around 40-50 metres marking the transition to the coastal waters of MCA 13.
- The northern landward boundary is influenced in part by the transition to slate/schist bedrock underlying the sea floor of the coastal waters (MCA 13).

Key Characteristics

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This MCA includes the offshore waters to the west and broadly outlines the AONB-designated Llŷn Peninsula.
Most of the water in this MCA is between 30 and 80 metres in depth , although there are some trenches which plunge to 115 metres.
Mudstone and sandstone bedrock overlain by a layer of sandy-gravelly sediment. The Devil's Tail sandbank is located in the south of the MCA.
A small portion of this MCA is contained within the Lleyn Peninsula and the Sarnau SAC , recognised for its reefs, shallow inlets and estuaries.
Numerous cetaceans have been sighted in these waters. It is part of a bottlenose dolphin migratory route towards Anglesey.
Generally the area has a low wave exposure , although rougher waters occur in the area around the Devil's Tail sandbank.
Wrecks provide evidence of war time losses including the <i>Erica</i> , <i>Knut</i> and the <i>Chelford</i> and a busy, crowded shipping lane (e.g. <i>Amethyst</i> sunk by collision in 1897).
War Grave site at wreck of H5 Submarine , a British submarine rammed by a British ship in 1918 whilst on surface patrol. The site is now controlled under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1989.
This MCA contains part of Aberporth Firing Range, a large firing practice area used by the Royal Navy which stretches down to the south of Cardigan Bay.
Part of the MCA is also licenced for oil and gas exploitation.
Commercial ships can be seen moving through this MCA.
Fishing uses include heavy beam trawling and lobster and crab potting.
A vast, empty seascape with high levels of wildness and remoteness – perceptual qualities are dominated by the wind, waves and a feeling of being at the mercy of nature.
Iconic views including to Bardsey Island and St Tudwal's Islands in MCA 13, the distinctive flat-topped Llŷn Mountains, and the more distant mountains of Snowdonia National Park to the east (and the Wicklow Hills, Ireland, to the west).
Forms an important maritime setting to the Llŷn AONB , and features as part of a wider seascape setting for the Anglesey AONB to the north-east and Snowdonia National Park to the east.

Natural Influences

This is a large area of open inshore water which meets the Irish Sea to the west and wraps around the western and southern extent of the AONB- and Heritage Coast designated Llŷn Peninsula. The seabed consists of mudstone and sandstone bedrock overlain by sand and gravel marine sediments of Holocene origin. Like much of St. Georges Channel, the geology of this area is heavily influenced by past glacial processes and deposits.

The sea bed is generally uniform in depth at between 50 and 60 metres, although there are some trenches which reach depths of almost 120 metres to the south west of Bardsey Island. Part of the Devil's Tail ridge is also found within this MCA – a narrow ridge of rock which extends for five miles to the south east of Bardsey Island. The ridge shallows to 23 metres, and the depth variation causes underwater currents which create strong tidal races around this feature.

The western side of the MCA contains some of the Llyn Peninsula and the Sarnau SAC, designated for its variety of estuarine, coastal and marine habitats, including reefs and sandbanks found in these waters. Other biodiversity interest includes the sighting of numerous cetaceans. This MCA is known to be part of a bottlenose dolphin migratory route from the south towards Anglesey. Strong tides around the Devil's Tail ridge mean that sand and sediments are constantly shifting and any fauna must be able to tolerate high levels of disturbance.

Cultural/social influences

This MCA encompasses the eastern edge of the St George's Channel shipping lanes, with vessels using Bardsey Lighthouse (MCA 13) and Tusker Rock Lighthouses (Irish waters) as points of navigational reference. As with much of the Irish Sea and waters around North Wales, military vessels frequented these waters in the early 20th century. Wrecks of wartime losses provide evidence of this activity, and include the *Erica*, *Knut* and the *Chelford*. Other losses have resulted from collisions in this historically busy shipping route.

There is a protected War Grave site located where the *HMS H5* submarine was sunk with the loss of all 26 lives in 1918, after being mistaken for a German U-Boat and rammed by a British merchant ship, the *Rutherglen*. At the time, ships were not required to check which side submarines were on. The incident was not publicised at the time, and the wreck was only discovered in 1990. Large steel wrecks lying on the seabed from provide evidence for combative encounters between u-boats, enemy aircraft and allied shipping during both World Wars. The shipping companies represented include several that had the largest fleets in their day,

Much of the MCA today is contained within the large military firing practice area of Aberporth Firing Range, used by the Royal Navy from their coastal base adjoining MCA 16 in the south of Cardigan Bay. Mariners must call in advance of any journey to ensure safe passage. Target boats are positioned offshore and sometimes sounds from exercises undertaken in this area can be heard from the mainland.

