

Devon Avon Estuary Cockle Survey 2020



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The Devon Avon Estuary

The Devon Avon Estuary MCZ was designated as part of the third tranche of MCZs in May 2019. It covers an area of 2 km² and is located on the south coast of Devon (Figure 1). The site extends from the mouth of the estuary up to a tidal weir at Aveton Gifford. Its features include intertidal mud, intertidal sand & muddy sand, and the nationally-scarce tentacled lagoon worm (Figures 1 and 2). These features, especially the tentacled lagoon-worm (Figure 2), are particularly vulnerable to activities that cause changes in its habitat, such as hand-gathering (including cockle picking/raking). NB: the Avon Estuary is privately owned by Bantham Estates, so any fishing activity requires permission from the landowners.

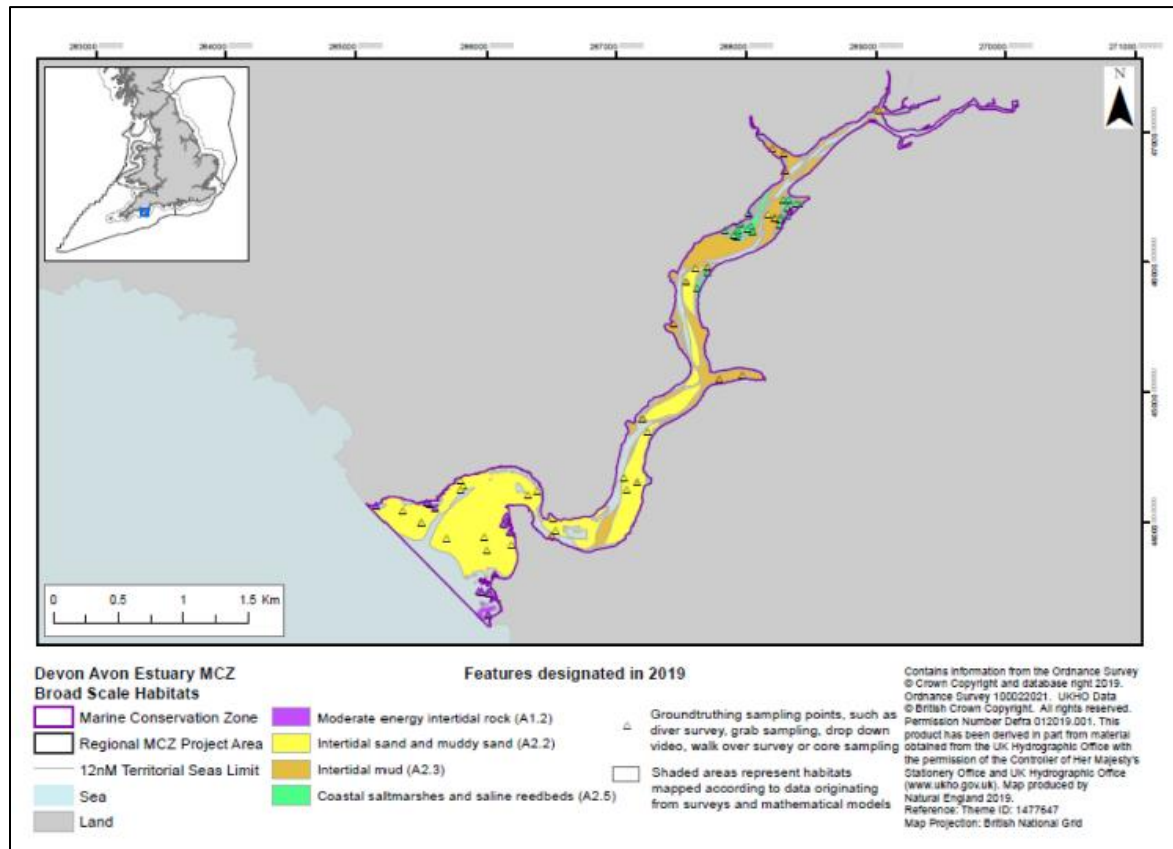


Figure 1: Features of the Devon Avon Estuary MCZ

