



Cardigan Bay Marine Protected Area (MPA)

Management Summary



Management of the **Cardigan Bay Marine Protected Area (MPA)** is co-ordinated by the Cardigan Bay MPA Officer through the **Relevant Authorities Group (RAG)** a body of organisations and authorities with specific legal responsibilities to take care of the site. A management plan for the MPA covers all the work that needs to be done to take care of the site and the protected species and habitats for which it was designated.

The management documents for the Cardigan Bay MPA together with the Relevant Authorities Group (RAG) that supports their delivery, provide a key mechanism for protecting and improving the marine environment. This approach helps ensure statutory compliance for the conservation of designated habitats and species, and contributes to achieving the UK's vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse seas.

The Cardigan Bay MPA designation recognises that the area supports some of the best marine wildlife in Europe. The site includes a diverse and highly valued marine and coastal environment, supporting a range of habitats and species across its waters and coastline. It is also an area where people live, work and visit, and where activities such as recreation and tourism form an important part of the local economy and culture.

The overall aim of the MPA is to maintain its rich and diverse marine life in at least as good a condition as when the site was first designated in 2004, and to improve this where possible, with the long-term aim of bringing all designated habitat and species features into '**Favourable Conservation Status**'. This means ensuring that the use and enjoyment of the site's natural resources is sustainable and does not lead to deterioration of its protected features.

Human activities and the duty to protect marine wildlife cannot be considered in isolation. Managing the Cardigan Bay MPA marine environment is therefore a shared responsibility. This document provides a summary of the MPA, who is involved in its management, and how local delivery contributes to the wider network of **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** around the Welsh coast.

1. Background and Description

1.1 Welsh MPA Network

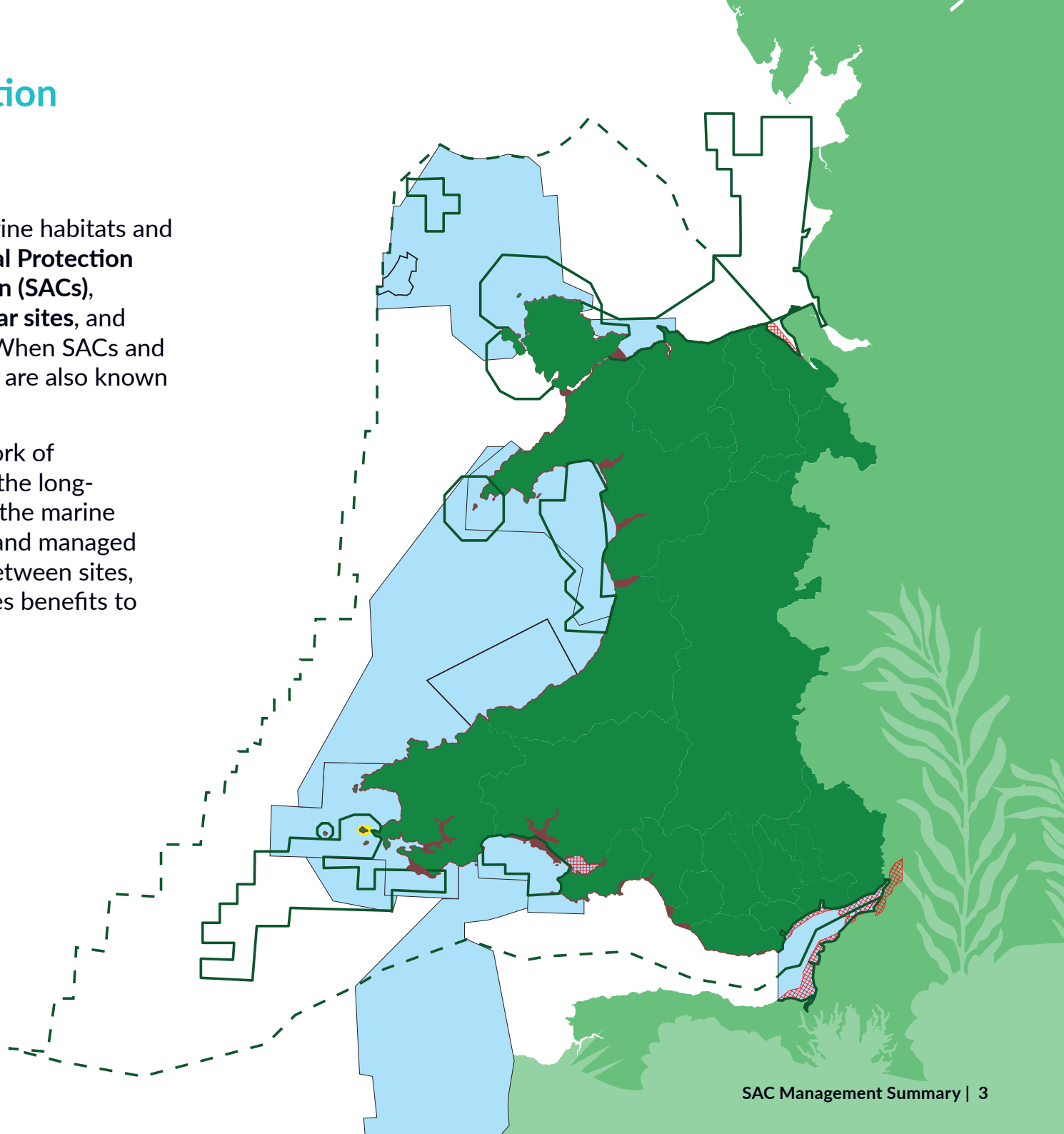
MPAs safeguard Wales's marine and estuarine habitats and species (see Figure 1). MPAs include **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)**, **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)**, **Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)**, **Ramsar sites**, and **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)**. When SACs and SPAs are designated on the same site, they are also known as **European Marine Sites (EMS)**.

