

# English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark

## Marine User Policy

January 2022

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## Mission Statement

*The English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark is one of Earth’s extraordinary places covering the whole of the unitary authority of Torbay. The Geopark, incorporating the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, celebrates, conserves, enhances, and protects the unique and diverse culture, heritage, and environment of this naturally inspiring area of South Devon. Working with multiple partners it is a driver for education, expansion of the tourism offer, and sympathetic regeneration through sustainable social and economic development. It enriches the lives and supports the development and well-being of the local community. The Geopark aims to reconnect human society at all levels to the local area, to the wider environment and to celebrate how Torbay’s 400-million-year long history has shaped every aspect of our lives and our societies and informs the future.*

## Background

The Geopark has an amazing diversity of marine life, the sheltered limestone and sandstone shores, internationally recognised geology and warm climate provide a home to an exceptional array of species. Torbay has been described as “the jewel in South Devon’s

crown” for marine wildlife. The boundary of the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark can be seen in Appendix 1.

The waters of Torbay are covered by two statutory international designations:

- **Lyme Bay and Torbay Special Area of Conservation (SAC)** – located between Mackerel Cove and Dartmouth. Designated to protect reefs and 85 sea caves which are of international importance. Surfaces and walls inside the caves are home to a variety of delicate sponges, bryozoan crusts, pink sea fingers, anemones and cup corals. The SAC carries no statutory protection, it is covered by the SSSI national legislation, as well as certain regulations under the Marine Conservation Zone.
- **Torbay Marine Conservation Zone (MZC)** – located between Oddicombe Beach and Sharkham Point. Designated to protect important, rare or threatened marine wildlife and habitats. The MCZ habitats support razor clams, sponges, sea squirts, seaweeds and seagrass beds. Seagrasses are the world’s oldest flowering plants with dark green, long, narrow, ribbon-shaped leaves and are the only flowering plant that is able to live in seawater and pollinate whilst submerged. The nationally rare long-snouted seahorse also inhabits the seagrass beds in Torbay.

In addition, many of the cliffs and slopes fall within Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGs) designated areas.

Torbay also has Britain’s only underwater nature reserve, Saltern Cove which extends 376m beyond low water mark which is also designated as a SSSI.

All these designations are integral to the UNESCO Global Geopark Designation. Our marine environments are sensitive to climate change and can be impacted by human activities. The Geopark and its Partners will have a range of environmental impacts both on the land and marine environments.

Impacts on the marine environment are caused by:

- Fuel use for marine vessels
- Fuel leaks and spillages
- Litter
- Anchor damage
- Discarded nets and fishing tackle
- Disturbance of marine wildlife
- Damage to sensitive environments
- The purchasing of products i.e., single use packaging.
- Agricultural and urban run-off

The impact of the above are:

- High carbon emissions
- A range of harmful pollutants that are deteriorating our local air and water quality

- Increased a range and number of health-related problems
- Loss of biodiversity
- Land and sea pollution.

The way we manage the land or sea can negatively impact it and contribute to the climate and ecological emergency we face. Marine practices such as anchoring/mooring, travelling at high speeds, abrasion, disturbance, spread of invasive species and pollution can negatively affect local marine life and alter feeding and breeding sites. In some cases, this can lead to a dramatic decline in the local population. The same can happen when local habitats are regularly disturbed by users. It is for this reason that there are a number of pieces of legislation, nationally and locally that are designed to protect our terrestrial and marine environments.

## Aims

This Policy aims to:

- Ensure all Geopark Partners understand the importance of the Marine Environment and its contribution to the designation
- To educate Partners and other users on appropriate ways to enjoy and use the marine environment which do not damage the fragile ecosystem and wildlife and promotes safe and respectful use.
- Ensure all partners and other users are aware of how the environment is managed and reporting mechanisms.
- Enable the Geopark and its partners to lead by example and reduce environmental impacts.

