

Revitalising Our Seas

Identifying Areas of Interest
for Marine Protected Area
Designation in Irish Waters



FAIR SEAS

AREA OF INTEREST

Southeast Coast

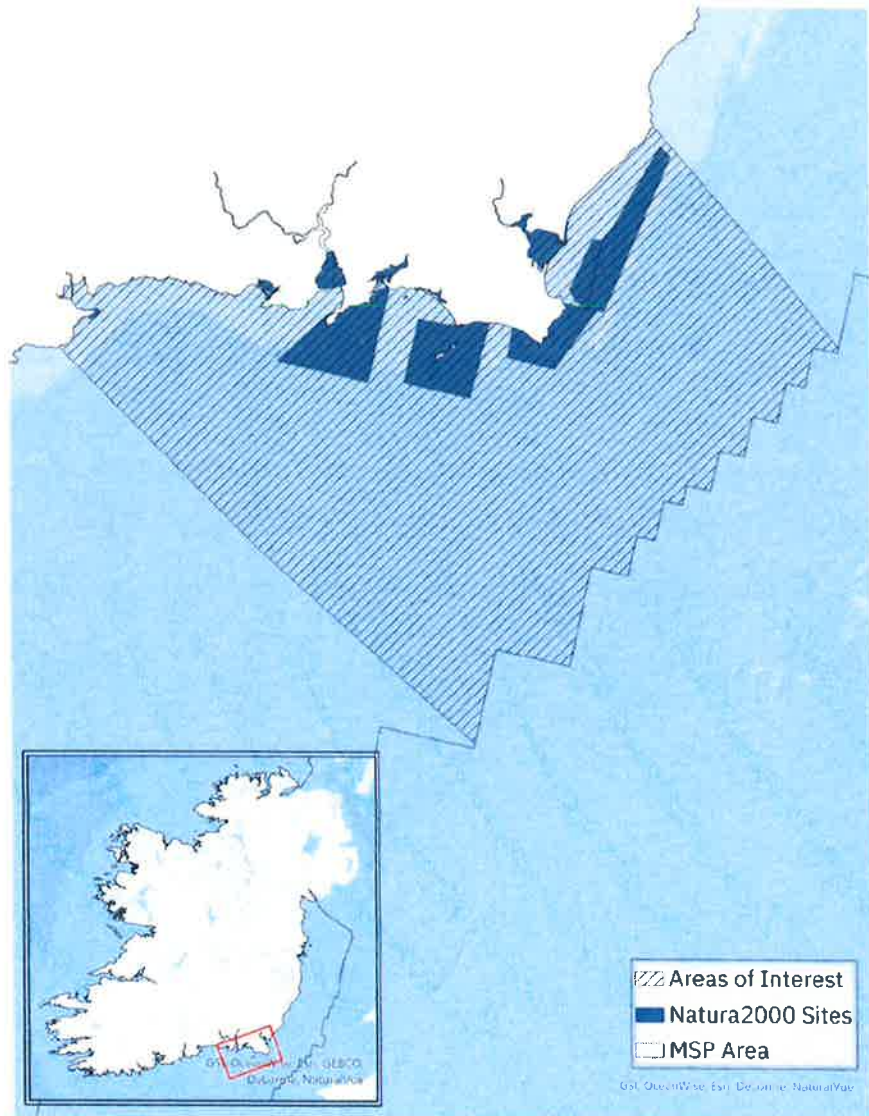
2.9

Qualifying Interests

- **Seabed features of conservation importance** *Laminaria spp.*
- **Cetaceans** Fin whale, Risso's dolphin, harbour porpoise
- **Elasmobranchs** Spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*), thornback ray (*Raja clavata*), tope (*Galeorhinus galeus*)
- **Commercially Exploited Species** Herring, cod, haddock, whiting
- **Birds: Breeding** Fulmar, puffin, guillemot, razorbill, black guillemot, kittiwake, black-headed gull, herring gull, lesser black-backed gull, great black-backed gull, little gull, Mediterranean gull, Leach's storm-petrel, European storm-petrel, Manx shearwater, great skua, Arctic tern, common tern, roseate tern, Sandwich tern, little tern, cormorant, shag, gannet
- **Birds: Frequent non-breeding** Arctic skua
- **Birds: Infrequent non-breeding** Balearic shearwater, Cory's shearwater, great shearwater, sooty shearwater, Sabine's gull, Wilson's storm-petrel, pomarine skua, long-tailed skua, black tern

Spatial Extent
7,124km² **1.46%**
of Maritime Area

Figure 2.9.1: Southeast Coast Area of Interest, MSP = Marine Spatial Planning Assessment Area, i.e. Ireland's Maritime Area