MPAs form part of the UK's national network of internationally important sites, supporting the long-term health, resilience, and productivity of the marine and coastal environment. A well-designed and managed network of MPAs increases connectivity between sites, improves ecosystem resilience, and provides benefits to biodiversity, society, and the economy.



Figure 1. A map of the current MPAs in Welsh waters (modified from: Report To The Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament On The Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) In Wales, Feb 2025)

Site boundaries can be found by searching for Marine Protected Areas on Data Map Wales



1.2 Cardigan Bay MPA

Stretching from Ceibwr Bay in Pembrokeshire to Aberarth in Ceredigion and extending almost 20km from the coast, Cardigan Bay Marine Protected Area (MPA) protects the wildlife found in around 1000km² (see Figure 2).

Cardigan Bay MPA celebrates a rich marine environment, full of wildlife. It is home to an amazingly diverse variety of species from reef-building worms to Europe's largest semi-resident population of bottlenose dolphins for which the site was originally designated in 2004. There are few places where these iconic and special animals can be more easily seen in the wild. Alongside the bottlenose dolphins, the area is also home to a significant population of Atlantic grey seals, together with river and sea lampreys.

The harbour porpoise, the bottlenose dolphin's smaller and shyer cousin, can be seen here throughout the year; while sunfish, basking sharks and leatherback turtles are occasional summer visitors. Seabirds such as guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes and fulmar congregate here in large aggregations during the summer breeding season, while feeding gannets can be seen diving offshore. Cardigan Bay's shallow waters also provide important habitats for colourful marine life amongst its abundant reefs, sandbanks and sea caves.

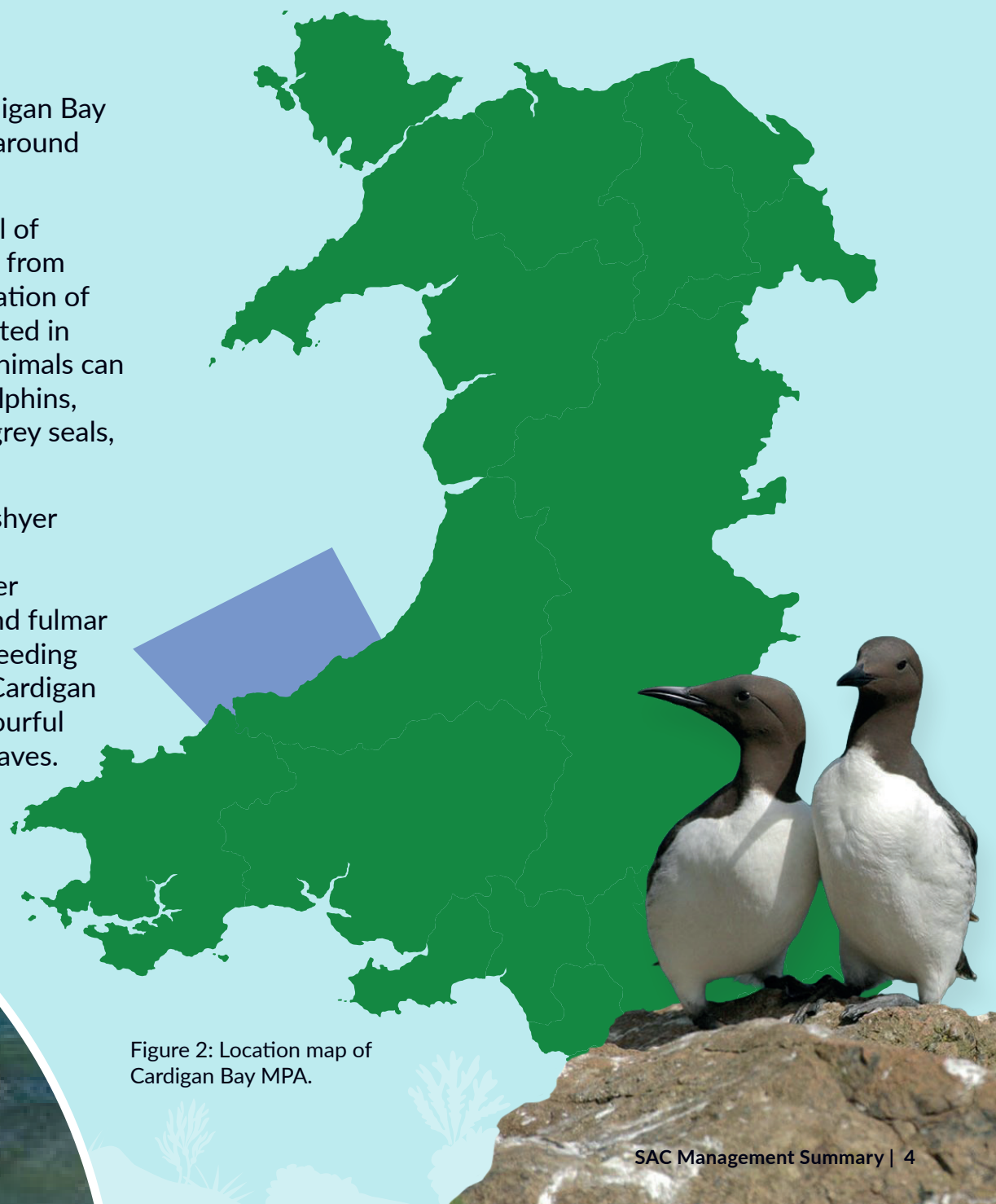


Figure 2: Location map of Cardigan Bay MPA.

1.3 Overlapping and Adjacent Designations

Cardigan Bay MPA overlaps with several other marine and coastal protected sites, reflecting its ecological importance:

- **West Wales Marine SAC:** The West Wales Marine MPA was designated in 2019; situated off the coast of Wales from the Llŷn peninsula in the north, to Pembrokeshire in the south-west, the West Wales Marine MPA has been identified as an area of importance for harbour porpoise. The West Wales Marine MPA encompasses the entire Cardigan Bay MPA.
- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs):** Intertidal and coastal areas along the MPA coastline overlap with multiple SSSIs, providing additional protection to habitats such as maritime cliffs, sloping grasslands, rocky shores and areas of geological importance for late Ordovician and early Silurian sandstones, siltstones, and mudstones.
- **Terrestrial and landscape designations:** Areas adjacent to the MPA include the Teifi Marshes National Nature Reserve, and Marine Heritage Coast which collectively enhance conservation outcomes across the land-sea interface.