Other usage of these waters is for commercial fishing operations including heavy beam trawling and lobster and crab potting. Scallop dredging is also common, with Queen Scallops found in this area. Large commercial ships travelling to and from Liverpool are a feature of this seascape, often featuring on the horizon in elevated views from the Llŷn. Areas in the west of the MCA are also licenced for oil and gas exploration, although any reserves have yet to be exploited.



View of ships on the horizon from the Llŷn peninsula © John Briggs

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities

This area is a vast, exposed and open stretch of sea, associated with high levels of isolation and remoteness, particularly in conditions of poor visibility. It generally feels wild away from the main shipping routes, and perception is influenced greatly by the weather and sea conditions, as well as the intermittent activity of live firing by the military. The use of the waters for shipping creates movement and human influence in an area otherwise dominated by natural influences.

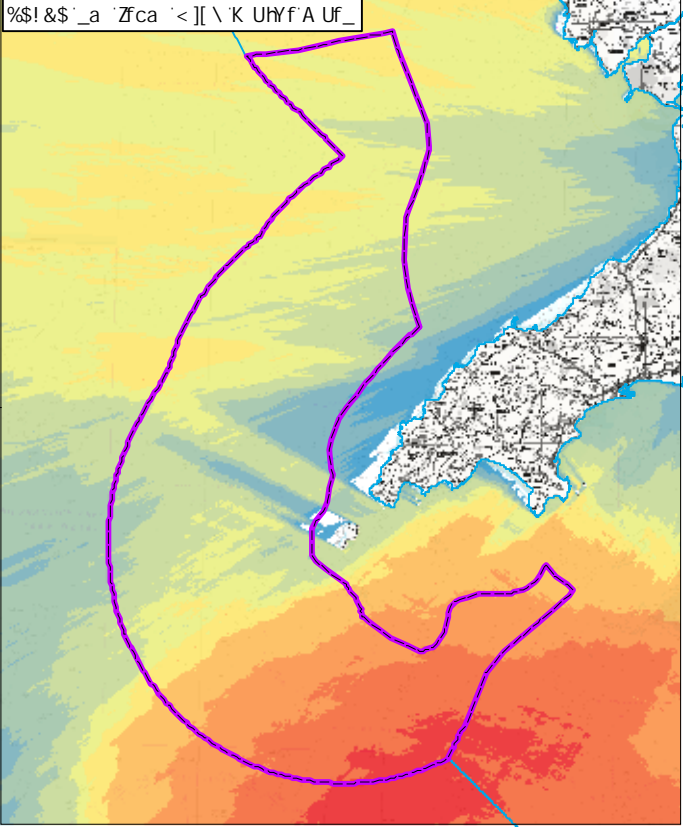
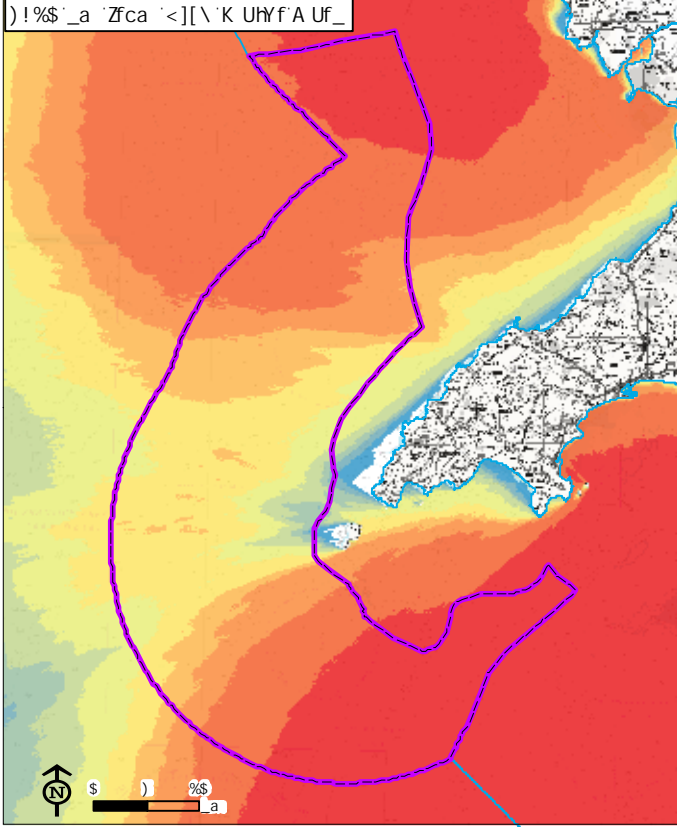
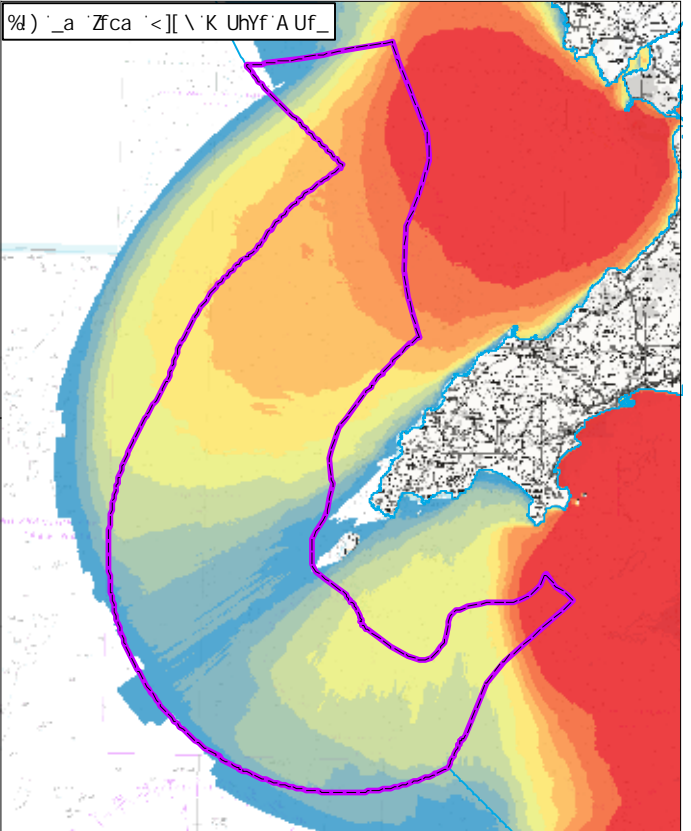
