

South Wexford Coast

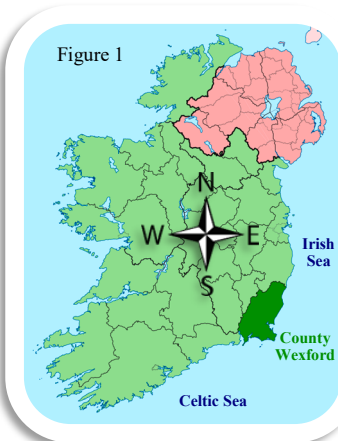
Marine Protected Areas

Introduction

This leaflet summarises the recent series of events that occurred aimed at establishing a network of Marine Protected Areas in Ireland with particular reference to the South Wexford Coast and its adjoining marine waters.

Where is the South Wexford Coast?

The South Wexford Coast is the south coast of



County Wexford an administrative area in the Sunny South East corner of the island of Ireland (Figure 1)¹ The county adjoins two seas: the east coast borders the Irish Sea, and the south coast borders the Celtic Sea. Carnsore Point, the south-eastern cornerstone of the

Emerald Isle, is the Irish landfall of the dividing line between these two marine waterbodies.

What is a Marine Protected Area (MPA)?

A MPA is “A geographically defined area of marine character or influence which is protected through legal means for the purpose of conservation of specified species, habitats or ecosystems and their associated ecosystem services and cultural values, and managed with the intention of achieving stated objectives over the long term.”²

How many MPAs does Ireland have?

None. None yet because enabling legislation has not been enacted. However, on 3 June 2011, Ireland transposed the European Union’s 2008 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) into domestic legislation via the European Communities (Marine Strategy Framework) Regulations 2011 (SI No 249 of 2011)³. These regulations state that, as protected areas, existing marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in effect even though they are not formally



Atlantic Puffin



Figure 2. Eight *de facto* MPAs on the South Wexford Coast.

recognised as such in law. In other words, they are *de facto* MPAs. Existing marine SACs and SPAs on the South Wexford Coast (Figure 2) are described⁴ and mapped⁵ by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and, a Fisheries Natura Risk Mitigation Plan to regulate scallop dredging and trawling in the Hook Head and the Saltee Islands protected areas was developed by the Marine Institute in consultation with local and national fisheries interests⁶.

Some milestones since 2011

2020 On 20 May 2020, the European Commission adopted the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030. That Strategy states that enlarging protected areas is “an economic imperative”, that 30% of the sea should be protected in the EU, and that 10% of EU sea should be “strictly protected”⁷.

In June 2020, Ireland failed to achieve the required Good Environmental Status in its waters by not passing tests regarding biodiversity, fish stocks (both fin fish and shellfish), and seabed integrity⁸.

Also in June 2020, in the Programme for Government, the coalition partners made the following commitment regarding Marine Protected Areas: “We will realise our outstanding target of 10% under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive as soon as is practical and aim for 30% of marine protected areas by 2030. This will be done on the basis of scientific expertise and in close consultation with all stakeholders, in particular the fishing industry, as well as environmental and community representatives.”⁹

2021 On 26 January 2021, the Government published the 336-page report of the advisory group convened to provide independent expert advice and recommendations regarding MPAs in Ireland². The report was open for consultation for five months. 2,311 submissions were received from



Grey Seal



Hook Head

Text and photos: Jim Hurley, SWC Promotions, Grange, Kilmore, Co Wexford Y35 YN35. Email: southwexfordcoast@gmail.com. Mobile: 086 163 7199.

Copies available as a PDF file from www.southwexfordcoast.com. Version date: October 2024. SWC Promotions: promoting the natural heritage resource values of the South Wexford Coast.



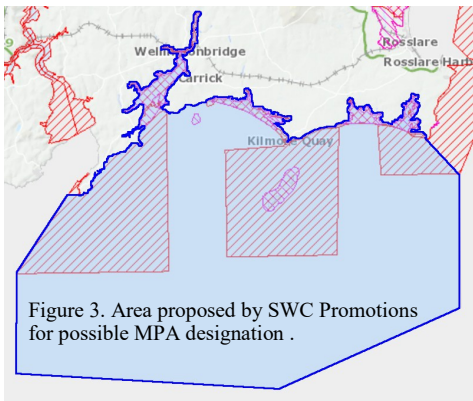


Figure 3. Area proposed by SWC Promotions for possible MPA designation .

members of the public and other stakeholders. The 2,311 submissions were sent to the RPS Group, a specialist company in the UK, for independent analysis. On 26 July 2021, in a submission regarding the above report, SWC Promotions proposed that an area approach be taken to any MPA designation on the South Wexford Coast regarding the cluster of existing SACs and SPAs (Figure 3)¹⁰.