## Scope

This policy applies to all Geopark employees, the Geopark Management Group and all partner organisations staff. It covers core activities. It also applies to partner activity where behaviour can be influenced through the membership schemes.

All Geopark Partners and Associate Partners must comply with this policy in order to retain their status as a partner.

## Statutory Requirements

It must be noted that the UNESCO Global Geopark status imposes no additional legislation over and above that which already exists. However, the following marine related legislation is relevant to this policy and as such all Geopark Partners must adhere to this legislation:

- **Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (as amended) 2017**. - The mechanism through which the EU Habitats and Species Directive is implemented in the UK. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-habitats-regulations-2017)
- **The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (COHSR) - from 12 to 200 nautical miles** - This implements the species protection requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations offshore (more than 12 nautical miles from the coast).  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1013/regulation/55](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1013/regulation/55)
- **Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009** - The creation of Marine Conservation Zones to ensure important areas are protected, creation of marine planning system where certain marine activities require a licence. Plus, the creation of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities who manage fishing activities to ensure sustainable fisheries and protection of the marine environment  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/section/292](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/23/section/292)
- **Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended) 1981** - the principal act relating to the protection of wildlife in Great Britain. Most of the marine wildlife you will see around the UK are protected by law.

**Marine animals protected by this legislation include:**

- Birds
- Cetaceans (dolphins, porpoises and whales)
- Seals
- Turtles
- Sharks, Skates and Rays
- Seahorses
- **Invertebrates:** pink sea fan, startlet sea anemone, lvell's sea anemone, marine hydroid, northern hatchet shell, trembling sea matt, tentacled lagoon worm, lagoon sand shrimp, De Folin's lagoon snail, lagoon sea slug, lagoon sand worm, fan mussel. [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69)
- **Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996** - An Act to make provision for the protection of wild mammals from certain cruel acts; and for connected purposes.  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/3/section/2](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/3/section/2)
- **Conservation of Seals Act 1970**  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals)
- **Conservation of Seal (England) Order 1999**  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals)
- **Seal Product Regulations 2021**  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protected-marine-species/seals)
- **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006** – places a duty on public authorities to have regard to conserving biodiversity in the exercise of their functions.  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents?text=%22Natural%20Environment%20and%20Rural%20Communities%20Act%202006%22](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents?text=%22Natural%20Environment%20and%20Rural%20Communities%20Act%202006%22)

- **The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL)**  
- the main international convention covering prevention of pollution of the marine environment by ships.

[www.imo.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/ConferencesMeetings/Pages/Marpol.aspx](http://www.imo.org/en/KnowledgeCentre/ConferencesMeetings/Pages/Marpol.aspx)

## Principles

The Geopark partners will work towards protecting and enhancing the marine environment. Marine Users will:

### 1. **Protect and enhance the natural environment**

As a minimum requirement, comply with all relevant legislation. We will work to ensure local biological and geological diversity is not adversely affected. We will ensure that there is an understanding of the impacts that our activities on land and sea can have on the environment and establish actions and targets to reduce the negative impact of these activities.

We will promote relevant local environmental information to our members such as the location of no anchor zones and sensitive habitats/species.

### 2. **Protect marine wildlife**

We will work to understand the Geopark and its Partners impacts on marine wildlife. We require all partners to comply with relevant legislation and operate in a way which does not have an adverse effect on local marine wildlife. Geopark marine partners will provide their clients with information about the legal protection of wildlife and the impacts, pressures, threats and conservation issues relevant to the Geopark.

### 3. **Protect marine habitats**

We will work to understand the Geopark and its Partners impacts on marine habitats. We will support Partners to ensure their activities do not have an adverse effect on local marine habitats including feeding and breeding sites and protected sites. Geopark marine partners will provide their clients with information about the legal protection of marine habitats and the impacts, pressures, threats and conservation issues relevant to the Geopark.

