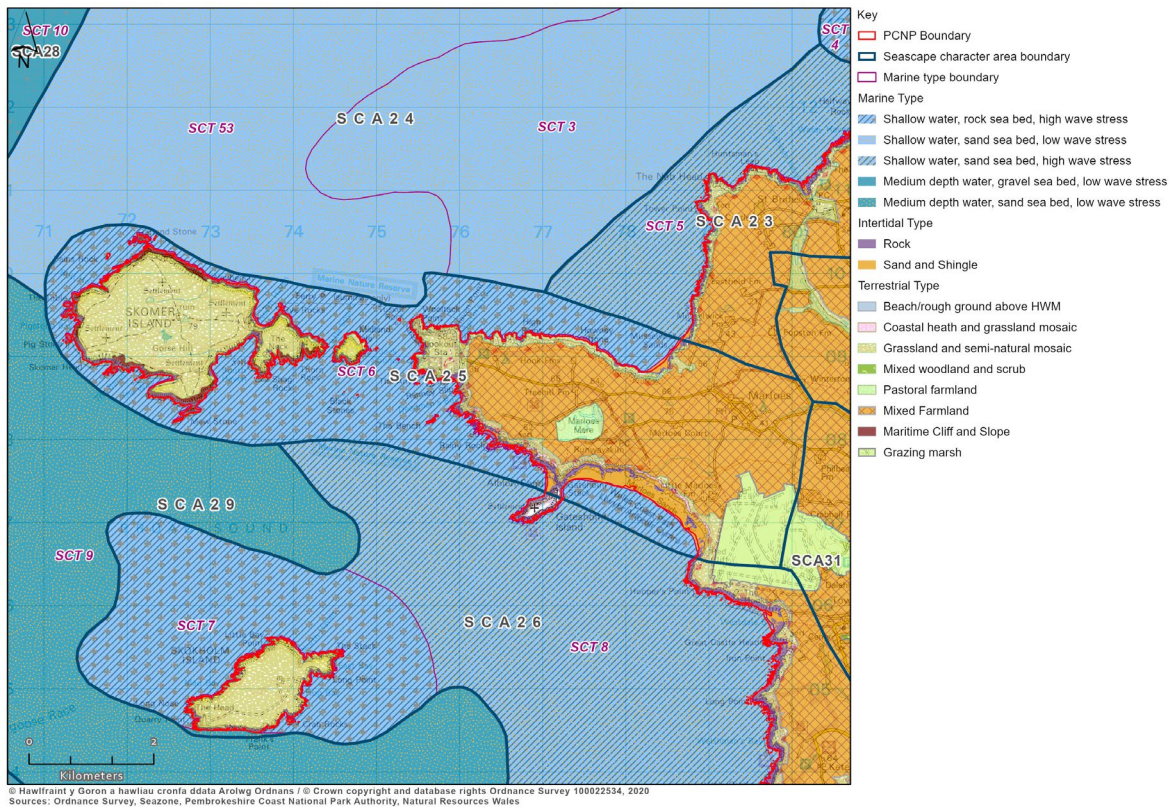


No: **25** Seascape Character Area Name: **Skomer Island and Marloes peninsula**



SCA25:Skomer Island and Marloes Peninsula



Looking to Skomer (left) from Haven Point CG lookout, with Ramsey Island visible across St Brides Bay to north (right)



Marloes peninsula looking east



Marloes Sands looking south east



Looking to Skomer from the sea, approximately 500m to the north

### Summary Description

Skomer Island and the Marloes peninsula and the islands are part of a volcanic geology with dramatic exposed rock formations and high cliffs, contrasting with a bleak and exposed plateau landscape. Skomer is an important bird colony and a popular destination for bird watching. Marloes Sands is a long sandy beach contained by high cliffs. The sea area is a Marine Nature Reserve and there are numerous shipping hazards.

### Key Characteristics

- Volcanic rock island of Skomer and associated islets, and domed Marloes peninsula with jagged cliffs and rocky shores, stacks, arches and caves and small coves.
- Long south facing beach at Marloes Sands.
- The sea is highly disturbed and exposed with tidal rips and many rocks and other hazards.
- High biodiverse sea as a marine nature reserve and SAC with seabirds, cetaceans and seals.
- Highly biodiverse coast and island as NNR, SPA and SSI with many bird species such as puffins and semi-natural vegetation of bracken, and bluebells.
- Historic landscape on Skomer with many remains dating from prehistoric times.
- Inland landcover is predominantly arable with a rectilinear field pattern and the isolated, stark settlement of Marloes but includes an area of raised mere which is managed for nature conservation.
- Recreation/sea use includes sailing, boat trips to Skomer, diving with many wrecks and wildlife, sea angling from the rocks and boats, kayaks and inshore potting.
- On land/coast the attractions are Marloes Beach, the Coast path and 'Deer Park'.
- Exposed and wild coast with exhilarating, wide and panoramic views from many locations.

### Physical Influences

Skomer Island (75m aod), The Neck (59m aod) and Midland Isle (45m aod) are formed of resistant, east-west striking Silurian Skomer Volcanic Group lavas, intrusives and sandstones, which continue eastwards across the gently domed Marloes Peninsula rising to 72m AOD (and westwards to Grassholm and the Smalls- SCA27). These rocks, and steeply dipping grey sandstones, dominate the rugged southern coastal cliffs with stacks, arches and caves. Rocks are both submerged and tidally exposed around islands. The intertidal areas are predominantly rocky shores, with sandy shores in bays, particularly Marloes Sands. Wind and wave erosion act through abrasion, attrition and hydraulic action, with depositional processes in bays transport sediment through traction, saltation and suspension. Sediment transport is generally swash aligned, with limited longshore drift.

