

Location and boundaries

This Marine Character Area (MCA) covers a large area of open sea to the west of Anglesey in north-west Wales.

- MCA boundaries are guided by sediment geology and bathymetry information marked on the Marine Charts.
- All of the area is characterised by moderate to low wave climate.
- The eastern boundary is guided by bathymetry as depicted on the Marine Charts, representing where the seabed drops away from the west coast of Holy Island (MCA 09).
- Strong tidal streams, races and overfalls associated with the coastal waters surrounding Holy Island are kept with the adjacent coastline in MCA 09.
- Its outer boundary follows the limits of the Wales Inshore Marine Plan Area.
- The MCA includes a large proportion of local Anglesey Seascape Character Area 31: West of Anglesey.

Key Characteristics

| Key Characteristics |
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| An offshore MCA to the west of Holyhead with a water depth of 40-60 metres with deeper sections in the far north and in Holyhead Deep . |
| Mostly coarse sediment in deep water with exposed Precambrian schist bedrock in the east. |
| Robust polychaetes, crustaceans and bivalves make up the infaunal community while rocky habitats are colonised by a varied community that includes sponges, ascidians, hydroids and bryozoans among many other taxa. |
| High energy water due to strong tidal currents and wave action , and high turbidity due to suspended particulate matter. |
| A variety of fishing activity with towed mobile gear used offshore. |
| Commercial shipping and ferries seen offshore, with recreational boats more common close to the coast, particularly close to Trearddur. |
| Long history and key role in shipping and trade , comprising the location where the western trade routes of Britain converge. The cargo ship <i>Slieve Bloom</i> was wrecked in 1918 while carrying passengers, cattle and mail from Dublin to Holyhead. |
| The Dublin to Holyhead and Dublin to Liverpool ferry routes pass through the north of this MCA. |
| Holyhead Mountain is a landmark which can be viewed from the southern part of the MCA, with the Isle of Man visible from the northern part of the MCA in clear conditions. |

Natural Influences

This MCA is made up of the offshore waters to the west of Anglesey, including a large proportion falling within St. George's Channel. On the seabed there is a thin layer of coarse quaternary sediment of glacial origin overlying mainly Precambrian Monian schist bedrock which is exposed in the higher energy eastern part of the MCA. The glacial till, known as the Irish Sea Till, is overlain by a thick successional layer of mud and sand, deposited during melting of the ice sheet 20,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. In the north of the area, 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.

Water depth for most of the MCA ranges from 40 to 75 metres below chart datum. There are deeper sections in Holyhead Deep (over 80 metres) and to the far north (over 140 metres). Sea floor habitat mostly consists of tide-swept coarse sediment with outcrops of bare rock in the south east of the MCA. Robust polychaetes, crustaceans and bivalves make up the infaunal community while rocky habitats are colonised by a varied community that includes sponges, ascidians, hydroids and bryozoans among many other taxa. On the surface, cetaceans including bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise are often sighted.

Careg Hen is a submerged rock in the south east of the area which causes depth to reduce suddenly from 40 metres to five metres, resulting in races and currents that can pose a threat to navigation. Strong tidal currents are found, particularly in the eastern part of the MCA on the boundary with MCA 09; where the presence of Holy Island results in rougher waters associated with the 'Holyhead Race'. The Race, which emanates from the north of the island, lies up to two miles off the islet of South Stack, also affecting sea conditions within this MCA on a localised basis.

Cultural/social influences

The western trade routes of Britain that converge on this corner of Welsh waters made this the second busiest shipping area in the UK in the mid-19th century. Shipped cargoes coming inward from the Americas and West Indies included tobacco and sugar, and the MCA featured a number of passing emigrant/passenger ships such as the *Royal Charter*, Brunel's *Great Eastern* and the White Star line's *Lusitania*. Nearby lighthouses such as South Stack (MCA 09) and the distinctive landform of Holyhead Mountain provided key navigational references for vessels passing through the busy waters. The importance of the nearby lighthouses in facilitating navigation along these nationally important trade routes is evidenced by lighthouse dues paid to the Skerries lighthouse in MCA 07 (£18,000 in 1852), which were second only to the Smalls in MCA 19 (£23,000). By comparison other lighthouses in the British Isles tended to raise £5,000 or below in annual revenue during this period.