### 4. **Be respectful of other users**

The Geopark and Partners will ensure their practices and engagement with other users promotes safe and respectful behaviour within this shared environment.

### 5. **Reduce energy and carbon emissions**

We will work to understand the Geopark and its Partners energy use and reduce carbon dioxide emissions arising from activities including using energy efficiently, renewable and clean energy generation (where possible) and through staff behavioural initiatives.

## **6. Minimise waste**

We will minimise operational waste that arises across the business through waste reduction, reuse, recycling and staff and visitors behavioural change initiatives. Including encouraging the responsible disposal of all waste on land and not at sea.

Encourage the recycling of marine equipment through partners and recycling schemes.

## **7. Reduce pollution on land and at sea.**

We will cut harmful pollutants and carbon emissions by adopting less polluting, more sustainable modes of travel on land via walking, cycling, public transport and ultra-low emission vehicles. Ultra-low emission marine vehicles will also be encouraged [required by 2030].

## **8. Use sustainable resources**

We will reduce the environmental impact of services through making sustainable choices on the goods and services provided, including encouraging the banning of all single use plastic where feasible.

# **Important information to ensure adherence to this policy**

### **Torbay Marine Conservation Zone:**

- To protect seagrass beds, adhere to the Torbay Harbour Authority “No Anchor” zones (Appendix 2).
- Keep to designated speed limits.
- Do not travel at more than 5 knots over the zones at risk from high speeds at low water indicated on the seagrass fact sheet  
[www.tor-bay-harbour.co.uk/media/1017/seagrass-map.pdf](http://www.tor-bay-harbour.co.uk/media/1017/seagrass-map.pdf)
- Do not exceed 4 knots when close to shorelines and banks as your wake can disturb wildlife and erode habitats.
- If you are snorkelling & diving around seagrass it's important that users ensure seagrass and seahorses are not harmed or disturbed. Ensure your diving equipment is tucked away and your arms and legs do not dangle down onto or drag through the seagrass.
- Intentionally disturbing seahorses without a wildlife licence is an offence.

### **Lyme Bay and Torbay Special Area of Conservation:**

- Familiarise yourself with the locations of the SAC reefs and caves (Appendix 2 - Magic Maps 1-4).
- Avoid anchoring and propeller wash where the reefs are located.
- If entering sea caves take care not to trample, disturb or remove sensitive marine life in these areas.

## Boating

- Adhere to the Green Blue boating guidance documents  
[www.thegreenblue.org.uk/resources/boat-user-resources/green-guides-to-boating/](http://www.thegreenblue.org.uk/resources/boat-user-resources/green-guides-to-boating/)
- If relevant at least one person in your organisation must attend the WiSe training scheme – the UK's national training scheme for minimising disturbance to marine wildlife [www.wisescheme.org](http://www.wisescheme.org)

## Marine Wildlife:

- **Slow Down** - Slow to a no wake speed (less than 5 knots) when you spot wildlife in the distance or if wildlife approach you. This also helps you to reduce your fuel consumption and noise levels.
- **Keep Quiet** - Lower voices and turn off any music, if you have them, think about engine/ propeller noise and echo sounds – consider sound levels and aim to keep levels constant, sound can be heard over longer distances on open water and many animals have more sensitive hearing than humans.
- **Reduce Your Wash** - Keep to designated speed limits. If in doubt, don't exceed 4 knots when close to shorelines and banks as your wake can disturb wildlife and erode habitats.
- **Distance** - Keep 100m from wildlife in and on the water or on cliffs, beaches and rocky outcrops where wildlife might be feeding, resting or breeding. Use binoculars to get a better view. Ensure wildlife does not get surrounded. Keep away if there are other boats in the area.
- **Direction of Travel** - Keep a consistent course when you spot wildlife in or on the water to avoid collisions. Changes in direction make you unpredictable and difficult for wildlife to know which direction to go in order to avoid your boat. Never approach wildlife from directly behind or in front as this is interpreted as predatory or aggressive, causing stress to wildlife.
- **Highly Sensitive Areas** - Avoid highly sensitive areas such as breeding sites or large groups of animals.
- **Groups of wildlife** - Never travel through rafts of birds on the water or groups of animals such as dolphins, whales and seals which allows them to stay together as you found them and does not separate mothers from their young.
- **Never follow, chase or feed marine life**

