

# Niarbyl Bay

## Marine Nature Reserve

*Kemmyrk Bea-Varrey Baie'n Arbyl*



## Why Protect the Marine Environment?

The past 50 years have seen global declines in the health of our seas, which not only reduces species and habitats, but also the economic and social benefits we enjoy.

Threats to the marine environment include habitat loss, pollution, invasive species, over-fishing and climate change.

By protecting areas of the sea as marine nature reserves we can conserve and restore healthy habitats and provide refuges for spawning and nursery grounds to help replenish the areas outside.

This helps maintain commercial and recreational fisheries, with Ramsey Bay MNR being a good example of how conservation and careful management can boost stocks of king and queen scallops over time.

Linked with the UNESCO Biosphere Isle of Man, the designation and careful management of MNRs can lead to the sustainable development of coastal areas; enhancing our experiences, economy and tourist appeal.

The Isle of Man territorial sea is a shared resource used by commercial fishermen, recreational anglers a wide variety of commercial, leisure and scientific interests, as well as the Manx community.

People who use the sea regularly have a wealth of knowledge which can complement the scientific information collected by DEFA and our partner organisations and we welcome input from anyone with information, ideas and experiences to share.

DEFA, The Sileau Whallian, Foxdale Road  
St. John's, Isle of Man, IM4 3AS

For further information about Marine Nature Reserves contact DEFA Fisheries on: 01624 685857  
fisheries@gov.im or use the QR Code.

<https://www.gov.im/protectedsites>

**Rushen ASSI.**  
MNR are: **Dalby Coast ASSI and Glen**  
Niarbyl Bay © Ffion Blundell



**ASSIs** are areas of private or public land whose owners/occupiers require consent from DEFA before undertaking activities that may damage its special features. **All coastal ASSIs are accessible to the public.**

**NNRs** are areas protected via specific byelaws to ensure visitors behave responsibly. The nearest protected areas to Niarbyl Bay

### Additional Protected Areas

**ASSIs** are areas of private or public land whose owners/occupiers require consent from DEFA before undertaking activities that may damage its special features. **All coastal ASSIs are accessible to the public.**

**NNRs** are areas protected via specific byelaws to ensure visitors behave responsibly. The nearest protected areas to Niarbyl Bay



### Spotter Sheets

Download a 'species spotter sheet' for each MNR from our website and use it when exploring your local Marine Nature Reserve. The QR code on this leaflet will take you there, or use: [www.gov.im/MNR](http://www.gov.im/MNR)



### #MyManxMNR

Share your MNR experiences and the wonderful world of everything marine by submitting your images online using the hashtag **#MyManxMNR**



### Blueways Trails

The Blueways Trails offer a sense of what goes on around the Isle of Man's seas and shorelines by providing multi-activity exploration of our historic and diverse coast. On land, on and under the water; from snorkel safaris to maritime history, from wildlife watching to geology, there is much to discover on the Blueways.

<https://www.visitisleofman.com/blog/read/2020/07/discover-the-islands-blueways-b98>



### Raad ny Foillan

Manx Gaelic for 'The way of the gull'; take a wander along the island's coastal footpath. At almost 160km/100 miles in length it's the perfect way to see our coastline. Details can be found here: <https://www.visitisleofman.com/see-and-do/active-and-adventure/walking-and-hiking/raad-ny-foillan-coastal-path>

Please be considerate to wildlife and other people and take your tackle litter to home or put it in a bin.

**Fishing Litter**  
[www.gov.im/recreationalfishing](http://www.gov.im/recreationalfishing)  
Although you don't need a licence for saltwater angling remember to observe minimum landing sizes for each species. These are displayed on boards at all main harbours or find them online, along with other useful fishing information, at: [www.gov.im/recreationalfishing](http://www.gov.im/recreationalfishing)

**Does Your Catch Measure Up?**  
**Location: Peel**  
**Type:** Breakwater and shore fishing  
**Amenities:** Ample free parking and shops, pubs, restaurants, cafes and public toilets in the town centre.

**Location: Port Erin Bay and Bradda Head**  
**Type:** Shore fishing  
**Amenities:** Ample car parking near to the breakwater and at Bradda Glen where you'll find a restaurant. Shops, eateries, pubs and public toilets can be found in the village centre.

**Location: Niarbyl Point**  
**Type:** Shore fishing  
**Amenities:** Ample parking to the rear of the cafe, and a short walk downhill to the shore.

**Information For Anglers**  
The best time for sea fishing is between April and September with the plankton population blooming in the warmer months. This attracts sand eels, shoals of mackerel, grey mullet, pollack and cod. However, even in the winter months you're likely to find codling, coalfish and dogfish in Manx waters.

- Basking sharks (May-September)
- Harbour porpoise (year round)
- Eider and mallard duck (year round)
- Guillemots (summer only)
- Peregrine Falcon (year round)

### Other Species to Spot

# Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs)

## What is a Marine Nature Reserve?

Marine Nature Reserves (MNRs) are a type of marine protected area, usually established to conserve particular species and habitats, or enable their recovery, and where the most damaging activities and impacts are excluded. Marine Protected Areas are a well-established method for achieving these objectives and have been successfully used worldwide.

