

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

MORAY FIRTH ISRA

European Atlantic Region

SUMMARY

Moray Firth is located on the eastern coast of Scotland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The area is within the largest narrow inlet or estuary (firth) in Scotland and is characterised by sandy and rocky substrates. It is influenced by the Scottish Coastal Current. Within this area there are: **threatened species** and **undefined aggregations** (Basking Shark *Cetorhinus maximus*).

CRITERIA

Criterion A - Vulnerability; Sub-criterion C5 - Undefined Aggregations

— —
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
 — —

0-114 metres
 — —

715.1 km²
 — —





DESCRIPTION OF HABITAT

Moray Firth is located in Scotland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is situated on the eastern coast, within the largest narrow inlet or estuary (firth) in Scotland. The area is characterised by sandy and rocky substrates (Moore & Wilson 2002).

The area is influenced by the Scottish Coastal Current (Inall et al. 2009), with the variation in phytoplankton being a driver of productivity in the area (Fehling et al. 2012), which increases alongside warm water plumes (Tetley et al. 2008).

This Important Shark and Ray Area is pelagic and is delineated from inshore and surface waters (0 m) to 114 m based on the bathymetry of the area.

ISRA CRITERIA

CRITERION A – VULNERABILITY

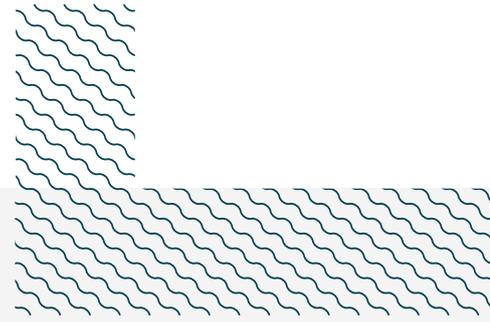
One Qualifying Species considered threatened with extinction according to the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species regularly occurs in the area. This is the Endangered Basking Shark (Rigby et al. 2021).

SUB-CRITERION C5 – UNDEFINED AGGREGATIONS

Moray Firth is an important area for undefined aggregations of one shark species.

Opportunistic land-based and vessel-based sightings reported by citizen scientists to the Shark Trust Basking Shark Project are collated into a dedicated database, with records since 1987 (Shark Trust unpubl. data. 2025). Observations of three or more individuals reported at one time were extracted, and duplicate records were removed. Between 2012-2020, a total of 619 Basking Sharks were observed from 55 aggregations (Shark Trust unpubl. data 2025). The mean number of aggregations per year in this period was 3, comprising an average of 11 individuals per aggregation (maximum = 41 individuals per aggregation). During this period, aggregations have been reported from this area in 2012 (1 aggregation; 5 individuals), 2013 (41 aggregations; 544 individuals), 2018 (2 aggregations; 10 individuals), 2019 (1 aggregation; 3 individuals), and 2020 (10 aggregations; 57 individuals). This location has one of the highest numbers of contemporary citizen science reports of Basking Shark aggregations in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and is the only known location with regular and predictable observations of Basking Shark aggregations on the eastern coast. This species may be aggregating for feeding purposes based on direct observations by citizen scientists of animals feeding at the surface (Shark Trust unpubl. data 2025) and the known plankton plumes within this area (Tetley et al. 2008). Further information is needed to understand the nature and function of these aggregations.





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Suggested citation

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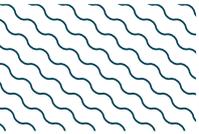
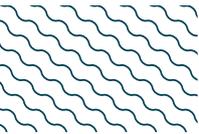
QUALIFYING SPECIES

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													
<i>Cetorhinus maximus</i>	Basking Shark	EN	0-1,504	X							X		

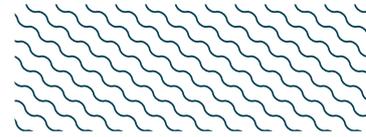
SUPPORTING SPECIES

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Red List Category
RAYS		
<i>Dipturus intermedius</i>	Flapper Skate	CR

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species Categories are available by searching species names at www.iucnredlist.org Abbreviations refer to: CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient.



SUPPORTING INFORMATION



There are additional indications that this may be an important reproductive area for one ray species.

Adult Flapper Skates have been observed by SCUBA divers and caught by recreational and commercial fishers in the area. Egg cases are also regularly found along the beaches of the area in high numbers. Between 2017-2024, a citizen science program recorded 52 Flapper Skates (n = 23 females, n = 6 males, n = 23 unknown sex) within the area (Shark & Skate Scotland unpubl. data 2025). In addition, local anglers have confirmed high catches of this species, comprised of predominantly females. For example, in 2024 one angler reported catching 60 females and five males in the area (C Rickard pers. obs. 2025). Between 2021-2024, beach surveys in the area have recorded >300 egg cases for the Flapper Skate (Shark & Skate Scotland unpubl. data 2025). However, more information is needed to confirm the reproductive importance of this area for Flapper Skates.



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