Maps and further details of overlapping sites can be accessed via [DataMapWales](#). These overlapping designations contribute to an integrated network of protection, strengthening habitat resilience and supporting species conservation both within and beyond the Cardigan Bay MPA.



2. Feature Overview and Condition

Cardigan Bay MPA has seven designated conservation features, including three habitats and four species (see Figure 3). These habitats and species are of high ecological value and contribute to the UK's obligations under the Habitats Directive. The term conservation feature refers to the specific habitats or species for which the SAC has been selected.

2.1 Habitat Features

The MPA contains some of the best examples in the UK of the following habitats:

- Reefs
- Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time
- Submerged or partially submerged sea caves

The extent of most features is not known precisely and some, such as sandbanks, are dynamic and can be highly mobile. Detailed maps for the features in Wales can be found on Data Map Wales.



2.2 Species Features

The site also supports important populations of:

- **Grey seal** (*Halichoerus grypus*)
- **Bottlenose dolphin** (*Tursiops truncatus*)
- **River Lamprey** (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)
- **Sea lamprey** (*Petromyzon marinus*)



2.3 Feature Condition

Feature condition is assessed to guide management actions and determine whether conservation objectives are being met. Condition reflects the status of a feature at a specific point in time, while Conservation Status indicates the long-term risk to the feature.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW), as the statutory nature conservation advisor to the Welsh Government, provides guidance on the SAC’s designated habitats and species. Their assessments of feature condition are a key source of evidence to inform management decisions. The seven features for which the Cardigan Bay MPA is designated are listed in the table below along with their current condition assessment status and the confidence ranking in that assessment.

Feature	Condition assessment	Confidence in assessment
Bottlenose dolphin (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>)	Favourable	Medium
Atlantic grey seal (<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>)	Favourable	Low
Sea lamprey (<i>Petromyzon marinus</i>)	Unknown	N/A
River Lamprey (<i>Lampetra fluviatilis</i>)	Favourable	High
Reefs	Favourable	Low
Sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time	Unfavourable	Low
Submerged or partially submerged sea caves	Unknown	Not applicable

Table 1: Summary of condition assessments for the designated features of the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC (source: NRW condition assessment for the SAC, Hatton-Ellis, M. et. al, 2025).

Condition overview status taken from NRW Evidence Report No: 226, Hatton-Ellis, M. et. al (2025)



3. Legislative background and framework

The main legislation underpinning SACs in Wales is the **EU Habitats Directive** (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna). The **EU Birds Directive** (Council Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds) underpins SPAs. These Directives are transposed into UK law through the **Habitats Regulations** (The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)). Together, these set out the legal framework for the designation, protection and management of SAC and SPA features. They also require that any plan or project likely to have a significant effect on a site must undergo a **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**, to ensure it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.



Table 2: Marine Biodiversity Obligations

	International
	The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance 1971 aims to conserve wetlands to support their sustainable use.
	The High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement) entered into force on January 17, 2026, creating a legally binding framework to protect marine life in international waters. This facilitates the achievement of the target to effectively conserve and manage 30% of land and sea by 2030, which was agreed in December 2022 within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
	The Convention on Biological Diversity requires parties to the convention to establish and maintain representative and effectively managed marine protected areas that contribute towards a global network of protected areas.
	The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at COP15, this framework sets global biodiversity targets including the goal to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030 (known as the 30by30 target) through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.
	The Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR) aims to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. One of the tools to achieve this is the establishment of an ecologically coherent well-managed network of marine protected areas.
	The Bern Convention aims to conserve and protect wild plant and animal species and their natural habitats and seeks to establish the Emerald Network, an ecological network made up of Areas of Special Conservation Interest.



UK



The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects animals, plants and habitats in the UK and provides for the designation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 - places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to form a network of sites, which contribute towards the conservation and improvement of the marine environment in the UK.

The UK Marine Strategy (MSFD) - requires the UK to put in place measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) in their seas by 2020. A network of MPAs will be a key tool in contributing to the achievement of GES.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017- provide for the establishment of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

UK Biodiversity Framework (UKBF) 2024 sets out shared objectives for co-operation and collaboration across the four countries of the UK. It supports the development of Nature Recovery Networks which aim to link MPAs and other protected areas ensuring connectivity.

UK Marine Policy Statement – provides a framework for marine planning. It requires marine plan authorities and decision makers to take account of how developments may impact on the UK's aim to halt biodiversity loss and the legal obligations relating to MPAs, their conservation objectives, and management.

National



The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 – aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It sets out seven wellbeing goals for the Wales we want; the goals include a Wales which is globally responsible and resilient.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 - sets out Wales' approach to planning and managing natural resources at a national and local level in line with the principles of the sustainable management of natural resources. It also places a duty on public authorities to seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems.

Wales National Marine Plan 2019 sets out a plan for the sustainable use and development of Welsh inshore and offshore marine environments. The plan helps shape and guide decision making and licence applications regarding marine development proposals and is adopted under the Marine and Coastal Access Act (MCAA).



4. Governance, management and partnerships

The management of the Cardigan Bay MPA is delivered through a structured partnership model, recognising that effective site management requires collaboration across statutory bodies, NGOs, local communities, and other stakeholders. This approach ensures that actions are evidence-informed, locally relevant, and aligned with wider marine and terrestrial strategies.

