



## Marine Reserves – Biosphere develops a response

Creating a planning environment to care for the sea is no easy task, but it is vital and that is what the Government's Marine Act 2010 sets out to do. Under the Act a network of Marine Conservation Zones is to be created around the country, not all no-take zones, but each with appropriate levels of protection.

Response from North Devon to initial consultations was low, so the Biosphere Reserve has set up a Marine Working Group to coordinate representative local input.

Chairman of the Working Group, Robert Down, Co-Chairman of Coastwise North Devon, says "All of us acknowledge the need for conservation. We only have to think of our fish stocks and the way even locally we have to fish down the food chain to meet the market's demands, to realise that this can not go on. Our aim is to identify and then safeguard the most precious North Devon marine environments by proposing levels of protection for them on which we hope to reach consensus."

The Biosphere Working Group includes representatives from environmental organisations, including Coastwise, and fishing, tourism and water sports. Key organisations have provided support and expertise including Natural England, the Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Agency, and Finding Sanctuary, the southwest agency responsible for submitting MCZ proposals to Government by next summer.

Andy Bell, Co-ordinator of North Devon's Biosphere Reserve says "Identifying MCZ areas is an important job and the Biosphere Partnership, with its broad membership, is uniquely well placed to help. The Government has established the targets and created a process for identifying the zones which we think will greatly benefit from the input we can give.

Our aim is to add local knowledge and experience to the limited scientific data available and send proposals representing a balance of interests between conservation and livelihood to Finding Sanctuary."

The process for scrutinising local proposals is as thorough and complex as the limited timescale allows. Finding Sanctuary will receive proposals from county groups, which includes the Devon MCZ Group. A recent well received presentation by the Biosphere MWG to the Devon MCZ Group identified potential areas on which the group would focus, including the estuary, stretches of coast, a possible extension to Lundy MCZ, and an area of the seabed to the west of Morte recognised for its exceptional animal communities.

The Biosphere group's next meeting will be on 2 August. Work will continue to refine the areas to be considered, measuring conservation value against international criteria, identifying levels of protection, and consulting interested parties. There will be opportunities for revision until early in the New Year.

Andy Bell said “Never has there been a more significant time for our sensitive and significant marine area, the importance of which has been recognised at Lundy, the country’s first Marine Nature Reserve, and in the Voluntary Marine Conservation Area between Combe Martin and Croyde. We have a major wind-farm planned for the Channel and considerable pressure on the local fishing industry. The task is both challenging and worthwhile.”

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North Devon’s Biosphere Reserve is centred on Braunton Burrows and includes the North Devon Coast Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB), the Taw and Torridge Estuary, Lundy Island and communities in towns and villages from the coast to the edge of Exmoor in the east, Hartland in the West and the foot of Dartmoor in the South.

Biosphere Reserves are designated by the United Nations (through UNESCO) as areas with internationally important environments where there is a focus on sustainable development, learning and conservation. North Devon’s Biosphere Reserve is the only one in England and is one of fewer than 540 worldwide.