N	Southeast Coast	Map Date 08/04/2020	7124km ² 1.46%	Scale: 1:100,000
	Data Sources: Fair Seas, NPWS	Copyright: OceanWise, Esri, DeLorme, NaturalVue		

EUNIS Level 3 Habitat Type	Habitat as % of Total AOI Area
Deep circalittoral sand	37%
Deep circalittoral coarse sediment	31%
Circalittoral rock and other hard substrata	7%
Circalittoral coarse sediment	6%
Circalittoral fine sand or circalittoral muddy sand	6%
Deep circalittoral mud	4%
Unclassified	3%
Other	4%

Table 2.9.1: Main broad-scale seabed habitat types covered within Southeast Coast AOI



Carnivan Bay,
Co. Wexford

“Areas south of Hook Head and towards the UK border showed high elasmobranch species richness with nine species recorded in several areas.”

Primary Reasons for Site Importance

There is a 130km long and 20km wide cod spawning ground running parallel to the south coast, which is one of only two cod spawning grounds in Irish waters. Between 2005-2021 16% of fin whale sightings within Ireland's EEZ occurred within this site, accounting for 14% of the overall total number of individuals (n=6,123). Fourteen percent of Risso's dolphin sightings occurred within this site, accounting for 10% of the overall total number of individuals (n=3,904). Four percent of harbour porpoise sightings occurred within this site, accounting for 3% of the overall total number of individuals (n=20,263). Seabirds with colonies on the east coast of Ireland, as well as the coast of Wales and Cornwall in England depend on this area for vital foraging during chick-rearing. The majority of the newly arrived Mediterranean gull breeding occurs here at Lady's Island Lake, which is also a hotspot for terns and black-headed gulls.

Description of Features

Commercially exploited species

Several commercially exploited species use this area as spawning and/or nursing grounds, including herring, cod, haddock and whiting (see Annex E). While there is currently no evidence of spawning site fidelity for sprat, high catches of juveniles are observed in groundfish surveys in this area (Marine Institute, 2021). A large proportion of sprat landings are from in and around the Waterford Estuary (Marine Institute, 2021). Protection of sprat is important, as it is a primary food source for many seabirds and cetaceans.

Elasmobranchs

Areas south of Hook Head and towards the UK border showed high elasmobranch species richness with nine species recorded in several areas. Spurdog, thornback ray and tope occur in high densities in this area. An average 11 individuals of tope were caught in groundfish survey hauls off the coast of Wexford, which is one of the highest densities in the country (see Annex F).

Habitats

The seabed in this Area of Interest is very diverse, consisting of roughly equal parts of sand and coarse sediment, with muddy patches and rocky substrate also present. Circalittoral rock is present from the coastline out to 4.5 nm. Large parts of these rocky areas occur in existing SACs, especially Hook Head SAC and the Saltee Islands SAC. In the shallow parts of these areas large kelp forests are known to exist, while deeper areas are characterised by sponge and sea squirt communities (NPWS, 2014; NPWS, 2013).

Seabirds

This Area of Interest is a true hotspot of seabird activity, with 34 of the 38 total number of species identified within the explored data occurring in this region. The highest level of species richness occurs in this area, with 28 different species recorded at at least one point in time off Carnsore Point in Wexford, which is a major migration bottleneck. The Seatrack migration survey (Keogh et al., 2014) recorded approximately 43,000 birds over a four-year period (2010-2103) with consistently high diversity each year (21-23 species present). Several key colonies exist within this Area of Interest. Internationally important colonies of roseate terns and Sandwich terns are located at Lady's Island Lake. The Saltees Islands host large colonies of gannets, guillemots,

razorbills, puffins, kittiwakes, and cormorants. A large gannet colony lies just across the border in Wales (Grassholm).

Cetaceans

High cetacean species diversity was recorded in this area generally at lower densities for most species compared to other sites. High densities (1.51/100km²) of fin whales were recorded close to the coast, observed during every month except March and April. High densities of Risso's dolphins (1.04/100km²) were recorded off Carnsore Point, particularly in the summer months.

Moderate to high densities (1.08/100km²) of harbour porpoise are distributed adjacent to the coast. Presence recorded year-round with greater sightings during January, July and November. Moderate densities (0.95/100km²) of minke whale were recorded in this site compared to other sites, with high concentrations recorded off Helvick Head. Presence was observed year-round with the exception of February.

Lower densities (1.24/100km²) of bottlenose dolphins compared to other sites, with occasional sightings throughout the year. Sightings were made from February to November with higher sightings during summer months. Lower densities (0.28/100km²) of humpback whales compared to sites further west, with concentrations recorded outside Waterford Harbour, and sightings records peaking in January (see Annex C).