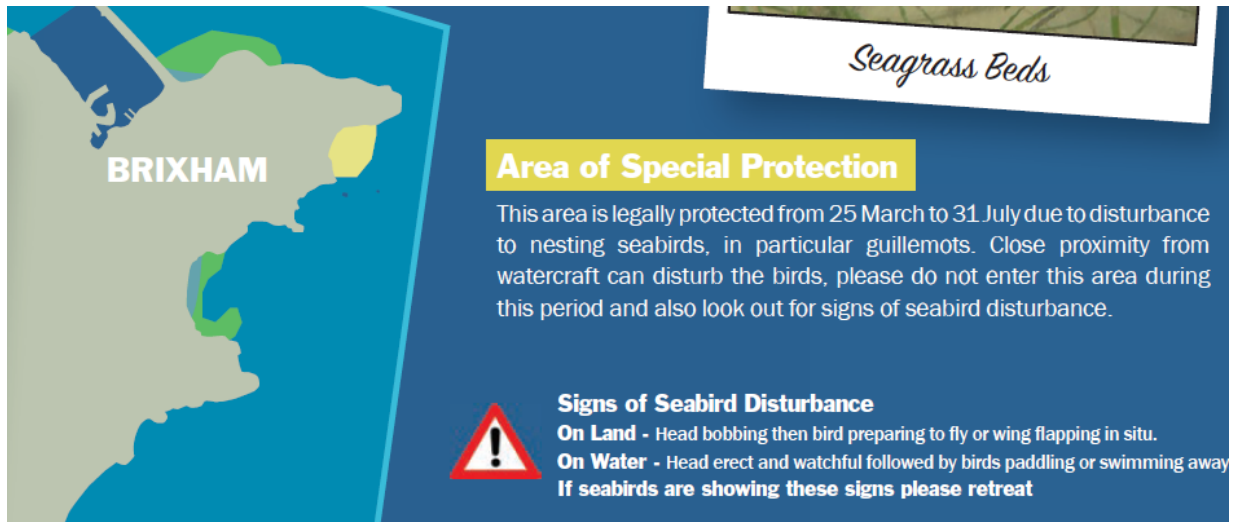
More information on marine wildlife observation can be viewed at

[www.marinedevelopments.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/02/observing-marine-wildlife-safely/](http://www.marinedevelopments.blog.gov.uk/2020/06/02/observing-marine-wildlife-safely/)  
[www.gov.uk/government/news/boat-operators-reminded-of-rules-on-protected-marine-mammals](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/boat-operators-reminded-of-rules-on-protected-marine-mammals)



### Berry Head Restrictions:

- The cliffs to the south of Berry Head are home to nesting seabirds which are legally protected from disturbance under the Wildlife and Countryside Act – it is a statutory requirement that boats stay out of the area of special protection between the 25th March and 31st July.



Other marine code of conduct resources:

[www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk/on-the-sea/](http://www.cornwallmarinelifecode.org.uk/on-the-sea/)

[www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/marine-code-of-conduct/](http://www.seawatchfoundation.org.uk/marine-code-of-conduct/)

## Management and Reporting

The management of the marine areas within Torbay is undertaken by the [Torbay Harbour Authority](#), Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority ([www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk](http://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk)), the [Environment Agency](#), and the [Marine Management Organisation](#) (MMO).