The long history of the nearby port of Holyhead as an embarkation point for passengers and mail to Ireland is represented by the wreck of the *Slieve Bloom* which was carrying passengers, cattle and mail when it was struck by a US Destroyer in March 1918. This wreck has a special resonance with people of Holyhead as it was owned by the London & Northwest Railway Co providing the passenger, mail and cargo service to Dublin. The trend of shipwreck losses within the MCA is from the southwest, following the traditional shipping lanes and associated with the dangerous seas off Holy Island. The waters of the MCA also served as a hunting ground for enemy U-boats during both World Wars, leaving a legacy of large steel wrecks as artificial reefs. These include the *Farfield* and *USS Roanoke*, both of which were sunk by German forces during WWII.

Today, the Dublin to Holyhead and Dublin to Liverpool ferry routes pass through the north of the MCA – retaining long-standing maritime links between the two countries. The commercial shipping lanes offshore are separated by a Traffic Separation Scheme

(markers are visible on the sea surface) with large cargo vessels travelling to and from Liverpool and Ireland. Limited recreational boat activity can be witnessed closer to the coast, particularly in the area near Trearddur Bay. A spoil dumping ground used for the deposition of dredged spoils is located in the area near Holyhead Deep and is marked by a lit buoy.

Varied commercial fishing activity includes scallop dredging, beam trawling, light otter trawling, longlining and potting. Recreational deep sea fishing boats can be found at Holyhead Deep; conger, cod, skate, spur dog, ling and bull huss can be caught here.

Submarine telecommunications and power cables from Wales to Ireland run along the seafloor through this MCA. The first telecommunications cable in Welsh waters was laid across this MCA to link Holyhead and Howth, Ireland in 1852.

Aesthetic and perceptual qualities

This is an open, exposed seascape strongly influenced by the weather and sea conditions sweeping in from the Irish Sea. Intervisibility with the AONB-designated Anglesey coastline to the east, and the distant form of Ireland to the west (including the Wicklow Hills), provide some sense of containment within the vast open sea.

Eastern views are framed by the distinctive form of Holyhead Mountain and the rocky, wave-exposed western facing coast of Holy Island framing MCA 09. In the southern parts of the MCA, the distant mountains of Snowdonia National Park and the conical hills of the Llŷn AONB are visible, lessening the remote, exposed feel of the open sea. Further to the north and west coastline features become less distinguishable and there is an increasing sense of remoteness, although the Isle of Man can be seen on the horizon in clear conditions.