Killer whales were sighted on a small number of occasions (n=4). Common dolphins were abundant throughout the site. Six percent of common dolphin sightings within Ireland's EEZ occurred within this site, accounting for 3% of the overall total number of individuals (n=296,489) recorded from 2005-2021.

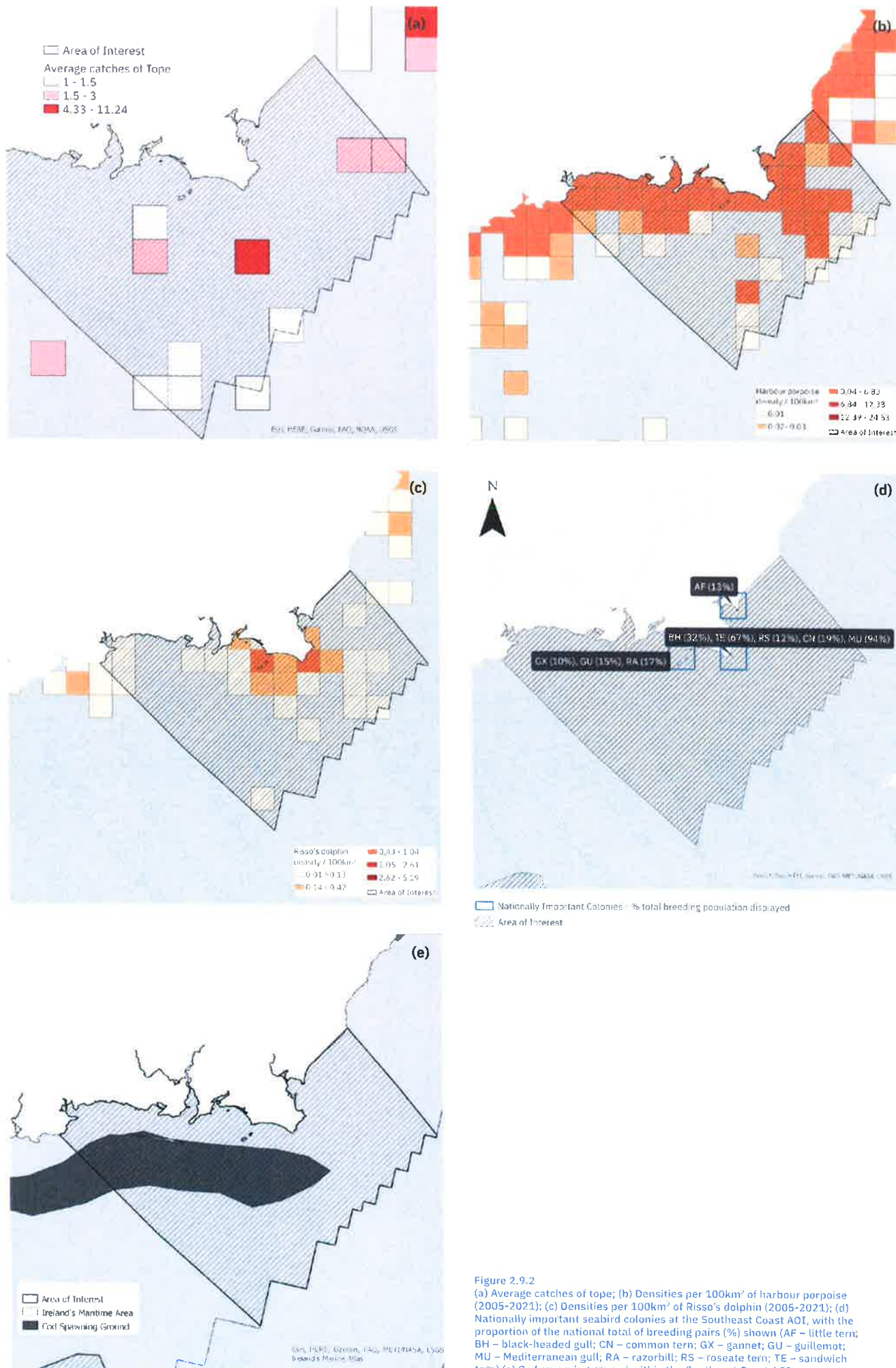


Figure 2.9.2 (a) Average catches of tope; (b) Densities per 100km² of harbour porpoise (2005-2021); (c) Densities per 100km² of Risso's dolphin (2005-2021); (d) Nationally important seabird colonies at the Southeast Coast AOI, with the proportion of the national total of breeding pairs (%) shown (AF – little tern; BH – black-headed gull; CN – common tern; GX – gannet; GU – guillemot; MU – Mediterranean gull; RA – razorbill; RS – roseate tern; TE – sandwich tern) (e) Cod spawning ground within the Southeast Coast AOI