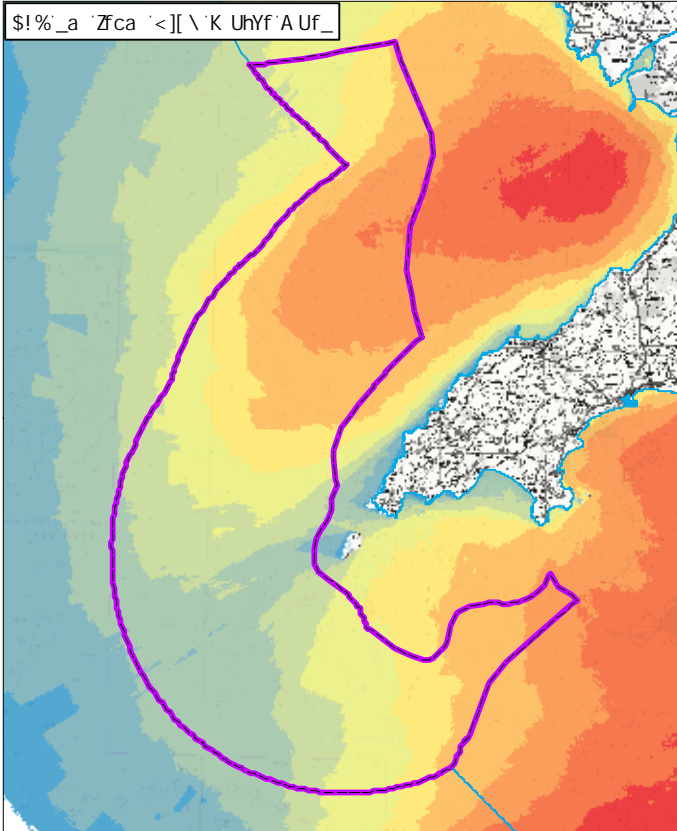
Various nationally important, iconic locations on the coast and in adjacent MCAs are visible from this area including Bardsey Island and St Tudwal's Islands in MCA 13, along with the distinctive conical Llŷn Mountains and more distant mountains of Snowdonia National Park which are visible in clear conditions. Views are also afforded westwards beyond the Irish Sea to the Wicklow Mountains in Ireland, forming distant silhouettes in clear dawn and dusk conditions.

The MCA itself forms an important maritime setting to the Llŷn AONB, and features as part of a wider seascape setting for the Anglesey AONB to the north-east and Snowdonia National Park to the east.

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.

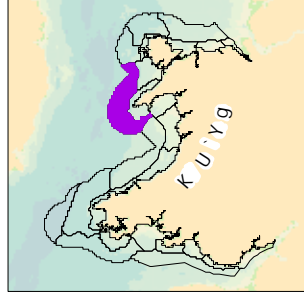
The second map shows sea visible from land, the warmer colours being areas of sea that are visible from more places on land. This comes from a national assessment of Wales so the results do not relate specifically to this MCA, whose boundary is overlaid for location only. The four individual versions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



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