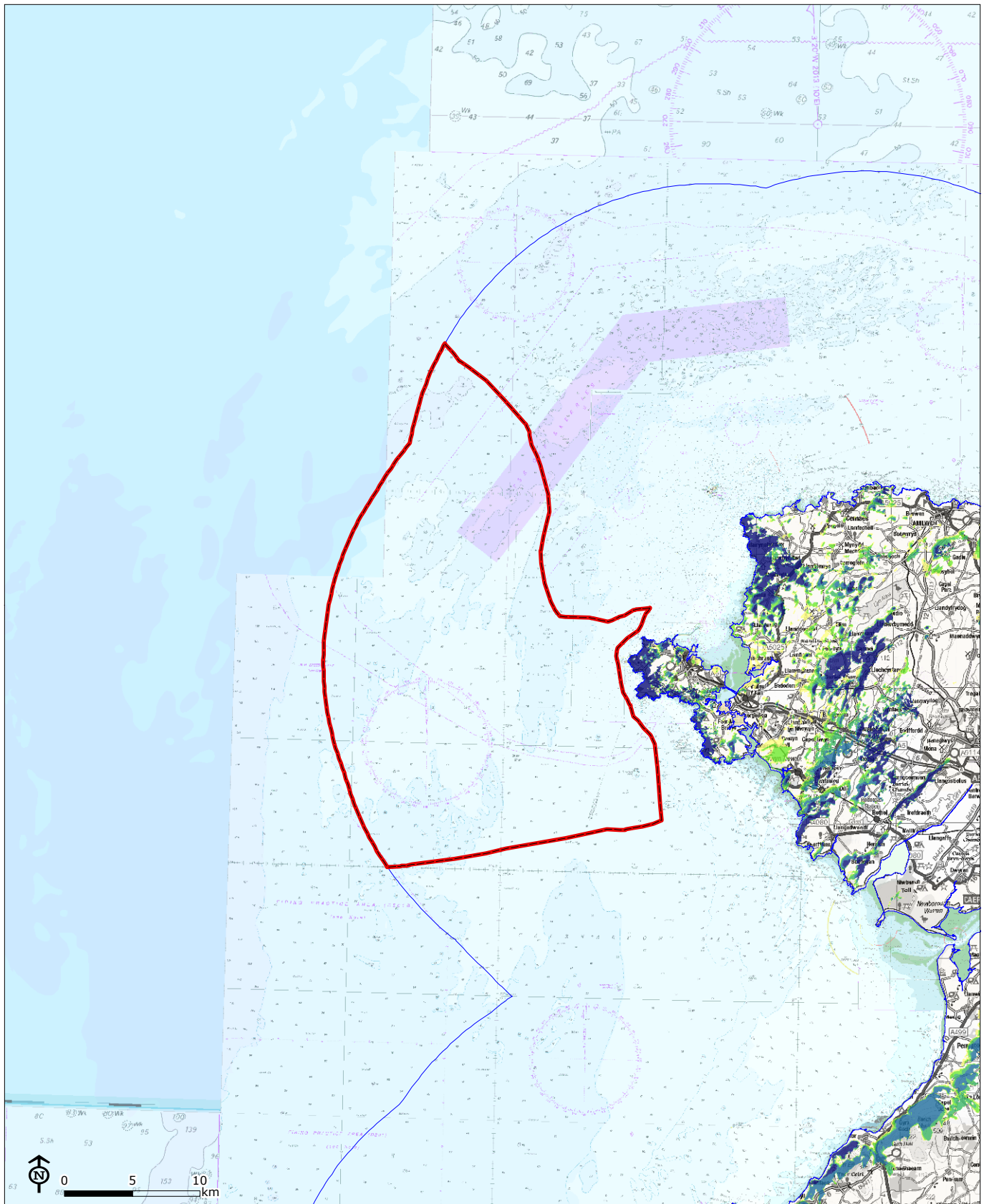
Zoomed-in sunset view from Holyhead Mountain across this MCA to the Wicklow Hills © John Briggs

Fishing boats and large commercial ships are often visible, with ferries in the north, resulting in a sense of transit and human activity. Recreational boats are a common sight in the coastal waters fringing Holy Island (MCA 09) and within Holyhead Bay (MCA 07), particularly during warmer months. Lighthouses at South Stack, the Skerries and the beacons at Holyhead Harbour are features of the seascape at night.

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.

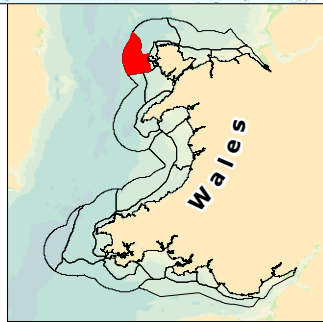
The second map shows sea visible from land, the warmer colours being areas of sea that are visible from more places on land. This comes from a national assessment of Wales so the results do not relate specifically to this MCA, whose boundary is overlaid for location only. The four individual versions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



- 08: 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)



