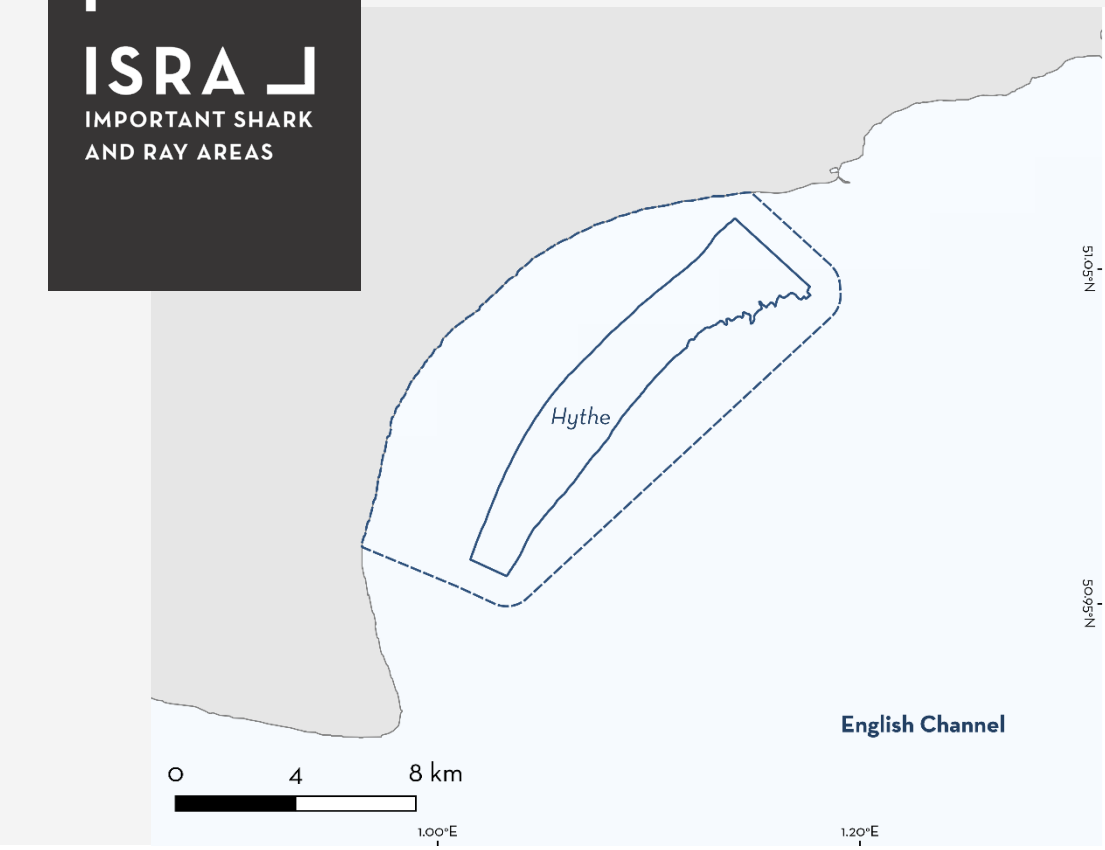
ISRA
IMPORTANT SHARK AND RAY AREAS



Blue lines indicate the area meeting the ISRA Criteria; dashed lines indicate the suggested buffer for use in the development of appropriate place-based conservation measures

HYTHE ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Hythe is located on the southeast coast of England, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The area is characterised by pebble, silt, and sand substrates. It is influenced by swells and tidal mixing from the English Channel. Within this area there are: **reproductive areas** (e.g., Thornback Skate *Raja clavata*).

CRITERIA

Sub-criterion C1 – Reproductive Areas

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

0–15 metres

30.78 km²

DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Hythe is situated off the coast of Kent on the southeast coast of England in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The area is characterised by pebble, silt, and sand substrates (British Geological Survey 2025). It is influenced by relatively high nutrient exchange due to tidal mixing and swells in the English Channel, though it is somewhat sheltered from the prevailing southwesterly swell.

This Important Shark and Ray Area is benthic and pelagic and is delineated from surface waters (0 m) to a depth of 15 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

SUB-CRITERION C1 – REPRODUCTIVE AREAS

Hythe is an important reproductive area for one shark and one ray species.

Early life stages of Starry Smoothhound and Thornback Skate are regularly and predictably observed, year-to-year, at two fixed survey stations in this area (Ellis et al. 2024; ICES 2025). Data from the Eastern Channel beam trawl survey (2010–2024) were analysed (ICES 2025) which uses a four-metre beam to survey the southeast coast of England, usually in July. The size threshold for young-of-the-year (YOY) individuals of each species was supported by analysis of catch data from across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (J Ellis & S McCully Phillips unpubl. data 2025).

Overall, 42 neonate/young-of-the-year (YOY) Starry Smoothhounds measuring ≤35 cm total length (TL) were caught in this area. Size-at-birth for this species is 28–32 cm TL (Ebert et al. 2021). Neonate/YOY Starry Smoothhounds were recorded in 2011 (n = 3), 2014 (n = 6), 2015 (n = 10), 2016 (n = 2), 2017 (n = 1), 2018 (n = 5), 2019 (n = 6), 2020 (n = 1), 2023 (n = 2), and 2024 (n = 6). During this period, neonate/YOY Starry Smoothhounds were recorded up to seven years per station. The number of neonate/YOY Starry Smoothhounds caught in Hythe was greater than in adjacent surveyed areas and is the second largest known hotspot on the south coast of England.

Overall, 891 neonate/YOY Thornback Skates measuring ≤24 cm TL were caught in this area. Size-at-birth for this species is ~10–13 cm TL (Last et al. 2016), with individuals up to 30 cm TL being considered neonate/YOY in other regions (Alkusairy 2019). Neonate/YOY Thornback Skates were recorded in 2010 (n = 46), 2011 (n = 13), 2012 (n = 23), 2013 (n = 34), 2014 (n = 115), 2015 (n = 43), 2016 (n = 57), 2017 (n = 34), 2018 (n = 135), 2019 (n = 281), 2020 (n = 34), 2021 (n = 13), 2023 (n = 8), and 2024 (n = 55). During this period, the number of years that neonate/YOY Thornback Skates were recorded ranged 3–9 years across stations. The number of neonate/YOY Thornback Skates caught in Hythe was greater than in adjacent surveyed areas and is the largest known hotspot on the south coast of England.

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QUALIFYING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category	Global Depth Range (m)	ISRA Criteria/Sub-criteria Met								
				A	B	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2
SHARKS												
Mustelus asterias	Starry Smoothhound	NT	0–199			X						
RAYS												
Raja clavata	Thornback Skate	NT	0–1,020			X						

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