4.1 Management and governance structure

The Cardigan Bay MPA is overseen locally by the Cardigan Bay MPA Relevant Authorities Group (RAG), which provides strategic oversight, identifies priorities, and ensures coordinated delivery of conservation actions. The Relevant Authorities for the site are:

- Ceredigion County Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council
- Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
- Natural Resources Wales
- Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water
- Trinity House

The Welsh Government is also a management authority and manages living resources (including fisheries) in the marine environment. Welsh Ministers have overall responsibility for securing effective management of MPAs however management is the joint responsibility of all management authorities.

RAG members work collectively to guide management decisions, support adaptive approaches, and share expertise across organisations.



It is important to distinguish between Competent Authorities and Relevant Authorities:

- **Competent Authorities** are any organisations or individuals with a statutory role in the UK. These bodies have a legal responsibility to help safeguard the features of the SAC in undertaking their work, thereby contributing to the aims of the Habitats Regulations. Examples may include The Crown Estate, The National Trust and the Ministry of Defence.
- **Relevant Authorities** are a subset of Competent Authorities with specific responsibilities in the marine environment. On many marine SACs, including Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau, these authorities work closely together as a **Relevant Authorities Group (RAG)** to deliver coordinated management.

Many activities, such as fishing or developments, which take place within or near the Cardigan Bay MPA are managed by individual Competent and Relevant Authorities. When granting any consent, permission or other authorisation, the Competent Authority must exercise their functions in a way that protects the designated features of the site under Regulation 38 of the **Habitats Regulations**. This is achieved through a process known as a **Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)**, which considers both direct and indirect impacts, including where activities occur beyond a site's formal boundary.

The **Habitats Regulations** also enable managing authorities to jointly establish a **Management Scheme** for coordinated and collaborative improvement action on MPAs across sectors and jurisdictions. The Cardigan Bay MPA RAG first agreed a Management Scheme for the site in 2008. The Management Scheme helps the management authorities to deliver their statutory duties, supporting the conservation objectives of the site. The **MPA Officer** coordinates the production of the Management Scheme and supports its implementation on behalf of the RAG partnership.

Whereas HRAs are reactive, ensuring that activities do not further degrade MPA features, the Management Scheme is proactive, supporting both long-term maintenance and, where feasible, the restoration and improvement of site features. Management actions beyond routine HRA work (including measures addressing non-licensable activities such as recreation) are addressed jointly through the MPA Management Scheme.

Compliance and enforcement actions are delivered through the relevant regulatory and statutory bodies, depending on the activity involved (for example, marine licensing, fisheries regulation, or wildlife legislation). Partnership working supports compliance through information sharing, joint site awareness, and coordinated responses to emerging issues.

Well-managed MPAs contribute directly to the Wellbeing of **Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** by promoting long-term ecosystem resilience, sustainable resource use and collaborative decision-making, and to the **Environment (Wales) Act 2016** by helping to maintain and enhance the

resilience of marine ecosystems in the face of growing pressures. Collectively, Wales' MPA network also underpins progress towards wider national and international commitments, including the global 30by30 target, demonstrating how effective site management can deliver wide and meaningful outcomes for biodiversity, climate resilience and the sustainable use of marine and coastal environments.

Natural Resources Wales, working alongside Natural England for cross-border sites (such as the Severn Estuary EMS), has a statutory role in advising on Conservation Objectives for the MPAs, potential pressures, and activities that could cause deterioration or disturbance. This advice underpins management measures and assessments of proposed activities.

Local site management links to broader governance through the MPA Management Steering Group, the Wales Coast and Seas Partnership (CaSP Cymru), and the Welsh Partnership of MPAs. These networks support coordination, shared learning, and consistency across the wider network of Welsh Marine Protected Areas.



The MPA Officer provides the operational capacity to deliver site management and partnership objectives. The SAC Officer oversees day-to-day management, project delivery, stakeholder engagement, and national representation.

Key responsibilities include:

- Developing, securing funding for, and managing projects to reduce pressures and support favourable condition
- Producing, supporting implementation, reviewing, and updating site management documents
- Engaging stakeholders, site users, and local communities
- Raising awareness and building understanding of site features and conservation issues
- Partnership working with local, regional, and national bodies
- Representing the site at national and network-level meetings
- Supporting projects with wider national significance, contributing to cross-site priorities

This combination of strategic oversight, operational delivery, and national coordination ensures that site management is effective, adaptive, and integrated across sites.



Overview of Cardigan Bay MPA Management Documents

The management of the MPA is guided by a structured set of documents and tools that together support planning, delivery, and reporting. These include:

- **Site summary** – providing a concise overview of the site, its features, and management context
- **Conservation Objectives (Regulation 37)** – outlining the targets for the MPA features
- **NRW's site action database** – a database held by NRW containing all site-specific actions
- **Work programme** – detailing planned management activities and priorities for the site
- **Site monitoring** – NRW undertake a regular and varied programme of ecological and environmental monitoring to collect data to inform site feature condition and pressures
- **Site condition assessment** – a formal document by NRW reviewing monitoring and management information to evaluate site condition and inform management decisions
- **Annual site update** – summarising progress at the site level
- **Annual network update** – summarising delivery and outcomes across the Welsh MPA network

Information from these sources feeds directly into the site assessment, which informs site management and prioritisation of actions. Collectively, these documents and assessments also feed into the MPA Network Management Framework for Wales and the MPA Network Management Action Plan for Wales, produced by the Wales MPA Management Steering Group, ensuring that local management aligns with national priorities and statutory requirements.

