



Mysteries of the deep on your doorstep

A website is delving into the depths of the Irish Sea providing an insight into its rich and diverse wildlife.

Living Seas Irish Sea website (www.irishsea.org) offers an interactive vision of the hidden wonders on our doorstep.

And it also highlights opportunities for Cumbrians to join in with activities to solve more of the mysteries of the sea which covers 45,000 square kilometres and dives to 300 metres at its deepest point.

It is a sea with a surprising amount of life:

- At least 30 species of shark pass through the Irish Sea, including the enormous basking shark, the world's second largest fish.
- There are many diverse habitats including seagrass beds, rocky reefs, mud flats - home to sea urchins, Dublin Bay prawns and brittlestars - and honeycomb reefs made up of living worms.
- About a dozen species of whale, dolphin and porpoise have been recorded in the Irish Sea.
- Leatherback turtles visit the Irish Sea each summer as they pursue swarms of jellyfish.
- Seals are increasing in number and can be seen in many places including the South Walney Nature Reserve.
- The Lune Deep is a 13-mile long, 85 metres deep underwater "Grand Canyon", just south of Cumbria, formed during the Ice Age, 20,000 years ago.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust is one of six Wildlife Trusts involved in Living Seas around the Irish Sea and the website which is campaigning for the provision of Marine Conservation Zones in the Irish Sea as well as educating people living around on its shores.

Cheryl Nicholson, Marine Conservation Officer says "Many people have an image of the Irish Sea as a dirty, lifeless sea but nothing could be further from the truth. Our sea is home to so many amazing species and habitats but sadly after centuries of neglect it is not in a good state. We must act now to protect the Irish Sea from the depths through to the coastal shallows.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are a new type of protected area and we need your support to make sure all 15 recommended MCZs are designated in the Irish Sea, providing a haven for wildlife to recover and thrive.

Currently less than 2% of the Irish Sea has any form of protection, if all recommended MCZs are introduced this figure would go to 25% making a dramatic and positive difference."



Sign Petition Fish today and add your voice to marine protection
<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/petitionfish>

The Living Seas Irish Sea website is a focal point for everyone who cares about this area of huge environmental importance. It unites populations of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man urging them to work together to protect local marine life.

The site provides species and habitat information and news and updates. There is an interactive area including videos of some of the amazing deep sea trenches off our coast.

There are activities for children and a list of events for adults, including sea and shore searches which help to uncover evidence of what can be found beneath the waves.

It includes walks, courses and diving expeditions over the coming months, including two dives off Roa Island, Barrow, in spring.