If a user witnesses an incident within the marine areas, they should be reported as follows:

- Species persecution or wildlife infringements: If you witness a suspected wildlife crime in action call 999 immediately. In all other instances call the non-emergency number 101 or use the [online 101 reporting form](#) Or call [Crimestoppers](#) on 0800 555 111.
- Marine animal in distress/stranded or need of immediate help: [British Divers Marine Life Rescue](#) Rescue Hotline: 01825 765546 (BDMLR have a rehab facility in Cornwall) and report strandings to Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme <http://ukstrandings.org/>

- Fisheries offences: Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority on 01803 854648 or on the Duty Phone 07740 175479.
- Poaching and pollution: Environment Agency through the incident hotline 0800 807060
- Water safety, speed limits, issues related to harbours: Torbay Harbour Authority by phone on 01803 208443 or email [harbour.authority@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:harbour.authority@torbay.gov.uk)

## Document Management

This policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. This policy has been approved by the Geopark Management Group.

Partners will be notified of any changes to the policy, and the implications of any such changes.

Date	Version	Reason	Changed by	Review due	Date approved by GMG
January 2022	1.1	New document created	Melanie Border	January 2027	

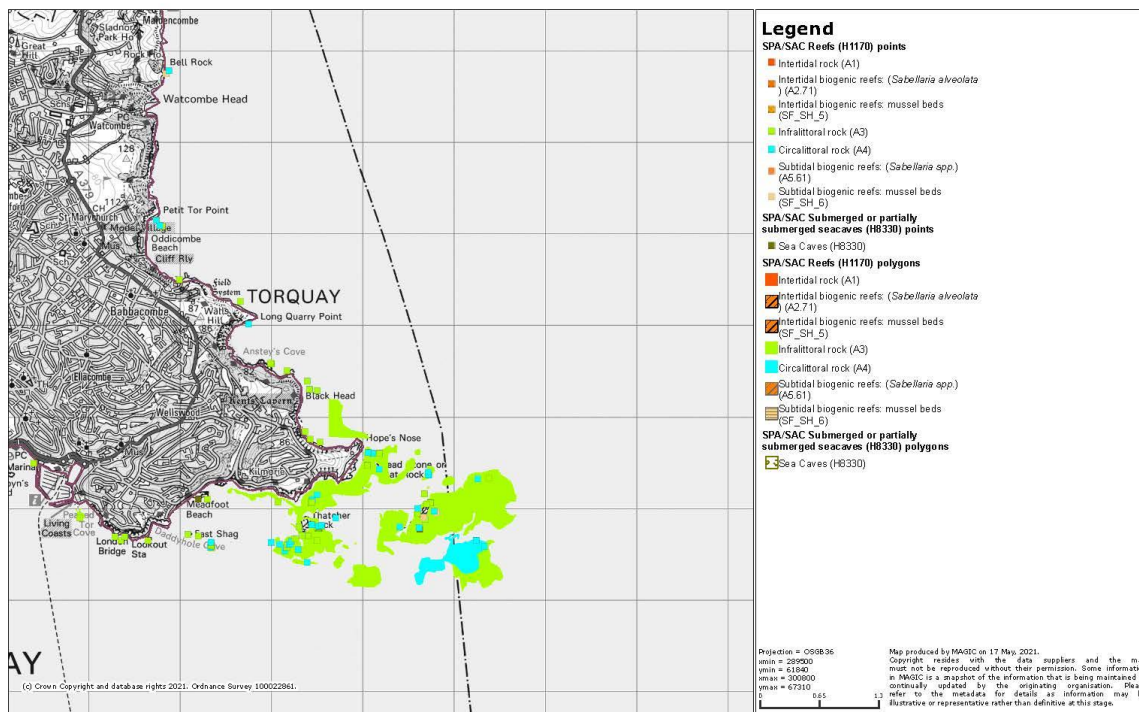
## Appendix 1 – Geopark Boundary



## Appendix 2 Magic Maps

MAGiC

Torquay



MAGiC

Torquay 2