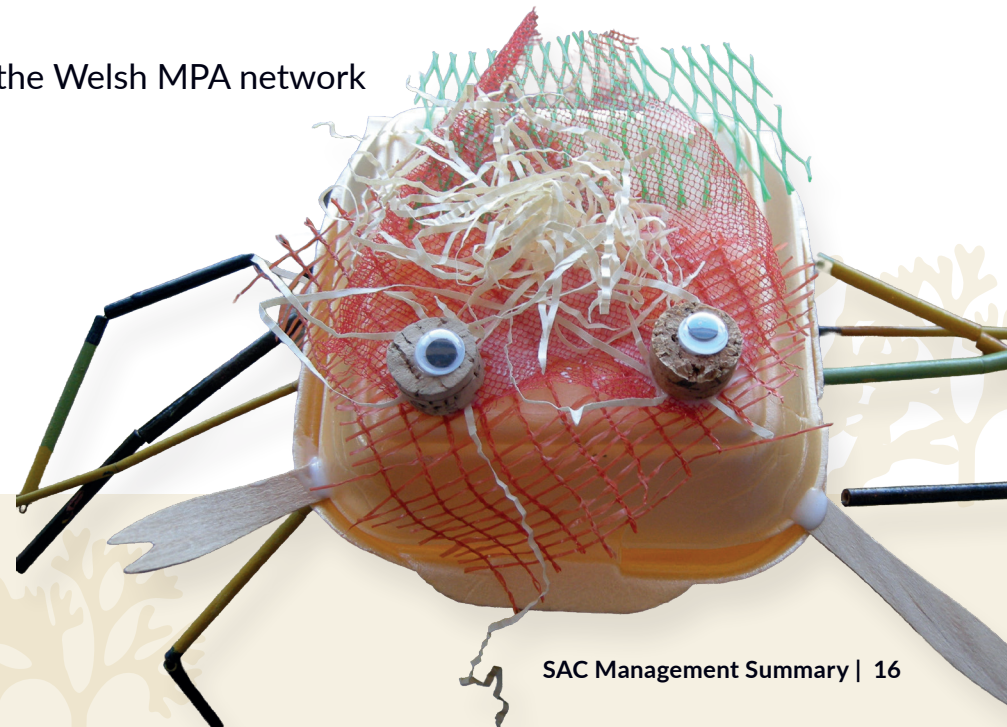
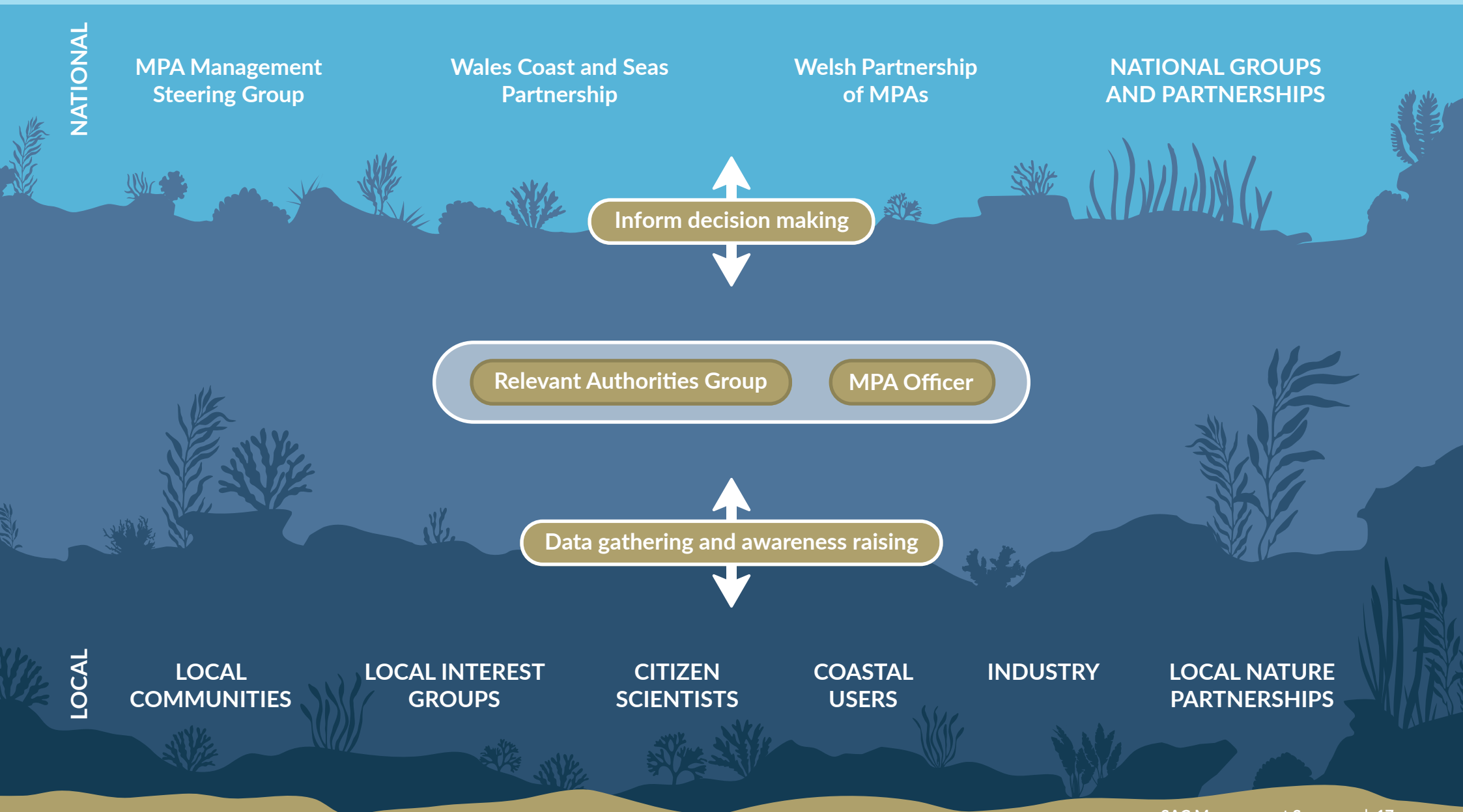


Figure 4.
How Cardigan Bay MPA is Managed and Delivered



4.2 Ways of working

Management of the MPA is based on collaborative, adaptive, and evidence-led principles. Partners work together to identify pressures, prioritise actions, and deliver solutions that support the conservation objectives of the site while taking into account social, cultural, and economic contexts.

