

This English summary accompanies the brochure “Gebiedsbescherming op de Nederlandse Noordzee. De stand van zaken in relatie tot visserij” by the North Sea Foundation (2018).

Marine Protected Areas in the Dutch North Sea: The situation in relation to fisheries.

Worldwide, marine protected areas (MPAs) are designated to protect or recover marine ecosystems, and the North Sea is no exception. However, opinions differ about what adequate protection encompasses and what parts of the North Sea are actually protected. Although there are many activities impacted by MPAs, this brochure mainly focuses on marine protection in relation to fisheries, the sector with which the greatest differences in opinion occur. The brochure has a binary goal: (1) to shed light on the various interpretations surrounding marine protection and creating a shared fact base, and; (2) to elaborate on the vision of the North Sea Foundation (NSF) for MPAs in the Dutch North Sea.

1. Analysis of marine area protection in the Dutch North Sea

About 20% of the Dutch North Sea is currently officially declared as MPAs. However, according to the NSF, a mere 0.3% was fully protected against all forms of bottom-impacting fisheries in 2017. Based on current proposals, this area will increase to 5% by 2020. According to the Dutch government, in 2020 they will comply with their own goal of protecting 10-15% of the Dutch North Sea against ‘noteworthy bottom impacts’. The fishing sector states that by 2020, fishing will not be permitted in approximately 30% of the Dutch North Sea.

These differences originate from the various interpretations of ‘marine protection’:

- According to the NSF, full seafloor protection (year-round, and against all forms of bottom-impacting fisheries) is an integral part of marine protection, and necessary for a healthy North Sea. We thus only include those areas that are closed year-round to all bottom-impacting fisheries (including flyshoot-fishing), and where nature conservation is the main objective. Wind farms, where fisheries are often excluded for safety reasons, are not included in our calculations because their priority purpose is not biodiversity conservation. See Figure 2.
- The Dutch government uses the term ‘noteworthy’ bottom-impacts’, and does not consider shrimp fisheries or flyshooting to have such impacts. Areas where these techniques are allowed are thus included in their calculations. See Figure 3.
- The fishing sector includes all areas where one or more fishing gears are prohibited. It thus includes the entire coastal zone (where beam trawls with tickler chains are

Legally designated MPA's 2017

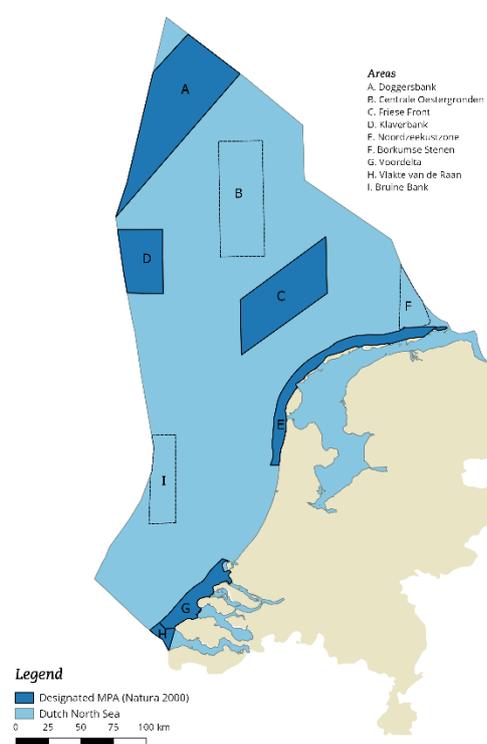


Figure 1. Legally designated Dutch MPAs in 2017 (all Natura 2000)

partially prohibited), the plaice box (which is closed to vessels with engines >300 hp), wind farms, and production platforms. See Figure 4.

