



The north west coast has distinctive dunes, shingle banks and till cliffs. Sheltered from Atlantic waves by Ireland, the areas are shallow, usually less than 60m, with a large tidal range and extensive tidal flats (Solway or Dee estuary). Communities of honey comb worms or mussel beds make further living habitats.

The north west has large areas included in marine protected areas (59% offshore and 26% inshore waters). This includes the UK's largest special protection area at Liverpool Bay, supporting 50,000 wintering birds including red-throated diver and common scoter. Morecambe Bay intertidal habitat also supports over 200,000 wintering waders and wildfowl and 60,000 breeding seabirds, as well as substantial cockle beds.

The natural beauty of the coast is exemplified through areas such as the Lake District National Park at Ravenglass, Solway Firth and Arnside/Silverdale Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Water quality remains low but is improving.



Opportunities

- O1. significant wild shellfish beds and spawning and nursery areas for fish [1] that could be protected or enhanced for important associated industries
- O2. bays and estuaries are important overwintering grounds for birds including the only breeding colony of black guillemots in the UK. There are opportunities to further develop bird related tourism and recreation [1]
- O3. leatherback turtles are a summer visitor and numbers are increasing with warmer water temperatures; increasing sightings of cetaceans are also occurring. Both are positive for wildlife based tourism [1]

Challenges

- C1. disturbance to wintering and passage waders, seabirds and terns from offshore construction activity (renewables and gas platforms [2])
- C2. contaminants from historic and current industrialisation of the Mersey catchment have reduced sediment quality (Liverpool Bay) and pose a risk if the sediment becomes disturbed [3]
- C3. water pollution from sewerage affects shellfish and mussel beds in Morecambe Bay and the Lune Estuary, preventing shellfish harvesting [3]
- C4. erosion of the sand dune system along the Sefton coast is increasing due to coastal squeeze from hard sea defences and altering sediment supply from increased construction, including house building at the coast [5]



Evidence sources

[1] North west plan area issues document
[2] Marine Policy Statement
[3] North Merseyside Biodiversity Action Plan

[4] Coastal Office expertise
[5] SA report cards