A key focus is on partnership working with stakeholders, site users, and local communities. Engaging people who know the site allows for:

- Learning from local knowledge and experience
- Co-designing and developing solutions that are practical, relevant, and effective
- Encouraging long-term support and stewardship
- Improving the sustainability and success of management actions

This inclusive approach ensures that management is informed not only by science but also by the perspectives of those directly interacting with the site, leading to solutions that are better supported, more resilient, and more successful over the long term. This includes supporting constructive dialogue where conservation needs must be balanced with sustainable use of the marine environment.



How we work with Stakeholders and Communities

The Cardigan Bay MPA Officer builds strong relationships and trust, offering multiple ways for people to engage, interact, and contribute. This helps remove barriers and ensure everyone has a voice. Engagement activities include:

- **Meetings and workshops** to discuss management priorities and co-develop solutions
- **Drop-in events, site visits, and guided walks** to share information and gather local knowledge
- **One-to-one conversations** to address specific concerns or opportunities
- **Attendance at local events, shows, and community fairs** to reach wider audiences
- **School and further education visits**, including talks, workshops, and field activities
- **Engagement with community and interest groups**, through presentations, discussions, and practical activities
- **Citizen science and volunteer opportunities** to involve people directly in monitoring and conservation
- **Creative approaches**, including art and other projects, to explore conservation topics and connect with different audiences
- **Digital engagement**, including the website, email newsletters, and social media updates

This inclusive approach ensures that management decisions are informed by local experience and expertise, creating solutions that are practical, widely supported, and sustainable in the long term.





4.3 The Welsh Partnership of MPAs

The seas all around Wales contain an abundance of nationally and internationally important marine life; they are so important that much of the Welsh coastline has now been designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The Welsh Partnership of Marine Protected Areas consists of the site officers from Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau MPA, Cardigan Bay MPA, Pembrokeshire Marine MPA, Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS, and the Severn Estuary EMS (a cross border site) to support collaborative working across the Welsh MPA network. The Cardigan Bay MPA is part of the Welsh Partnership of MPAs, which brings together officers and organisations from across Wales to support national coordination, consistency, and shared learning.

Through the Welsh Partnership of MPAs, sites benefit from:

- Shared tools, resources, and best practice guidance
- Knowledge exchange and peer learning
- Greater consistency in management and reporting
- Stronger links between local delivery and national priorities



4.4 The MPA Management Steering Group

In 2014, the Welsh Government established the MPA Management Steering Group to provide strategic coordination for the management of all MPAs in Welsh seas. The Group brings together representatives from the main management authorities in Wales, as defined by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, to work towards a shared vision, agreed objectives, and a consistent management framework.

The MPA Management Steering Group provides advice, guidance, and a collective steer to authorities involved in the delivery of MPA management actions. It champions effective MPA management, raises the profile of MPAs, and promotes buy-in from management authorities and wider stakeholders across Wales. Effectively, the Group acts as a national Competent Authorities Group, helping to secure the effective management of the MPA network. This coordination ultimately contributes to improving site condition, safeguarding marine biodiversity, supporting ecosystem resilience, and delivering socioeconomic benefits for Wales.

A representative from the Welsh Partnership of MPAs sits on the Group, providing a link to site-based MPA management and ensuring alignment between local delivery and national priorities.

Following the publication of a Framework and an Action Plan in 2018, the Group selects and scores network-level actions for delivery each year, supported by a Grant Scheme. This funds small, network-applicable projects that contribute to improving the MPA network across Wales.



4.5 NGOs and local delivery partners

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local groups play a critical role in delivering management actions. They provide expertise, capacity, and strong links to local communities, supporting both practical work on the ground and engagement initiatives.

Their involvement adds value through:

- Specialist knowledge and technical skills
- Engagement with volunteers, citizen science projects, and local stakeholders
- Delivering innovative, locally adapted solutions
- Strengthening community ownership and long-term stewardship

This partnership approach ensures that strategic objectives are effectively translated into practical, sustainable outcomes for the MPA's features.

The Cardigan Bay MPA Officer collaborates closely with the marine staff from the Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre (CBMWC), part of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales' Marine Conservation Team. The CBMWC staff and volunteers contribute records from New Quay Harbour to the Dolphin and Porpoise Watch monitoring project.

The Cardigan Bay MPA Officer and RAG are very grateful for the staff and volunteer time dedicated to this research by the CBMWC without which the production of the annual Dolphin and Porpoise Watch monitoring report would not be possible.



4.6 Alignment with local and national plans

Management of the MPA is undertaken in alignment with relevant local, regional, and national strategies. This includes alignment with adjacent coastal and terrestrial protected sites and designations, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. Recognising the strong ecological links between marine and coastal environments (including estuaries) helps ensure that management actions are joined-up across the land-sea interface, supporting shared objectives for biodiversity, water quality, habitat resilience, and sustainable use. This alignment also includes ensuring coherence with wider nature recovery and place-based frameworks, including Nature Recovery Action Plans (NRAPs), National Park Management Plans, and other place-based frameworks where applicable.

Aligning SAC management with these plans helps to:

- Avoid duplication of effort
- Maximise shared outcomes for nature and people
- Embed SAC priorities within wider land and sea management
- Strengthen collaboration across sectors and geographies

This integrated approach ensures that local actions contribute to broader environmental and societal objectives.



5. Cardigan Bay MPA Management Scheme

The Cardigan Bay MPA has a Management Scheme, maintained by the MPA Officer on behalf of the RAG. The Management Scheme is an evidence-led document that contains a wide range of actions, from raising awareness and influencing behaviour, to targeted measures undertaken by individual Relevant Authorities to address identified pressures and threats. All actions ultimately aim to maintain or improve the condition of the SAC features.



5.1 Management action identification and review

The Cardigan Bay MPA Management Scheme Action Plan contains a prioritised list of agreed, specific and measurable actions to support the improvement of MPA features. These actions are kept under review by the RAG and underwent significant updating during work led by NRW on the site Prioritised Improvement Plans, Thematic Action Plans and five Cross-cutting Action Plans within the LIFE N2K Programme in Wales (2012-2015).