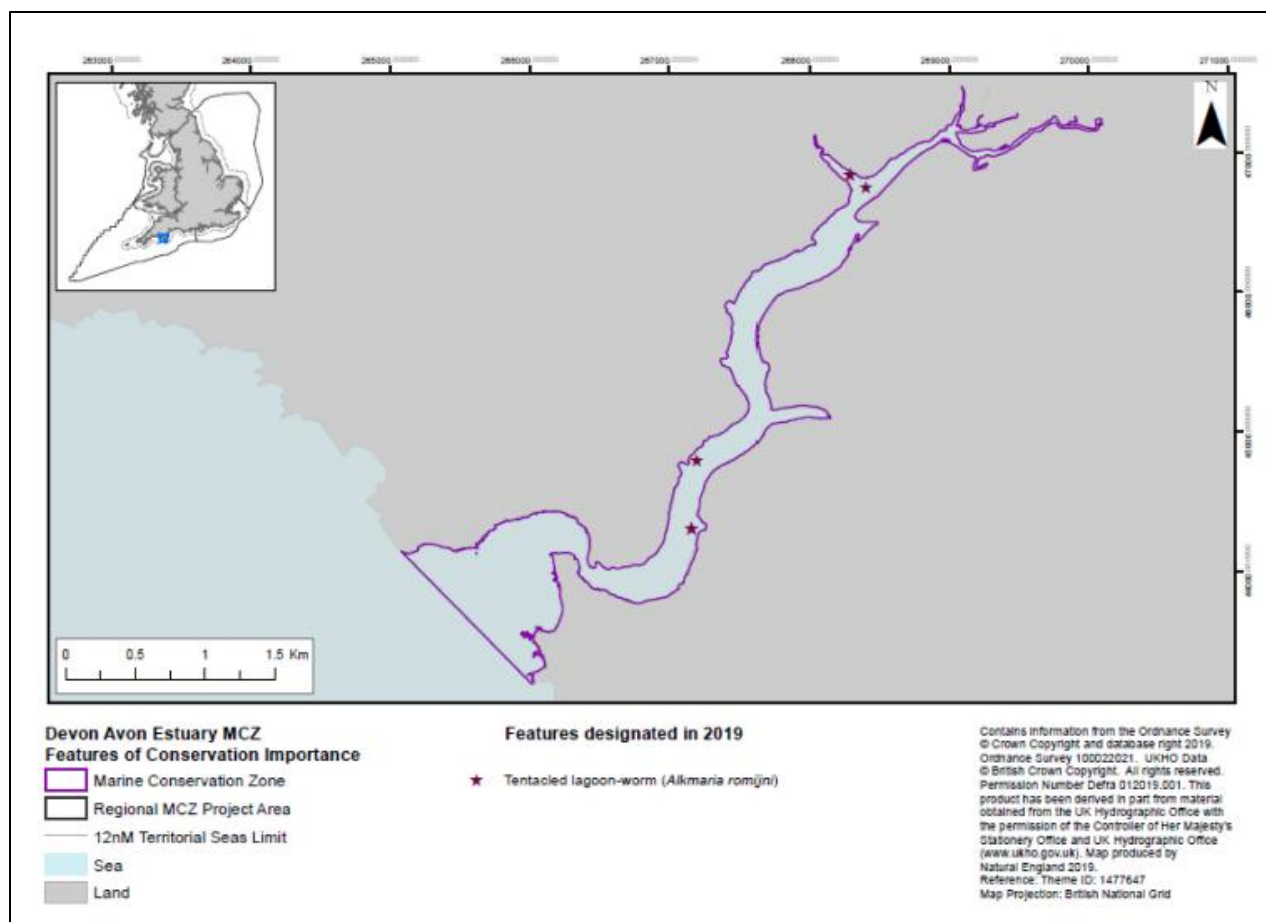


Figure 2: Location of the Tentacle Lagoon worm - a feature of the Devon Avon Estuary MCZ

Given the designation of the MCZ and anecdotal reports of cockle beds on the estuary, D&S IFCA aimed to establish a baseline of cockle stocks on the estuary in 2020. Three locations were surveyed, including along the shore below Bantham Village, Cockleridge and Villa Crusoe (Figure 3). Only 8 cockles were found in total (7 at Cockleridge and 1 at Bantham) so no analyses are reported here. D&S IFCA officers liaised with some hand gatherers collecting cockles for personal consumption, who reported that they had not found many cockles in the estuary and there seem to be less now than previously recorded.

D&S IFCA will revisit the Devon Avon Estuary when cockle surveys are undertaken in 2022 to ensure no significant cockle beds were missed or have been established since this survey was undertaken.