

## Coastal Designations Explained

The Dorset coast and inshore waters are protected by a range of environmental designations. Dorset Coast Forum have provided below simple definitions and examples for the international and national designations that apply to the Dorset coast.

### Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

MPAs are places at sea which have management measures in place. JNCC defines MPAs as 'a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values'. In the UK there are several types of MPA giving different levels of protection:

- Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Ramsar Sites
- Marine Nature Reserves

More information on MPAs can be found on the [JNCC website](#).

### Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are a type of Marine Protected Area (MPA), designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. MCZs differ from other UK MPAs in that they consider social and economic impacts during the selection and designation of sites. For more information on MCZs visit the [JNCC website](#).

Current MCZs in Dorset:

- [Chesil Beach and Stennis Ledges](#)
- [South Dorset](#)
- [Poole Rocks](#)

### Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

SACs are designated under the EC Habitats Directive; they are areas which have been identified as best representing the range and variety within the European Union of habitats and (non-bird) species listed on Annexes I and II to the Directive. SACs in terrestrial areas and territorial marine waters out to 12 nautical miles are designated under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). More information is available on the [JNCC website](#).

In Dorset SACs include:

- [Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs](#)
- [Studland to Portland](#)
- [Sidmouth to West Bay](#)
- [Dorset Heaths & Studland Dunes](#)

## Special Protections Areas (SPAs)

SPAs are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable and for regularly occurring migratory species. More information can be found on the [JNCC website](#).

SPAs in Dorset include:

- [Poole Harbour](#)
- [Chesil Beach & the Fleet](#)
- [Solent and Dorset Coast potential SPA](#)

## Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

SSSIs provide statutory protection for the best examples of the UK's flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features. These sites are also used to underpin other national and international nature conservation designations. Most SSSIs are privately-owned or managed; others are owned or managed by public bodies or non-government organisations. The SSSIs designation may extend into intertidal areas out to the jurisdictional limit of local authorities, generally Mean Low Water in England. There is no provision for marine SSSIs beyond low water mark, although boundaries sometimes extend more widely within estuaries and other enclosed waters. For more information [here](#).

Most of the Dorset coastline has been designated as SSSI including:

- [South Dorset Coast](#)
- [West Dorset Coast](#)
- [Lodmoor](#)
- [Chesil & the Fleet](#)
- [Poole Harbour](#)
- [Christchurch Harbour](#)

## Ramsar Sites

Ramsar sites are designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance 1971. The Convention defines a wetland as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres". Ramsar sites that protect intertidal or subtidal habitats and species are considered MPAs. More information about Ramsar Sites can be found on the [Ramsar website](#) and a list of site can be found on the [JNCC website](#).

Ramsar sites in Dorset include:

- [Chesil Beach & the Fleet](#)
- [Poole Harbour](#)

## Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs)

The purpose of MNRs is to conserve marine flora and fauna, as well as geological features of special interest, while providing opportunities for study of marine systems. The introduction of the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) has meant that MNRs in England and Wales are to be replaced by Marine Conservation Zones.

## Heritage Coasts

Heritage Coasts were established to conserve stretches of England's most beautiful, undeveloped coastline, which are managed to safeguard their natural beauty and, where appropriate, to improve accessibility for visitors. Heritage Coasts are 'defined' rather than designated, as there is no statutory designation process like that associated with National Parks and AONBs. Definition is formalised by agreement between the relevant maritime local authorities and Natural England. Most are within the boundaries of National Parks or AONBs, although a small number stand alone. More information about Heritage Coasts can be found [here](#).

There are two Heritage Coasts in Dorset:

- Purbeck
- West Dorset

## Voluntary Marine Nature Reserves (vMNRs)

Have been established by agreement between non-governmental organisations, stakeholders and user groups. They have no statutory basis.

There are two vMNRs in Dorset:

- [Durlston Marine Research Area](#)
- [Purbeck Voluntary Marine Nature Reserve](#)

## Protected Military Remains Places and Controlled Military Remains Sites

Under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 it is an offence to interfere with the wreckage of any crashed, sunken or stranded military aircraft or designated vessel without a licence. This is irrespective of loss of life or whether the loss occurred during peacetime or wartime. All crashed military aircraft receive automatic protection, but vessels must be individually designated. Currently, there are 79 vessels protected under this Act, both in UK waters and abroad, and it is likely that the Ministry of Defence will designate more vessels in the future. Find out more [here](#).

There are two levels of protection offered by this Act, designation as a Protected Place or as a Controlled Site.

Protected Places – Diving is permitted on a 'look but don't touch' basis only.

Controlled Sites – Diving operations are effectively prohibited on these sites without a specific licence.