## Manx Marine Nature Reserves

There are 10 MNRs around the Isle of Man, forming a network that has been developing since 1989. Some areas, such as the first protected site, at Port Erin, and Ramsey Bay Marine Nature Reserve, have been well-studied and are examples of how conservation can benefit the marine environment and commercial and recreational fisheries. Manx MNRs now cover 430km<sup>2</sup>, around 52% of the 0-3 nautical mile area, or 11% of the whole territorial sea.

## Niarbyl Bay MNR

First established as a Fisheries Closed Area for scallop reseedling trials in 2009, this MNR is 5.66km<sup>2</sup> and makes up just over 1% of the reserves network. The north of the MNR is predominantly rocky and provides excellent conditions for kelp forests and their associated species, whilst the south is more coarse gravel, suitable for Iceland clams and scallops. The coast is rocky with cliffs and sea caves, and is excellent for birds, seal and shark watching; perhaps from Fleshwick Beach, which is accessible by road from the south.

# Niarbyl Bay

## Marine Nature Reserve

Niarbyl Bay MNR extends from Elby Point in the north to Fleshwick Bay in the south. Marine habitats were little studied until a detailed survey was carried out by a Bangor University MSc student in 2016. The survey indicated the presence of maerl and kelp beds and that king scallop densities were very low compared to fished grounds, therefore there was limited benefit in re-opening the area to scallop fishing, instead it now acts as a source of larvae.

## Important habitats within Niarbyl Bay MNR

**Kelp forests • Rocky reefs • Sea caves • Intertidal blue mussel**



Rocky reef © Chris Wood

### Rocky reefs

Rocky reefs provide an attachment site for various marine animals and algae and, over time, wave action creates crevices that increase the available habitat. The rocky intertidal zone is routinely covered and uncovered by the tides and species that live here have special adaptations to cope with a constantly changing environment. Rocks that occur below the waterline host a wide range of different species providing protection and a good feeding location.

### Kelp forests

Kelp seaweeds grow close to shore creating the equivalent of underwater forests. They have similar structures to terrestrial plants; the holdfast (like a root), stipe (like a stem) and blades (like leaves), and establish on hard rock surfaces which they anchor to with the holdfast. Kelp provide a 3D habitat for a range of species; worms, molluscs and crustaceans hide in the holdfast and the blades host bryozoans, juvenile fish and other seaweeds that colonise the surface. Kelp also plays an important role in marine foodwebs, providing a food source for fish, urchins and the beautiful blue-rayed limpet.



Kelp forest © Lara Howe

### Sea caves

Niarbyl means "the tail" in Manx Gaelic and refers to the long collection of rocks which extend out from the shoreline. All along the coast are stacks and caves which are mostly only accessible by sea via kayak. Seals and seabirds are abundant here as they use the caves and outcrops as refuge.



Kayaker in sea cave © Craig Whalley

### Intertidal blue mussel beds

This bivalve mollusc settles in large numbers as seed mussels but appears to be uncommon as adults, although there is a small colony near Peel Castle and at Niarbyl. They attach to the seabed or rocks using sticky threads called byssus, and can form extensive subtidal reefs. They are commonly predated on by dogwhelks and eider duck.



Blue mussels © Melissa Parsons

# MNR General Restrictions

**No mobile fishing gear (dredge or trawl)**

**No seabed extraction or deposit of materials**

**No damage to protected habitats or species**

## Important species within Niarbyl Bay MNR

**Grey seal • Iceland clam • Shag • Fulmar • Basking shark • Dogwhelk**  
**Harbour porpoise • Lesser black-backed gull**



Basking shark feeding ©Anders Salesjo

### Basking sharks

The basking shark is the second-largest fish in the world, feeding on zooplankton (small crustaceans, larvae and fish eggs) that it filters from the water with its gills. As their Manx name, *Gobbag Vooar* (big mouth) suggests they can strain up to 2000 tonnes of water per hour. Basking sharks have a worldwide distribution and search out plankton blooms in Manx waters from mid-May to the beginning of September.

### Atlantic grey seal

Two species of seal are found in Manx waters, the Common or Harbour seal and the Atlantic Grey seal. Grey seals are the most common species. They can be seen year round and give birth to white pups in the Autumn. Although they can be found all around the coast, the area from the Calf of Man to Peel is particularly good, including Niarbyl and Fleshwick bays.



Grey seal © Lara Howe



Fulmars © Lara Howe

### Fulmars

Fulmars are members of a group of birds known as petrels or tubenoses. Excess salt from their diet is excreted through their nose. They breed on the cliffs surrounding the MNR in the spring and early summer but spend much of their time at sea. They can live up to 40 years. Don't get too close as they can spit a foul-smelling oil at predators. Easily recognised from their stiff-winged gliding flight.

### Iceland clam

This burrowing bivalve (*Arctica islandica*) lives in sandy seabeds, filter-feeding organic matter from the water. It is the longest living animal on Earth – one individual was found to be over 500 years old. They are on the OSPAR list of threatened or declining species in the Irish Sea due to their very slow growth rate and sensitivity to seabed damage. Due to their longevity, their shells can be used for paleo-environmental analysis, indicating how warm/cold or saline the oceans were 1,000s of years ago.



Iceland clam © Angus Robson