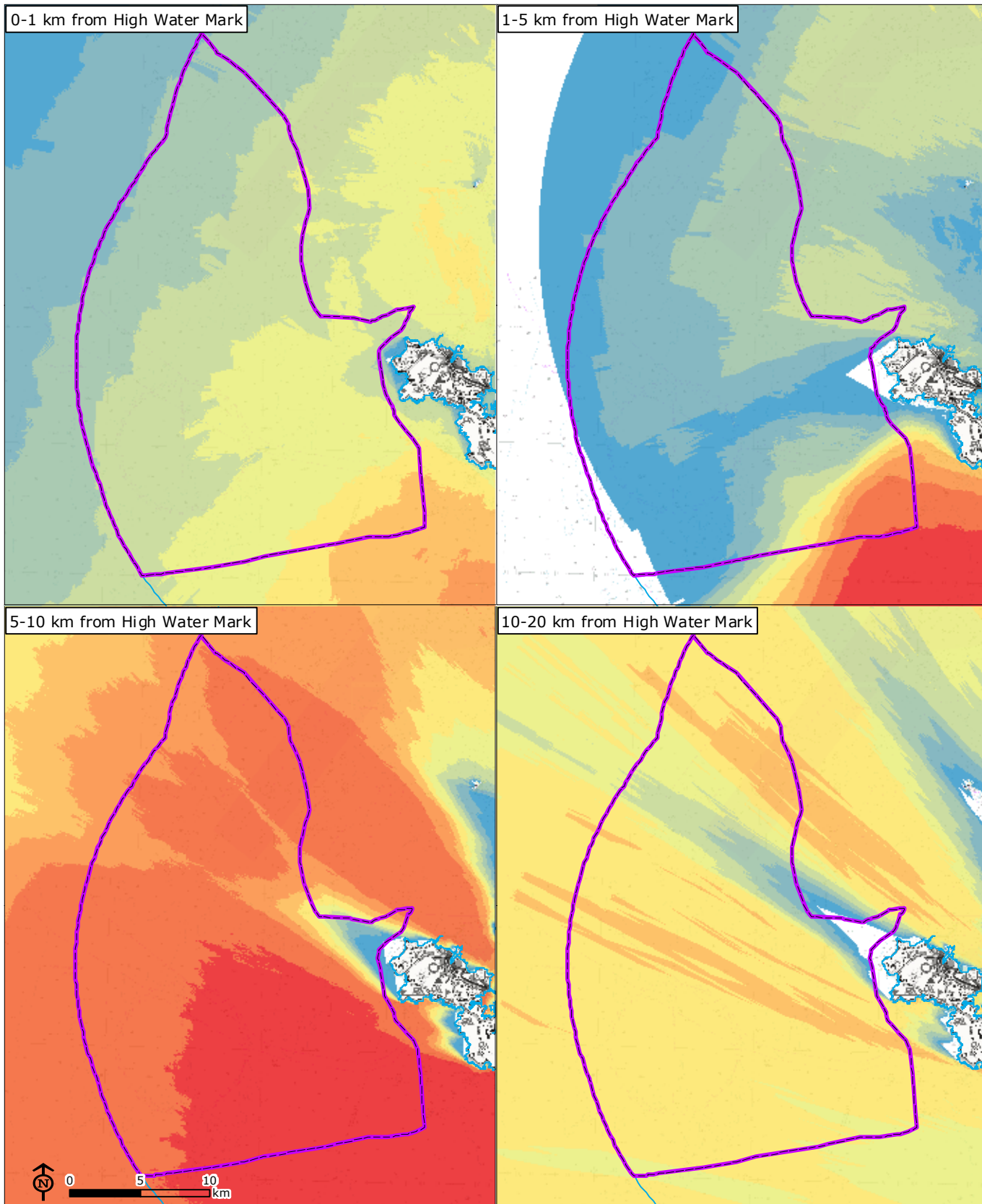
Wales National Seascape Assessment



**Land with Views of:
MCA 08: West Anglesey
Open Waters**

Source: LUC, NRW, OceanWise













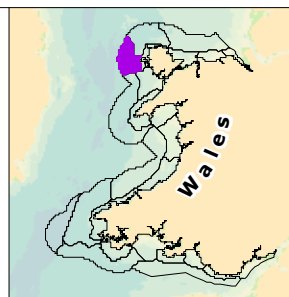
Map Scale @ A4: 1:400,000



-  08: West Anglesey Open Waters
-  Wales Inshore Marine Plan Area

Visibility of sea from land (percentile)

| | |
|--|--|
|  <10 (Lowest) |  51-60 |
|  11-20 |  61-70 |
|  21-30 |  71-80 |
|  31-40 |  81-90 |
|  41-50 |  91-100 (Highest) |



Wales National Seascape Assessment

Relative Visibility of the Sea Surface from Viewers on Land
MCA 08: West Anglesey Open Waters



Map Scale @ A4: 1:390,000