## Protected Wreck Sites

The Protection of Wrecks Act (1973) allows the Government to designate a wreck to prevent uncontrolled interference. Designated sites are identified as being likely to contain the remains of a vessel, or its contents, which are of historical, artistic or archaeological importance. In some cases the site is indicated by a buoy, usually yellow and inscribed Protected Wreck. All protected wrecks are listed in the annual Admiralty Notices to Mariners and are marked on UK Hydrographic Office charts. Visit the [Historic England website](#) to find out more about Protected Wreck Sites.



## Areas of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB)

AONBs are designated for their landscape and scenic beauty and have the same level of protection as National Parks. AONBs are designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to Countryside Act and further protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000.

Natural England is the government body responsible for the designation in England. For more information about AONBs around the country, visit [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)

There are two AONBs in Dorset:

- [Dorset AONB](#) covers almost half of Dorset's countryside and the majority of the coastline between Lyme Regis and Poole Harbour
- [Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB](#) overlaps the boundaries of Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire and Somerset

## UNESCO World Heritage Sites

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) seek to encourage the protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in 1972. For more information about World Heritage Sites visit the [UNESCO website](#). The Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site spans across Dorset from Studland Bay to Exmouth in East Devon, find out more on the [Jurassic Coast Trust website](#).

## Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

LNRs are local sites of importance for wildlife, geology, education or public enjoyment. All district and county councils have powers to acquire, declare and manage LNRs. Search for LNRs on the [Natural England website](#).

There are 49 LNRs in Dorset including:

- [Branksome Dene Chine](#)
- [Boscombe & Southbourne Overcliffe](#)
- [Hengitsbury Head](#)

## National Nature Reserves (NNRs)

NNRs represent significant wildlife and geological sites. Natural England manages roughly two thirds of England's NNRs, whilst the remaining third are managed by organisations approved by Natural England such as The National Trust, The Forestry Commission, RSPB, many Wildlife Trusts and Local Authorities. Find out more [here](#).

NNRs in Dorset include:

- [Arne Reedbeds](#)
- [Durlston](#)
- [Studland and Godlingston Heath](#)



## Natura 2000 Network

Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation form the Natura 2000 network. The aim of the network is to ensure the long term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats, listed under both the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive. Find out more [here](#).

## Conservation Areas

Conservation areas are described as 'areas of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance'. They range from the centres of historic towns and cities to historic transport links and their environment, such as stretches of canal. Local planning authorities are obliged to designate any parts of their own area that are of special architectural or historic interest as a conservation area. There are over 160 conservation areas of varying size and character in Dorset. To find out more visit [Historic England](#), for local information visit the [Dorset County Council website](#).

## Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)

SNCIs are a non-statutory designation which identifies valuable areas of wildlife outside of Nature Reserves and SSSIs. These are typically identified by local authorities or Wildlife Trusts. In Dorset, the Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) SNCI Project identifies SNCIs, collects data about the plants and animals surviving there and helps to protect them by providing information to local authorities, so that SNCIs can be considered in planning, and informing and offering a free advice service to the landowners about the important species and habitats on their sites. There are approximately 1250 SNCIs in Dorset. Find out more on the [Dorset Wildlife Trust website](#).

## Geological and Geomorphologic Conservation Review Sites

The Geological and Geomorphologic Conservation Review (GCR) was designed to identify sites of national and international importance that show all the key scientific elements of the Earth heritage of Britain. These sites display sediments, rocks, fossils, and features of the landscape that make a special contribution to our understanding and appreciation of Earth science and the geological history of Britain. JNCC now have an inventory of over 3000 GCR sites and have developed the [GCR site database](#), which contains basic site information for these sites. Find out more on the [JNCC website](#).

## Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS)

RIGS are sites of regional and local importance for their geology that have not been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There are currently 49 RIGS in Dorset which have been designated by Dorset's Important Geological Sites Group. More information about the Dorset RIGS group can be found [here](#).

## Historic Parks and Gardens

Since the 1980s, there has been a national record of the historic parks and gardens which make a rich and varied contribution to our landscape. This record, known as the 'Register of Parks and



Gardens of special historic interest in England', was established, and is maintained by, Historic England. Find out more on the [Historic England website](#).

## Listed Buildings

Listed buildings are buildings or structures that have been judged to be of special architectural or historic interest and warrant special protection within the planning system. Find out more about listed buildings in Dorset [here](#).

## Scheduled Monuments

Scheduled Monuments are legally protected, nationally important sites and monuments. These sites are protected by placing them on a list, or 'schedule' which means that preservation is given priority over other land uses. English Heritage takes the lead in identifying sites in England. This Act is primarily land based, but it has also been used to provide some level of protection for underwater sites. In relation to maritime scheduled monuments, once a wreck has been scheduled, public access to it, i.e. diving on the site, is not currently restricted but only permitted on a 'look but don't touch' basis. More information on Scheduled Monuments can be found on the [Historic England website](#). Information on Dorset's scheduled monuments can be found [here](#).