The MPA Action Plan is informed by NRW's site action database, which primarily contains task-specific actions with defined completion dates, focusing on discrete measures that can be completed and closed. In contrast, the site-based joint MPA Action Plan contains all actions needed to support the site's management, including maintenance of ongoing or recurring activities to benefit site management, as well as education and awareness-raising initiatives.

Actions are used to create a work programme for the site, and this then determines what projects are required. Some actions are local to the Cardigan Bay MPA, while others may be common to multiple MPAs across the network, in which case they are developed and implemented jointly or at a national level, as appropriate.

Close working with NRW ensures that actions stay relevant and are informed by the best available information. The list of identified actions is extensive, reflecting the multiple areas where improvements are needed to bring features into favourable condition. These are briefly summarised below.

5.2 Key areas for improvement

Key areas for improvement for the features of the Cardigan Bay MPA include the following (in no particular order):

Management of Disturbance

Sustainable Tourism and Recreation: Reduce the incidence of disturbance, both recreational and commercial; to ensure that activities such as commercial wildlife trip boats and site use by recreational water users do not disturb and/or have a detrimental impact on the species features of the site.

Educational/ scientific use of site

Determine the nature and scope of educational/ scientific activities within the MPA, the level of pressure this use is having on the MPA features and if and how this should be addressed.

Marine Litter

Identify sources of marine litter coming into the MPA.

Reduce marine litter from sources identified from above bullet point.

Activity Management

Ensure permitted activities are assessed in line with the Habitats Regulations by Competent Authorities.

Ensure activities carried out by Competent Authorities are assessed in line with the Habitats Regulations.

Key areas for improvement

Water Quality & Pollutant Reduction

Agricultural Run-off: Linking land management to MPA conservation through a catchment approach to minimise nutrient-laden run-off

Vessel Waste: Enhancing harbour waste reception facilities to prevent the discharge of oils, cleaning chemicals, and antifoulants into the MPA.

Evidence & Governance

Climate change: Building climate resilience into management actions – increasing sea temperature rise and changes to prey availability and abundance may affect species features of the site.

Evidence & Governance

Data Gaps: Address the lack of recent high quality data on features and activities to improve confidence in Condition Assessments for the Features of the site

Cross-Sector Awareness: Raising public and stakeholder understanding to foster behaviour change towards more sustainable activity.

Water Quality & Pollutant Reduction

Understanding Diffuse and Point Sources: Better understanding of the contribution from diffuse sources such as land run-off and point sources such as sewerage.

Diffuse Pollution: Mine remediation works to reduce presence of heavy metals entering the marine environment via stream flow through mine adits. NRW have a priority list of mine sites requiring remediation work.

5.3 Management action implementation

Feature improvement within the MPA is often dependent on addressing multiple pressures or threats simultaneously. This means there are many actions to implement to support the site's wildlife features. Management implementation requires adequate resources: both staffing capacity and funding dictate the pace and scale of what can be achieved.

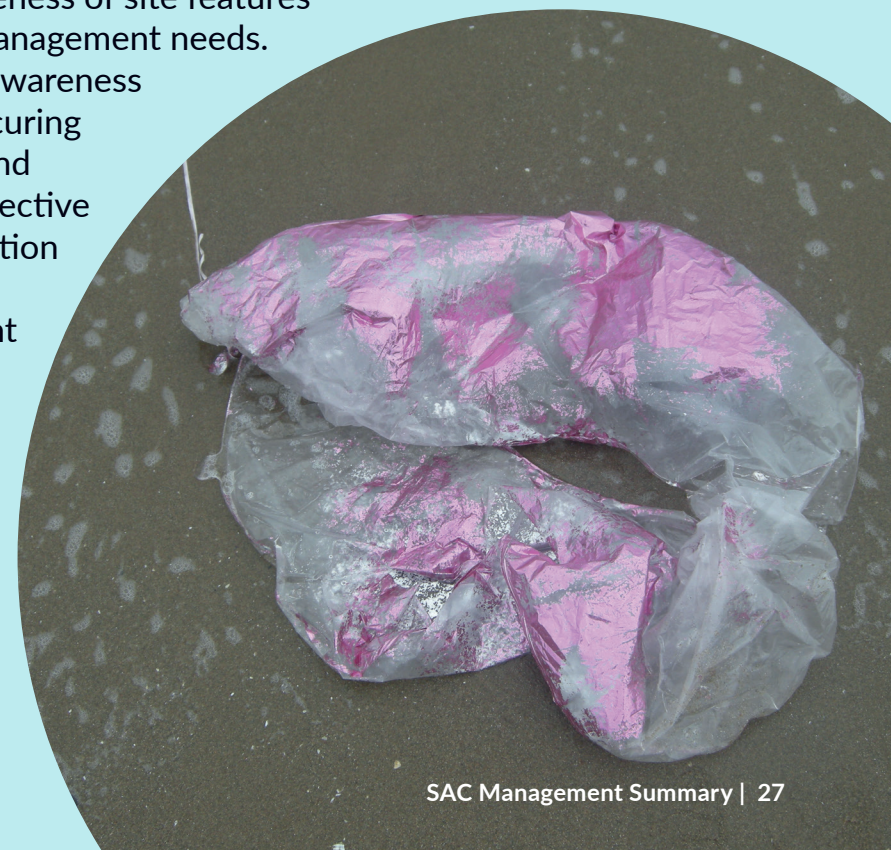
Contributions from management authorities for proactive management implementation are crucial but not guaranteed, and this directly impacts the work programme and outcomes at the site level.

In 2022 the **Nature Networks Programme** was initiated by the Welsh Government to address the nature emergency in Wales by increasing biodiversity, improving the condition of protected sites and enhancing the resilience and connectivity of habitats and species. The Programme includes direct delivery by NRW and a grant scheme, the Nature Networks Fund, run in partnership with **National Heritage Lottery Fund**. This funding has enabled delivery of a wide range of marine projects that support MPA management, including joint projects by the **Welsh Partnership of MPAs**. The Nature Networks Fund is competitive, so funding cannot be guaranteed from year to year, which impacts work programme planning.

