

	HEALTH, SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT AND QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM 20.0 PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREAS, ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES AND MEHRA NAUTICAL MANUAL	Sect : 20.0 Page : 1 of 7 Date : 07-Aug-25 Rev : 10.2 Appr : DPA
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PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREAS, ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES AND MEHRA

1. PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE SEA AREA (PSSA)

Particularly Sensitive Sea Area is an area of the marine environment that needs special protection through action by IMO because of its significance for recognized ecological or socio-economic or scientific reasons and which may be vulnerable to damage by international maritime activities. The criteria for the identification of particularly sensitive sea areas and the criteria for the designation of special areas are not mutually exclusive. In many cases a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area may be identified within a Special Area and vice versa.

When a PSSA is designated, the IMO also may adopt associated protective measures (APMs). These measures aim to prevent, reduce, or eliminate the identified risk by controlling maritime activities within the designated area. APMs include but are not limited to: mandatory ships routing; mandatory ships reporting; areas to be avoided, strict application of MARPOL discharge, installation of VTS , compulsory pilotage etc... APMs are to be consistent with international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹

References:

- (a) IMO Resolution A.982(24), Revised guidelines for the identification and designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs), adopted 1 December 2005, as amended by IMO Resolution MEPC.267(68), adopted 15 May 2015
- (b) IMO Circular MEPC.1/Circ.778/Rev.4 List of special areas, emission control areas and particularly sensitive sea areas, issued 30 October 2023
- (c) IMO Publication Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA), 2017 Edition
- (d) IMO Publication Ships' Routeing, 14th Edition 2019²

1.1. Guidelines and criteria

As per IMO, PSSA will need to meet three key elements:

- a. The area must have the necessary ecological, social, cultural, economic, scientific or educational characteristics;
- b. The area must be at risk from international shipping activities; and
- c. There must be measures that can be adopted by IMO to provide protection to the area.

1.2. General Protective measures from vessels

¹ W 01 / 2023

² W 06 / 2025

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- a. Ships routing measures – such as an area to be avoided
- b. Recommended / Mandatory ship reporting system
- c. Compulsory pilotage
- d. Recommended tracks/ Traffic separation schemes/ Mandatory Deep-water routes
- e. Strict compliance with MARPOL regulations (No dumping of garbage, No discharge of ballast water, No discharge of sewage, No discharge of oil or oily water mixture, chemicals, noxious substances etc)
- f. Use of Vessel traffic management services
- g. Not anchoring in “Prohibited anchoring areas”

Where a ship is to transit a PSSA, Master must ensure that any special requirements are strictly followed. If there is any doubt then the office is to be contacted for further advice.

Each PSSA needs its own particular protection regime, so specific Associated Protective Measures are introduced for each. These APMs might consist of areas to be avoided, compulsory ship routing, ship reporting, or recommendations on how shipping should pass through an area. The IMO Publication Ship’s Routing includes General provisions on ship’s routing must be consulted.

This Appendix is a summary of PSSAs and their APMs. It is based on Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA), a compilation of official guidance documents and PSSAs adopted by IMO. The supplemental information from Ships’ Routing details measures, meaning, traffic separation schemes, inshore traffic zones, deep water routes, areas to be avoided, mandatory ship reporting systems, and precautionary areas adopted by IMO³

Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)	Associated Protective Measures (APMs)	MEPC Endorsement
The Great Barrier Reef (Australia)	- Mandatory ship reporting system (REEFREP) - IMO-recommended Australian pilotage system - Australia's compulsory pilotage system when navigating the Torres Strait is recommended, rather than required based on the principle of navigation freedom under UNCLOS, Section 2. See IMO Resolutions MEPC.133(53) and MEPC.268(68).	Resolution MEPC.44(30) September 1990
The Sabana-Camagüey Archipelago (Cuba)	- Traffic separation schemes off Costa de Matanzas, in the Old Bahama Channel, and the Punta Maternillos - Discharge prohibition - Area to be avoided in the access routes to the ports of Matanzas and Cardenas	Resolution MEPC.74(40) September 1997
Malpelo Island (Colombia)	Area to be avoided around Malpelo Island	Resolution MEPC.97(47) March 2002
The sea around the Florida Keys (United States)	- Mandatory no anchoring areas in the Tortugas Ecological Reserve and the Tortugas Bank in the Florida Keys - Areas to be avoided off the Florida coast	Resolution MEPC.98(47) March 2002
The Wadden Sea (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands)	Existing protective measures, including but not limited to: mandatory ship reporting systems; deep water routes, traffic separation schemes, recommended and mandatory pilotage, MARPOL Special Area, and other national measures	Resolution MEPC.101(48) October 2002
Paracas National Reserve (Peru)	- Area to be avoided (by ships > 200 GT carrying hydrocarbons in bulk) - Traffic separation scheme in the approaches to Puerto Pisco	Resolution MEPC.106(49) July 2003
Western European Waters	Mandatory ship reporting system for single-hull tankers carrying heavy grades of fuel oil	Resolution MEPC.121(52) October 2004
Torres Strait (as an extension of the Great Barrier Reef)	- Two-way shipping route through the Torres Strait - IMO-recommended Australian pilotage system	Resolution MEPC.133(53) July 2005
Canary Islands (Spain)	- Mandatory ship reporting system (CANREP) - Traffic separation schemes - Five areas to be avoided: off Lanzarote Island; off the island of Tenerife; off the island of Grand Canary; off La Palma Island; and off the island of El Hierro	Resolution MEPC.134(53) July 2005