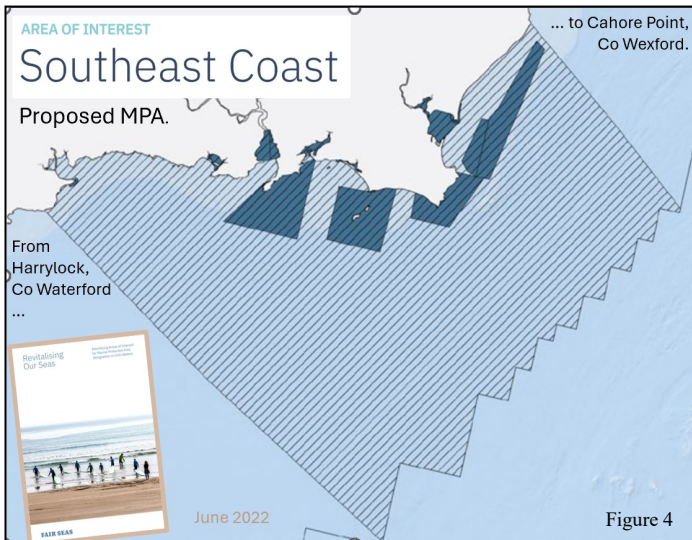


Figure 4

2022 On 31 March 2022, the report from the RPS Group was published by the Government; the report showed there was overwhelming support for MPAs¹¹.

In June 2022, in its publication *Revitalising Our Seas, Fair Seas*, a coalition of Ireland’s leading environmental non-governmental organisations and networks, identified a large area of the Southeast Coast an area of interest for MPA designation¹²(Figure 4).

On 13 June 2022, Elected Members of Wexford County Council adopted the Wexford County Development Plan 2022-2028 at a Special Meeting of the Council. The Plan came into effect on 25 July 2022. The Plan sets out the policies and objectives for the development of Marine Protected Areas over the plan period¹³.

In November 2022, the Joint Committee on

Environment and Climate Action launched its Report on Biodiversity. The report sets out 75 recommendations and highlights the need for prioritising the designation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) as well as the immediate development and implementation of management plans for existing and future designated MPAs to restore biodiversity and prevent further damage¹⁴.

On 5 August 2022, the government approved the General Scheme to Provide for Marine Protected Areas¹⁵ and on 16 December 2022, the government published the General Scheme of the Marine Protected Areas Bill 2022¹⁶.

2023 On 6 March 2023, a report by the European Environment Agency on progress made in the designation of new marine protected areas by Member States showed that Ireland had the lowest percentage of marine protected area coverage in the EU¹⁷.

Also in March 2023, the report of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was published. The 99 members of the Assembly agreed 159 recommendations. Recommendation No 105

stated: “*The State shall designate and effectively manage an ambitious network of Marine Protection Areas, in line with EU targets of 30% of Ireland’s Maritime Area, by 2030.*” Ninety-six of the 99 members supported that recommendation, two opposed, and one abstained¹⁸.



implement necessary conservation measures¹⁹.

On 14 December 2023, the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action published its report on the examination of the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly report on Biodiversity Loss. The Committee made 86 recommendations and conclusions across six key themes. Recommendation No 84 stated: “*The Committee recommends that legislation to designate Marine Protected Areas is progressed through the Oireachtas with urgency in line with EU targets to designate 30% of our waters (with 10% having the strictest protection) by 2030 and that appropriate resources are given for enforcement of such protection.*”²⁰