Some areas for action have benefitted from small network-level projects funded through the MPA Management Steering Group's annual Action Plan and Grant Scheme. This Grant Scheme, whilst useful, is also competitive.

Between 2015 and 2016 the MPA Management Steering Group conducted a stakeholder engagement exercise on options for an area-based approach to managing MPAs as a network. Although an area-based approach with local site officers was the preferred option, delivering better outcomes and value for money, adequate funding was not available at the time. An MPA management review by the National Assembly for Wales Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee stated in its 2019 report: "We note that stakeholders continue to overwhelmingly support the area-based approach, with local site officers".

Marine wildlife is often "out of sight, out of mind," which can affect awareness of site features and their management needs. Increasing awareness is key to securing resources and enabling effective implementation of management actions.



6. Reporting

The Cardigan Bay MPA contributes to multiple national and international biodiversity obligations and as such reporting occurs at different scales and through a variety of mechanisms to track site condition and progress. The Welsh Government and NRW work closely with the **Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)** to report against these obligations. For example, the Cardigan Bay MPA contributes to the MPA network which is required under the UK Marine Strategy and is, under The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, essential in achieving 30by30 targets. The Welsh Government reports on MPA network-wide progress in accordance with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to the Senedd every six years.

NRW is responsible for monitoring the condition of the SAC features and for providing conservation advice to inform management of activities that may impact them. These reports are shared with the MPA Officer and management authorities to support local management and action planning.

Projects that contribute to site management and the maintenance and improvement of site features vary along with their reporting mechanisms. Projects are often grant funded and their outputs and reporting processes are determined by funders. Where projects involve the MPA Officer and Relevant Authorities, progress and outcomes are captured through the RAG progress reporting process.

RAG progress reports are produced annually and highlight achievements, priorities for future work and the importance of ongoing partnership working. They are also combined into a joint annual report provided by the Welsh Partnership of MPAs to the MPA Management Steering Group which is then used to inform Welsh Government's reporting to the Senedd, in accordance with Section 124 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.



6.1 Data and the evidence base

NRW undertake a comprehensive marine monitoring programme which includes:

- **Statutory habitat and species monitoring** – surveys of MPA features and ongoing surveillance, often in partnership with species experts, to improve ecological understanding, detect change, and identify trends.
- **Water quality monitoring** – under the Water Framework Directive (WFD), NRW monitors transitional (estuarine) and coastal waterbodies. This involves biological elements including surveys of estuarine fish, phytoplankton, and macroalgae. It also involves chemical and physical elements which include regular testing for nutrients (such as Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen), oxygen levels, and contaminants to determine Ecological Status.
- **Dedicated research and evidence needs** – targeted surveys addressing high priority evidence gaps, often focusing on pressures and threats to MPA features.

Data from these programmes underpin condition assessments, reporting and management decisions, ensuring operations are based on robust, quality-assured evidence. Additional data sources include commissioned surveys in connection with development, academic research, expert collaboration, and local knowledge gathered through engagement with local stakeholders. Information sharing between management authorities strengthens the evidence base, helping to understand local conditions and inform site reporting.

6.2 MPA feature condition assessments

Condition assessments for all MPA features were carried out by NRW, with reports last produced in 2025. These condition assessments contribute to multiple key national and international processes and legislative drivers. Examples include, internationally, The Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR) management effectiveness reporting and, nationally, The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR).

The habitats and species within MPAs are challenging and resource intensive to monitor which can make reporting on condition challenging. Monitoring condition at the site level (in addition to network-level) is recognised as vital to inform effective site management. The results of these condition assessments are summarised in Section 2 (overview of features) and are being used to guide targeted investigations into causes of feature failure.



6.3 MPA conservation advice

The condition assessments underpin the conservation objectives for the site which are contained within conservation advice packages under Regulation 37 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitats Regulations) and are commonly called 'Reg 37' packages. NRW as the statutory nature conservation advisor to the Welsh Government provides information on operations that might cause damage to a feature or features of the MPA. This detailed and targeted advice is essential in supporting and improving sustainable management of MPAs.

Further information on site features and overlapping designations is provided in the conservation advice Appendices.



7. Further Information

- Cardigan Bay MPA website
- Feature Condition Assessment - for individual features and for the site. Cardigan Bay / Bae Ceredigion Special Area of Conservation Indicative site level feature condition assessments 2018 NRW Evidence Report No: 226, Natural Resources Wales, Cardiff.
- NRW Conservation Advice - Ardal Cadwraeth Arbennig Bae Ceredigion/ Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation Advice provided by Natural Resources Wales in fulfilment of Regulation 37(3) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. June 2025.
- MPA Management Steering Group
- The Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations, 2017
- Habitats Regulations Assessments
- Marine Protected Areas in Wales
- Report to Welsh Parliament on the MPAs in Wales, 2025
- DataMap Wales mapping of MPAs in Welsh waters
- Wales Coast and Seas Partnership (CaSP Cymru)
- MPA Network management Framework for Wales
- Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales
- A 30by30 Framework for Wales
- The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) (England & Wales), 2017
- Habitats Regulations 9A Report for Wales 2019-2024
- SoNaRR 2025 SMNR and biodiversity assessments



Mewn Partneriaeth â
Llywodraeth Cymru
In Partnership with
Welsh Government

This summary was produced by the Welsh Partnership of MPAs as part of the 'Partnership delivery of MPA improvements project', funded by Nature Networks 2 Heritage Lottery Fund and Welsh Government. The partnership works to improve the condition of MPAs in Wales through collaborative working, knowledge sharing and project delivery.

Photo credits: David Cuniffe, Melanie Heath, Janet Baxter, CCC Archive, Josh, Paul Heath, Bryan & Sharon Whitley