According to the North Sea Foundation

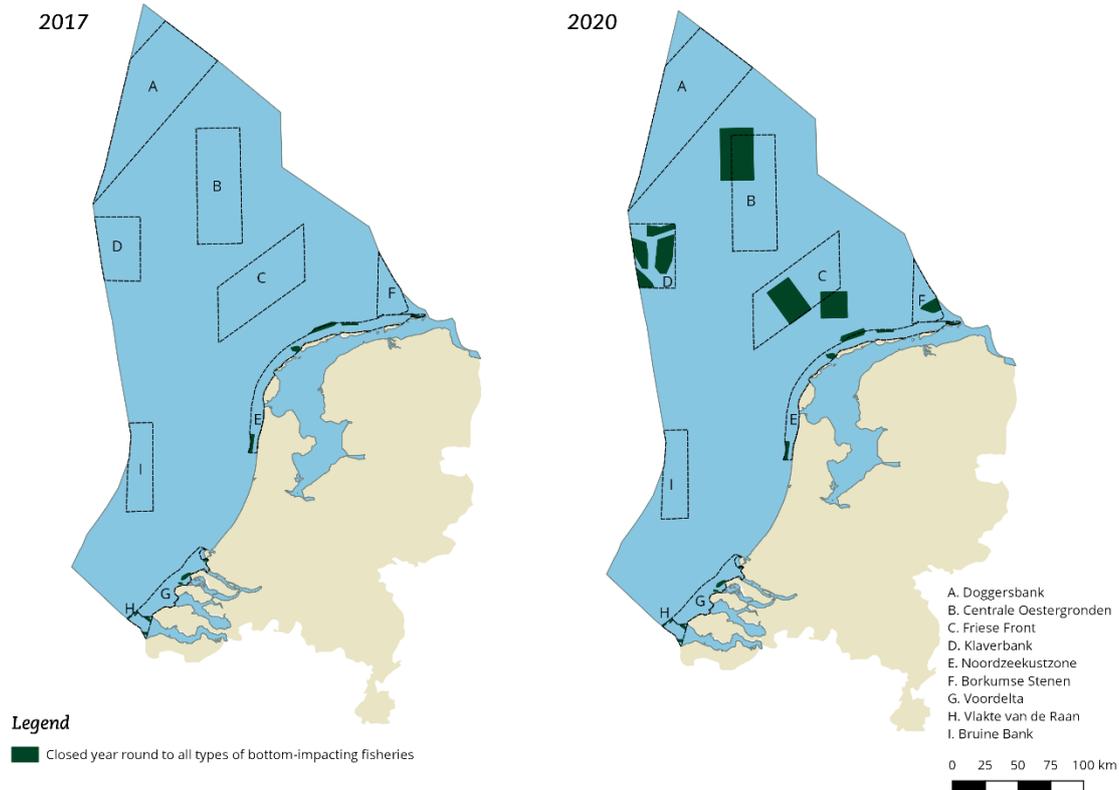


Figure 2. Marine protection according to the North Sea Foundation; areas closed year-round to all bottom-impacting fisheries, and where the primary objective is nature conservation.

According to the Dutch government

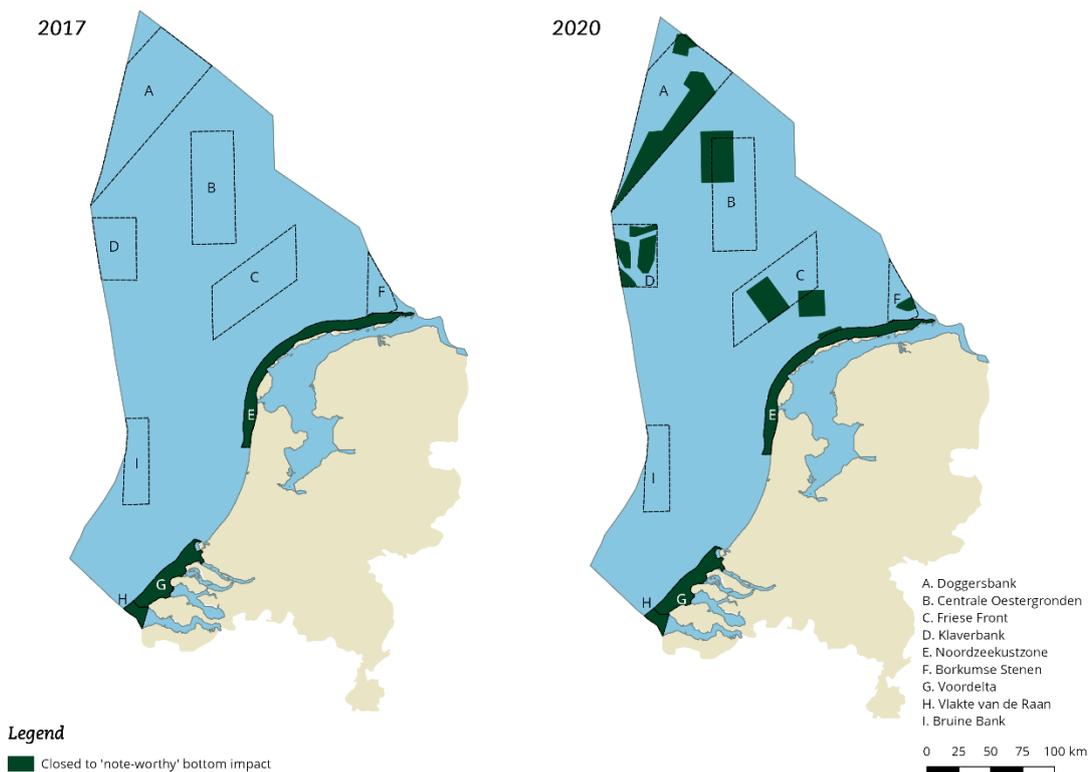


Figure 3. Marine protection according to the Dutch government; areas closed to 'noteworthy bottom impacts'.