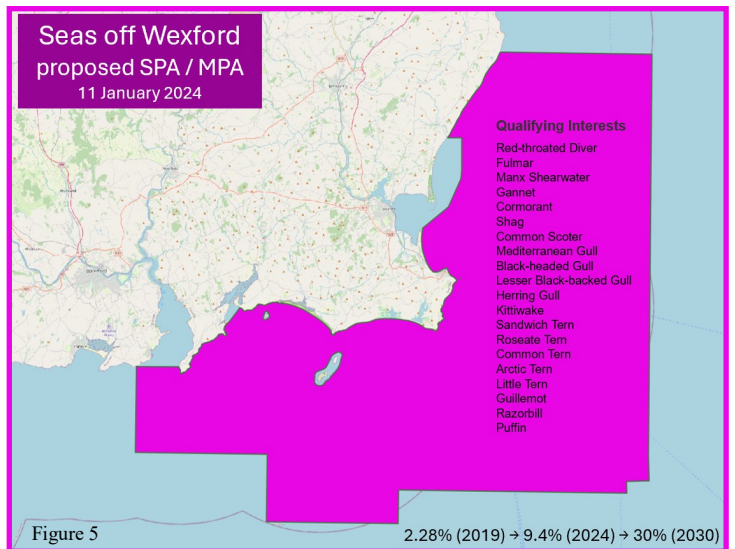


Figure 5

On 29 June 2023, Judgment of the Court (Second Chamber) in Case C-444/21, European Commission versus Ireland, regarding alleged failure of a Member State to fulfil obligations to protect biodiversity, the judgement handed down found that:

“*Ireland has failed to fulfil its obligations under Article 4(4) and Article 6(1) of the Habitats Directive.*” The specific failures were cited as failure to properly designate Natura 2000 sites (SACs and SPAs), failure to set site specific conservation objectives, and failure to

2024 On 11 January 2024, Minister for Heritage Malcolm Noonan T.D., announced his intention to designate the Seas off Wexford, a marine Special Protection Area (SPA) for 20 named species of marine birds. The SPA extended over 305,000 hectares making it the largest SPA in the history of the State (Figure 5)²¹.

On 17 June 2024, the EU Council adopted the Nature Restoration Law. The new law aims to restore 20% of damaged habitats, including marine habitats, by 2030 and all damaged habitats by 2050. Ireland is required to enact domestic legislation, and to draw up a National Restoration Plan to be submitted to the Commission within two years (mid-2026)²².

Saltee Islands



On 3 May 2024, a report regarding the Draft South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan for Offshore Renewable Energy was published. The report identified four areas off the southeast coast proposed as suitable for wind farming (Figure 6)²³.

On 27 June 2024, the Marine Protected Area Advisory Group published the results of its independent Ecological Sensitivity Analysis of the Celtic Sea requested by government to help inform the MPA selection process. The report highlighted areas of high ecological sensitivity, including

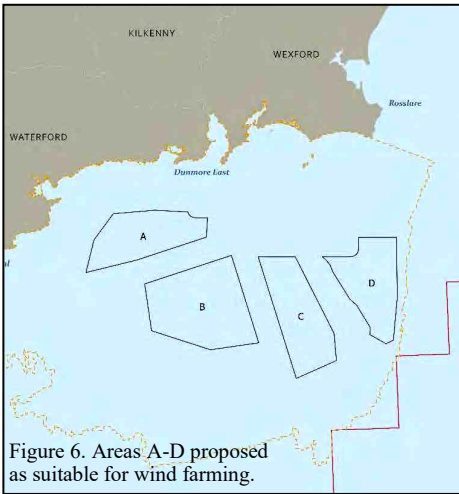


Figure 6. Areas A-D proposed as suitable for wind farming.

one off the South Wexford Coast (Figure 7). The report, its appendices, a summary of methods, and a link to an end of project webinar, held on 24 July 2024, are all available inline²⁴.

On 7 October 2024, the government launched the €25 million MPA LIFE project to develop a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Ireland's marine territory²⁵.