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Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)	Associated Protective Measures (APMs)	MEPC Endorsement
The Galapagos Archipelago (Ecuador)	- Recommended tracks, mandatory as a condition of port entry - Mandatory ship reporting system (GALREP) - Area to be avoided	Resolution MEPC.135(53) July 2005
The Baltic Sea area (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden)	- Existing protective measures, including but not limited to: existing routing and pilotage systems; mandatory ship reporting systems; MARPOL Special Area; SO_x Emission Control Area - Traffic separation scheme and associated routing measures in the South-west Baltic Sea - Deep-water route of Gotland Island - Areas to be avoided in the Southern Baltic Sea	Resolution MEPC.136(53) July 2005
The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (United States)	- Mandatory ship reporting system (CORAL SHIPREP) - Six areas to be avoided	Resolution MEPC.171(57) April 2008
The Strait of Bonifacio (France, Italy)	- Mandatory ship reporting system (BONIFREP) - Routing Measures - Recommendation on navigation through the Strait of Bonifacio	Resolution MEPC.204(62) July 2011
The Saba Bank, (North-Eastern Caribbean Area of the Kingdom of the Netherlands)	- Existing MARPOL Annex V Special Area - Mandatory no anchoring area for all ships - Area to be avoided (by ships 300 GT and over)	Resolution MEPC.226(64) October 2012
South-west Coral Sea (as an extension of the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait)	- Two-way route in the Prince of Wales Channel - Two-way route in Diamond Passage - Two-way route to the West of Holmes Reef - Area to be avoided north-east of the Great Barrier Reef, between Palm Passage and Hydrographers Passage - Traffic separation systems	Resolution MEPC.268(68) May 2015
The Jomard Entrance (Papua, New Guinea)	- Two-way route to the north of Jomard Entrance - Three two-way routes to the south of Jomard Entrance - Precautionary area that lies between the northern and southern two-way routes	Resolution MEPC.283(70) July 2016
Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (The Sulu Sea, Philippines)	Area to be avoided	Resolution MEPC.294(71) July 2017
North-Western Mediterranean Sea (coastline of France, Italy, Monaco and Spain)	- Voluntary speed reduction (VSR) to between 10 and 13 knots. - Voluntary safety distance keeping from any medium or large cetacean detected. - Voluntary VHF broadcasting of the position of any medium or large cetacean detected and transmitting the information to designated coastal Authority.	Resolution MEPC.380(80) July 2023
Nusa Penida Islands and Gili Matra Islands in Lombok Strait	Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) at the Lombok Strait	Resolution MEPC.396(82) October 2024

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2. ARCHIPELAGIC SEA LANES

Archipelagic sea lanes are defined by a series of continuous axis lines from the entry points of passage routes to the exit points.

Axis lines of archipelagic sea lanes are shown on charts for the purpose of defining sea lanes and are not intended to indicate the deepest water, or any routes or recommended tracks as defined in IMO Publication on Ships' Routeing.

The axis of designated archipelagic sea lanes, including a listing of geographical coordinates with geodetic datum that define axis turning points, and any prescribed traffic separation schemes, will be clearly shown on all appropriate scale charts.

The legends, symbols and notes for the representation and details of archipelagic sea lanes and associated measures on nautical charts can be found in the IMO publication on Ships' Routeing.

Ships are required to respect any traffic separation schemes in archipelagic sea lanes established in accordance with IMO Publication on Ships' Routeing.

Within archipelagic sea lanes, traffic is not separated, except in traffic separation schemes.

If there are no islands bordering the sea lane, ships in archipelagic sea lanes passage are required to not deviate more than 25 nautical miles to either side of the axis line defining the archipelagic sea lane.

Where an island borders the sea lane, ships in archipelagic sea lanes passage may not navigate closer to the coast than 10 per cent of the distance between the nearest point on the island and the axis line of the sea lane.

Refer to "Symbols and abbreviations used on admiralty charts / Admiralty Guide to ENC Symbols used in ECDIS" publication for Archipelagic sea lanes symbols.

These are printed on charts in colour, usually magenta.

In ECDIS Cautionary and explanatory notes on the use of Archipelagic sea lanes can accessed using "Object Info".

3. MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL HIGH-RISK AREAS (MEHRA)

MEHRAs are defined as areas established around the UK coast having high environmental sensitivities and being at risk of pollution from merchant shipping. The locations of MEHRAs have been identified after taking into account shipping risk, environmental sensitivity and other environmental protection measures already in place at each location. The primary purpose of MEHRAs is to inform mariners of areas where they need to exercise even more caution than usual.

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In due course, they will be marked on Admiralty charts and their existence should be taken into account during passage planning.

The 32 MEHRAs which have been identified are as follows:

- Bass Rock
- Berry Head
- Berwick
- Dumbar
- Dungeness
- Farne Islands
- Fethaland, Mainland Shetland
- Flamborough Head
- Gallan Head, Isle of Lewis
- Harwich & Felixstowe (2 MEHRAs)
- Hastings
- Holy Island
- Islandmagee, County Antrim
- Isle of May
- Kinnaird Head
- Muckle Flugga
- Newburgh
- North St Kilda
- Pembrokeshire Islands
- Plymouth
- Portland
- St Abb's Head & Eyemouth
- South Foreland to Ramsgate (2 MEHRAs)
- South St Kilda
- Spurn Bight Hastings
- Tees Holy Island
- Tor Ness, Hoy
- Western Solent
- West Islay, Argyll and Bute (2 MEHRAs)

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The UK Government expects mariners to take note of MEHRAs and either to keep well clear or, where this is not practicable, to exercise an even higher degree of care than usual when passing in close proximity to MEHRAs.