

# Inner Hebrides and the Minches

proposed Special Area of Conservation

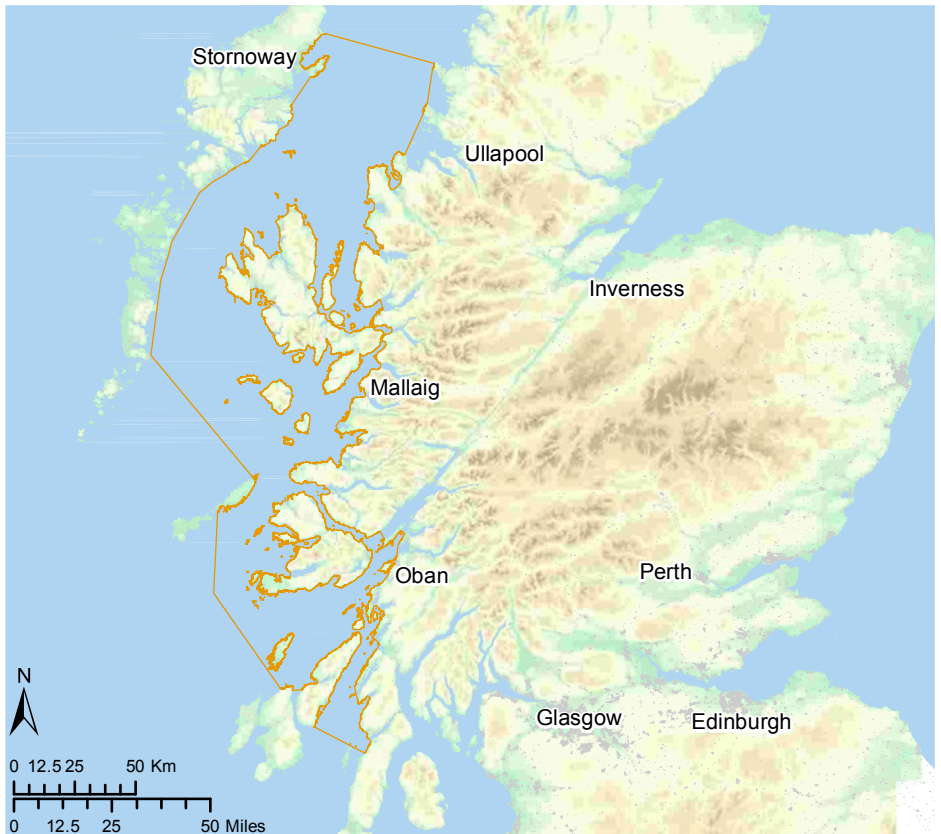


A stronghold for harbour porpoise

# Inner Hebrides and the Minches

## proposed Special Area of Conservation

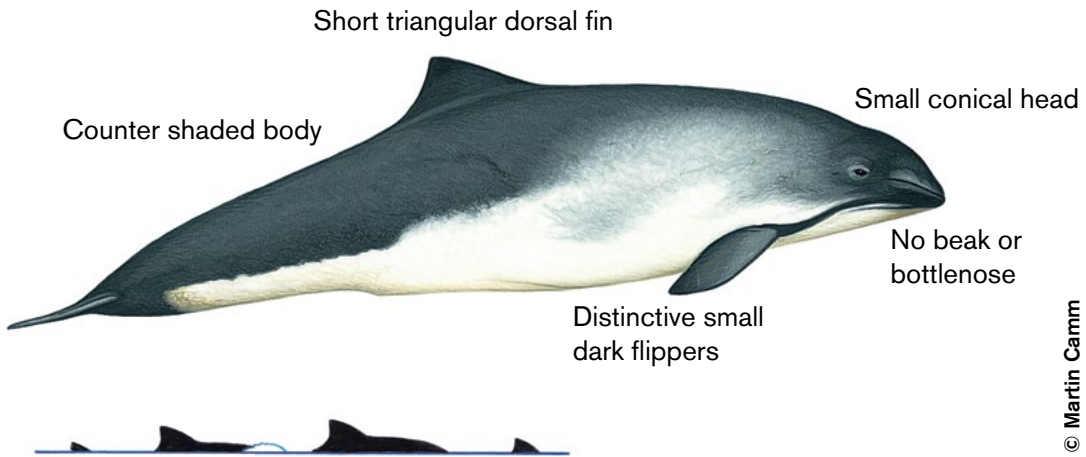
The west coast of Scotland is a European stronghold for harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*). They are the smallest marine mammal in Scottish waters and the only species of porpoise found in the UK. However, harbour porpoise are the most commonly sighted cetacean in Scotland and high numbers have been consistently recorded in the Inner Hebrides and the Minches proposed Special Area of Conservation (pSAC).



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Location: 57° 10.037' N 6° 15.991' W

Area: 13,539 km<sup>2</sup>



## Characteristics of a harbour porpoise

### Proposed Protected Feature

Harbour porpoise

### Aims of the site

Contribute towards maintaining the favourable conservation status of harbour porpoise and provide protection for habitats that support the species within the pSAC.

### Key sensitivities

Pollution  
Underwater noise  
Disturbance  
Collision / boat strike

Harbour porpoise have an active lifestyle and a high energy demand. Being small mammals they are not able to store a lot of energy in their bodies and so must feed frequently. Harbour porpoise are dependent on year round access to food sources and concentrations of prey including sandeels and herring are found in the relatively shallow, cold, fast flowing waters above the diverse sea bed of the Inner Hebrides and the Minches pSAC.

Sightings of harbour porpoise are generally limited to a brief glimpse when they surface to breathe between dives. While hunting, they may surface four or five times in quick succession before diving down to catch their prey. Unlike dolphins, harbour porpoise rarely leap out of the water preferring a smooth forward roll at the surface to breathe, also known as porpoising. They can dive to depths of more than 200 metres and hold their breath for up to six minutes.

Summer is the peak reproductive season for harbour porpoise with the highest number of births occurring in June and July. However, this shy marine mammal has yet to reveal much about their private lives, preferring to keep it beneath the waves!

# Responding to the consultation and further information.

To make a response online or for more information about the proposal please go to [www.snh.gov.uk/porpoiseSAC](http://www.snh.gov.uk/porpoiseSAC).

If you are unable to make your response online, please contact us and we will send you a paper copy of the response form.

Email: [porpoiseSAC@snh.gov.uk](mailto:porpoiseSAC@snh.gov.uk)

Phone: 01463 725 025

Post: Marine SAC Consultation, Great Glen House,  
Leachkin Road, Inverness, IV3 8NW.

## Adult harbour porpoise with calf



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The Scottish Government  
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