Sources and references

1. Map of Ireland sourced from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Wexford.
2. Expanding Ireland's Marine Protected Area Network <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/135a8-expanding-irelands-marine-protected-area-network/>.
3. 2011 Regulations <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2011/si/249/made/en/print>. See Article 12 (7)(a) and (7)(b).
4. Protected sites <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>.
5. SAC and SPA maps <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ed34d92e28040fd87d3d14f55d8d95f>.
6. Mitigation plan http://www.fishingnet.ie/media/fishingnet/content/fisheriesinnaturaareas/Natura%20Fisheries%20Risk%20Mitigation%20Plan_Scallop_Wexford_Final.pdf.
7. EU Biodiversity Strategy <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52020DC0380> page 4.
8. Good Environmental Status <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2fe6c-marine-strategy-framework-directive-200856ec-article-17-update-to-irelands-marine-strategy-part-1-assessment-article-8-determination-of-good-environmental-status-article-9-and-environmental-targets-article-10/>.
9. Programme for Government <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/?app=true> page 70.
10. SWC Promotions submission <https://www.southwexfordcoast.com/swcprom/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Proposed-South-Wexford-Coast-MPA.pdf>.
11. RPS report <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4acec-independent-analysis-and-report-on-marine-protected-area-mpa-public-consultation-submissions/>.
12. Revitalising Our Seas <https://fairseas.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/>
13. County Development Plan <https://consult.wexfordcoco.ie/en/consultation/wexford-county-development-plan-2022-2028>. Pages 504, 512-513, and 527-528.
14. Joint Committee report https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_environment_and_climate_action/reports/2022/2022-11-17_report-on-biodiversity-november-2022_en.pdf.
15. Government approval <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0bda2-approval-given-for-development-of-general-scheme-to-provide-for-marine-protected-areas/>.
16. Head of MPA Bill <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2fd71-general-scheme-of-marine-protected-areas-bill-2022/>.
17. EEA report <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/indicators/marine-protected-areas-in-europes-seas> Figure 2.
18. Citizens' Assembly https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content/uploads/Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf page 126.
19. EU Court <https://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=275028&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=324932>.
20. Oireachtas Joint Committee https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_environment_and_climate_action/reports/2023/2023-12-14_report-on-the-examination-of-recommendations-of-the-citizens-assembly-report-on-biodiversity-loss_en.pdf page 46.
21. Seas off Wexford <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/6837d-minister-noonan-announces-seas-off-wexford-irelands-largest-special-protection-area-for-seabirds/> and <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/spa/004237>.
22. Nature Restoration Law <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/PE-74-2023-INIT/en/pdf>.
23. Wind farming <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/72a5c-south-coast-designated-maritime-area-plan-for-offshore-renewable-energy/?referrer=https://www.gov.ie/southcoastmap/> Figure 1 on page 17.
24. Ecological Sensitivity Analysis <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/03ccc-ecological-sensitivity-analysis-of-the-celtic-sea/>.
25. LIFE project <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/0511f-minister-noonan-announces-25-million-investment-for-the-development-of-protected-areas-for-marine-biodiversity/> and <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/LIFE22-IPE-IE-MPA-LIFE-IRELAND-101103680/mpa-life-ireland>.

-o0o-

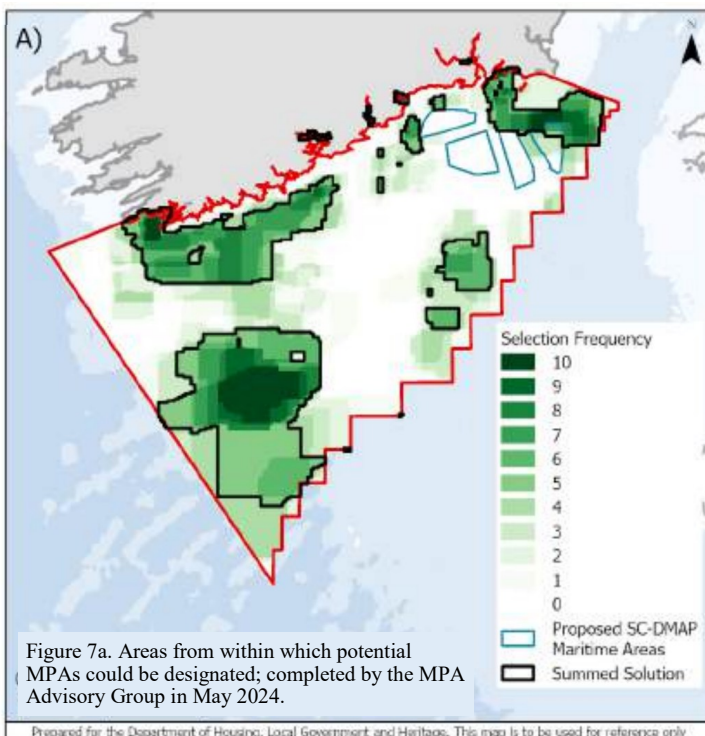


Figure 7a. Areas from within which potential MPAs could be designated; completed by the MPA Advisory Group in May 2024.