According to the fishing sector

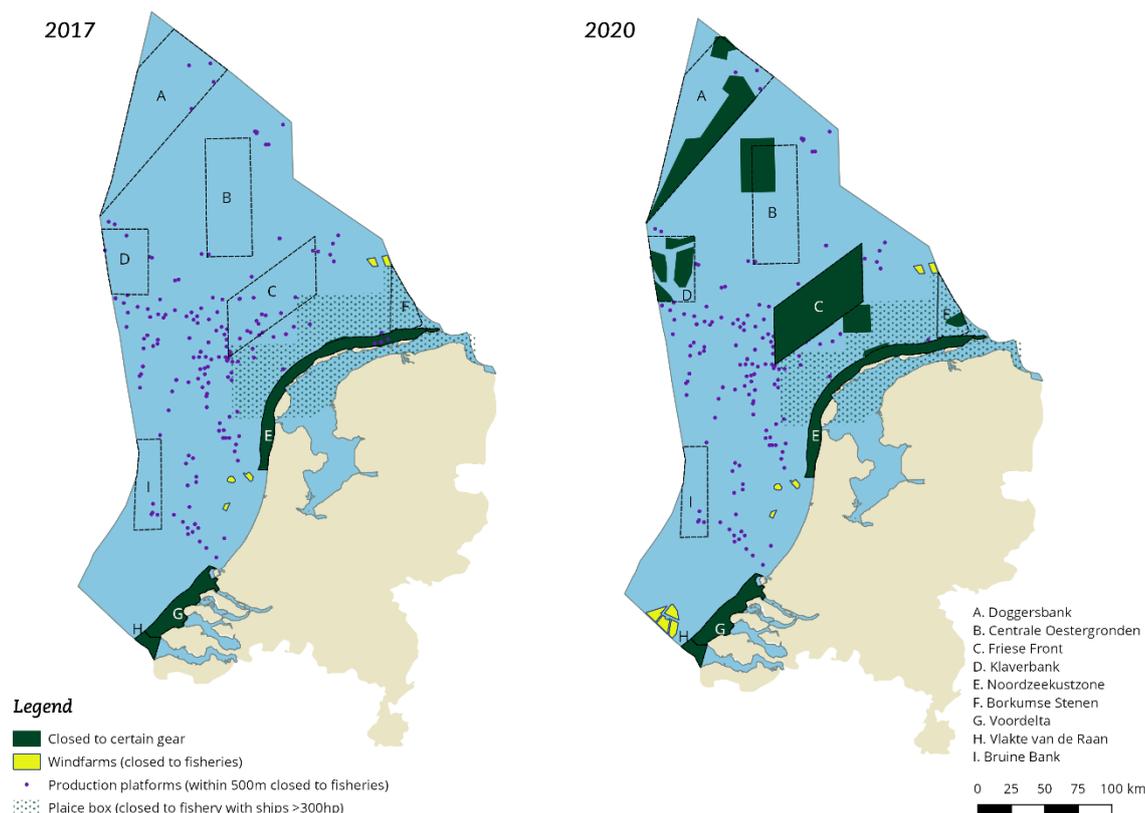


Figure 4. Marine protection according to the fishery; areas closed to one or more gear types.

2. Vision of NSF on marine area protection

As mentioned previously, the NSF considers full seafloor protection to be a main component of marine area protection. Ideally, NSF would like to see 30% of the Dutch North Sea closed to all types of bottom impacts. However, the North Sea is changing rapidly, and we propose to reach this vision in steps, where we first aim at 2030 (in line with the NorthSea2030 strategy of the government). This also leaves room for documenting the effects these MPA's have on North Sea nature, by performing solid scientific research in the closed areas.

During the coming years, our focus will be on the quality of current protection measures, as well as on new opportunities for protection. Our focus on quality will be embodied in lobbying for designation of actual MPAs, by closing large parts of the current areas to all bottom-impacting activities. Furthermore, we would like to see the designation of some additional areas. This could lead, in total, to approximately 15-20% of the Dutch North Sea safeguarded from bottom impacts. Finally, the development of offshore wind farms provides some opportunities for ecological protection (in addition to posing risks to certain species such as various birds). This does not mean that wind farms serve as MPAs, but they can increase the area of seafloor protection. For 2030, they could cover up to 5% of the Dutch North Sea, yielding a total of 15-25% of the seafloor safeguarded from bottom impacts.

Marine protection is important for reaching a healthy North Sea, especially in a time in which the uses of the North Sea and its resources keep increasing. Differing interpretations of marine protection lead to difficult discussions, and with this brochure, the NSF hopes to clarify these differences, and generate a shared fact base.