Prepared for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This map is to be used for reference only

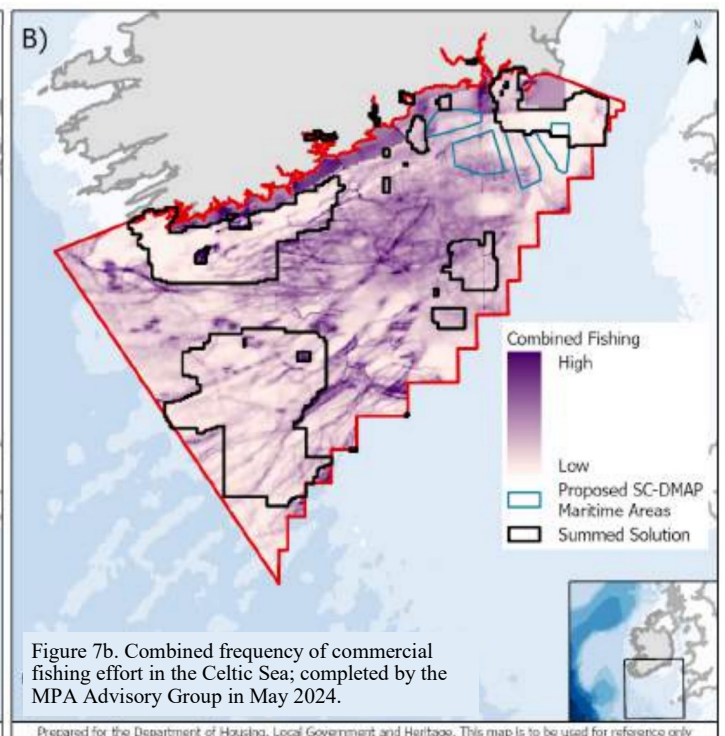


Figure 7b. Combined frequency of commercial fishing effort in the Celtic Sea; completed by the MPA Advisory Group in May 2024.

Prepared for the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This map is to be used for reference only

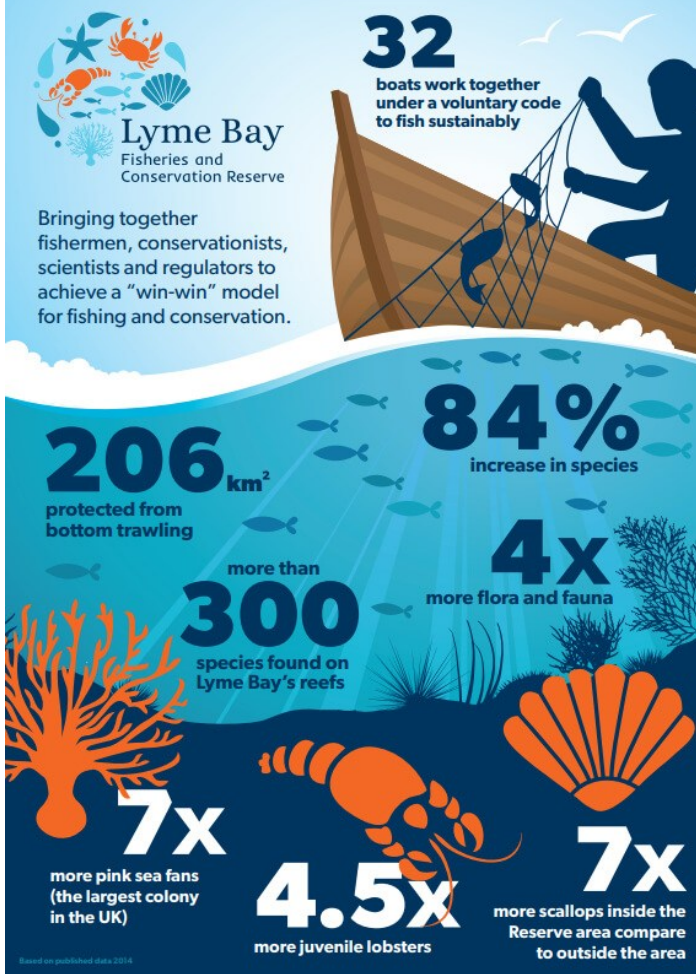
Nature conservation

SWC Promotions



Promoting the South West Coast

Lyme Bay MPA



While there are no designated Marine Protected Areas in Ireland yet, it is estimated that there are 18,868 MPAs worldwide (Source: <https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/marine-protected-areas>).

In Britain there are currently 371 sites that come under the Marine Protected Areas umbrella. These areas cover 38% of UK seas (Source: <https://www.mcsuk.org/>).

Coming late to the MPA process, Ireland is well placed to learn from mistakes made elsewhere and to embrace best practice from around the world.

Lyme Bay MPA is regarded as one of the model MPAs for both fishing and nature conservation.

The Lyme Bay Fisheries and Conservation Reserve in the south of England is located in the English Channel between Dorset and Devon and was designated an MPA in 2010. 120km of coastline and 2460 km² of the bay are a protected area, a shared space where fishers aim to promote nature conservation and not to damage the seabed while making a sustainable living.

For further information about the Lyme Bay MPA, videos, links, and downloads go to <https://www.lymebayreserve.co.uk/>. And to read or download a 25-page guide to how the Lyme Bay MPA was established and is managed go to <https://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BLUEPrint-for-MPAs-Case-Study-Lyme-Bay-.pdf>.

-o0o-

To get the latest news on the evolving MPA process in Ireland keep in touch with the MPA webpage on the government website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/e00ec-marine-protected-areas/#current-and-next-steps>.

Legend

1. Red fill = *de facto* MPAs (government area of existing and proposed SACs and SPAs).
2. Blue fill = four areas identified by government as suitable for wind farming.
3. Area edged green = identified by the MPA Advisory Group.
4. Area hatched blue = proposed by the Fair Seas coalition.
5. Area edged yellow = proposed by SWC Promotions.

Note. The areas numbered 3, 4, and 5 are indicative areas from within which a potential MPAs could be designated.

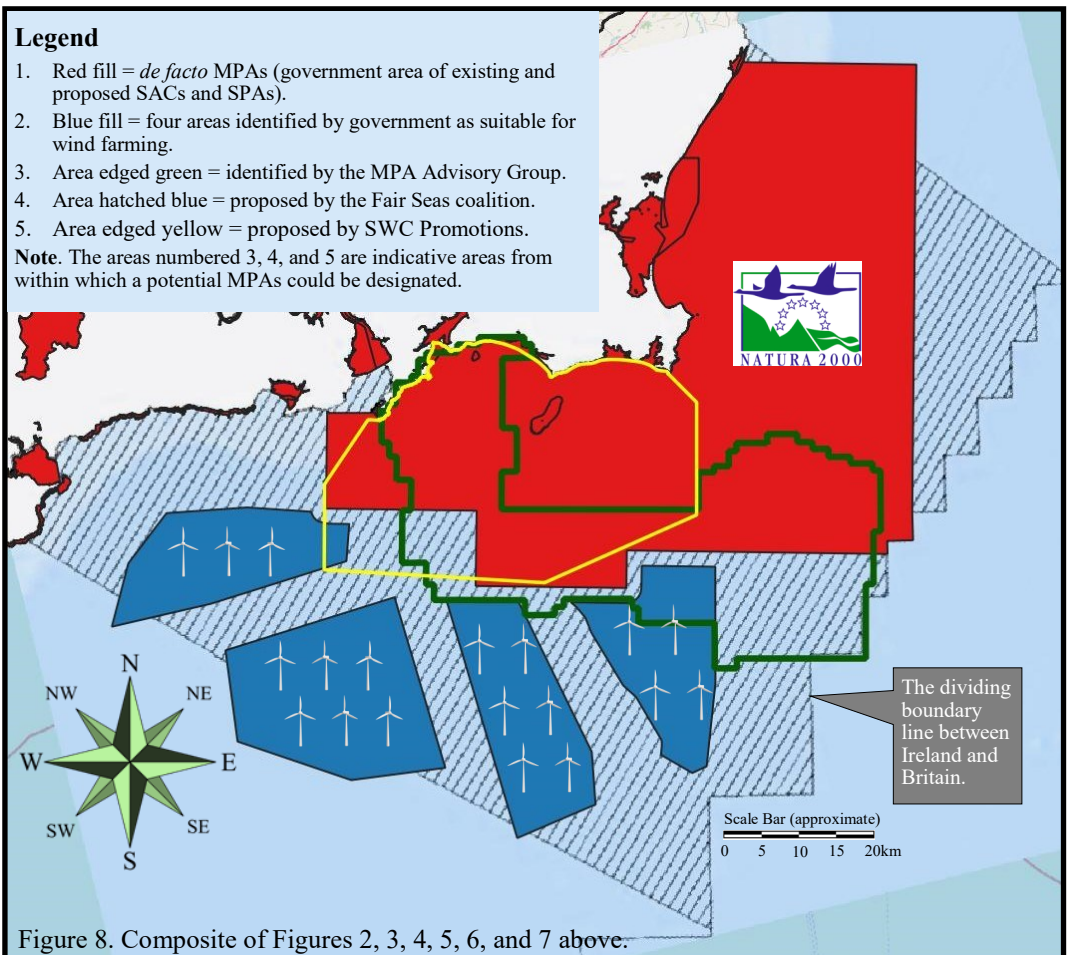


Figure 8. Composite of Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 above.