The submerged bedrock in shallow (<30m) seas towards both north and south is covered by

gravelly sand. Around the islands the sea floor slopes steeply away from high, deeply indented cliffs. Across Marloes Bay the very shallow sea floor (<10m) slopes gently (<1°). The seas are exposed to high wave stress from the south west and tidal currents. Tidal currents set north and south through Jack Sound and to the west of Skomer. Tidal flow is <6 knots in Jack Sound, where there are rough waters and tidal rips. West of Skomer, tidal flow is <4 knots, and waters are rough to the west and north (Garland Stones) of the island. The tidal range at Martin's Haven is 6.9m.

Skomer Island and its surrounding seas are a Marine Nature Reserve with a rich biodiversity and several species at their northern or southern-most limits. The wildlife is abundant including puffins, auks, manx shearwaters, storm petrels, seals, dolphins and porpoises. Skomer is a national nature reserve, an SPA, SSSI, an important bird area and the waters lie within Pembrokeshire Marine SAC and the Skomer, Skokholm and the seas off Pembrokeshire SPA. Much research takes place on and around the island. The interior of Skomer Island the island is covered with extensive areas of bracken with bluebells and red campion giving way to thrift and sea campion on the coastal slopes.

The waters around Skomer Island and the Marloes Peninsula are Wales' only Marine Conservation Zone. The important habitats include sponge and anthozoan communities on sub tidal rocks, Ross 'coral' and seagrass beds.

The peninsula is predominantly arable in a rectilinear field pattern. An area of raised wetland mere is managed for waterfowl. The Deer Park is an area of semi-natural heathland.

### Cultural influences

Skomer Island is an island on the western seaways whose Norse name makes clear its connections with the Viking polity of Scandinavia, Britain and Ireland. Lying just off the south Pembrokeshire coast, it shows human activity in a closed microcosm, with extensive, well-preserved, relict remains of prehistoric settlements, field systems and recent farming activity- the farmhouse was inhabited until 1948. The island was used for pasturage in recent centuries, possibly reflected in the ramp near the Lantern natural arch. There are two large 19<sup>th</sup> century lime-kilns on the island. Skomer Island ranks among the finest archaeological landscapes in Britain.

SAMs include:

- PE180 (hut circle settlement): community: Marloes and St Brides (partly in SCA26)
- PE181 (hut groups, cairns and cliff castle): community: Marloes and St Brides
- PE194 (promontory fort): community: Marloes and St Brides
- PE323 (promontory fort): community: Marloes and St Brides
- PE566 (airfield): community: Marloes and St Brides (partly in SCA26 and SCA31)

There are a number of wrecks especially clustered around Jack Sound which indicate the potentially treacherous nature of the waters and are dangerous themselves. The remains of some, like the Molesey and Lonsdale have been sighted by divers. The Molesey was a steel steamship en route from Manchester to Cardiff when it was caught in the severe storm and driven onto Midland Island in 1929. Subsequently the Lonsdale, a steel hulled steamship travelling from Berehaven to Padstow, was wrecked nearby after taking on coal off St Martins Haven.

This area lies within the Skomer Island Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest.

The Norse name 'Skomer', as with Ramsey and Skokholm, indicates its Norse links- it refers to the cloven shape of the island. The Prehistoric 'Harold Stone' is said by Giraldus Cambrensis to have been erected by Earl Harold to commemorate his victory over the Welsh in 1063. The Deer Park on the tip of the peninsula takes its name from a failed attempt to establish a deer park at the turn of the 20th century.

Motor and sailing cruisers, along with motorised day boats come out from the Milford Haven Waterway to visit the Skomer Island and anchor. It forms part of a heavily used coastal cruising route linking Milford north across St Brides Bay and west to Ireland. Navigation through the channel between Skomer and the Deer Park, The Jack Sounds, is particularly hazardous. Diving is popular in this area as there are many wrecks and the waters are rich in wildlife and other fauna. Sea angling from the rocks on Marloes headland and from boats is popular as is inshore

potting. Kayaks and day boats launch from Martins Haven which also offers swinging moorings for inshore fishing boats, research vessels and private craft. A temporary anchorage at South Haven is good in northerly winds.

Skomer Island is extremely popular with tourists who take the boat from the landing stage at Martin's Haven out to the island. The boat runs from 10am and starts bringing visitors back from 3pm - total number of visitors allowed on the island at any one time is 250 for conservation reasons. Fishing in the area is restricted by the MNR but could include set nets and lobster and crab potting.

A minor road runs along the spine of Marloes peninsula through the isolated settlement of Marloes as far as a car park close the St Martin's Haven where boat trips depart for Skomer. On the peninsula, overlooking Skomer, is the Deer Park which is popular for walking and wildlife watching as is the Pembrokeshire Coast Path. There is a coastguard lookout here. Climbing takes place on the cliffs of the Deer Park, especially at Wooltack Point. Marloes is a good beach with associated beach activities, especially popular when the wind is from the north. The beach is also used for fossil hunting. Marloes Mere is a birdwatching hotspot attracting a large number of waterfowl in winter.

There are several camp and caravan sites in the area but these tend to avoid permanent caravans. A disused airfield lies south of Marloes.

The Deer Park and some land in the peninsula is owned and managed by the National Trust and Skomer is managed by the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales.

Passing ferries to Ireland from Pembroke Dock and oil tankers and other freight ships for the terminals and the power station in Milford Haven can be viewed at a distance.

#### **Aesthetic, perceptual and experiential qualities**

The island and end of the peninsula have a highly exposed and wild character and feel very large scale and open. The cliffs and rock shores, islets and rocks are dramatic, jagged and angular. At sea the character is dominated by the disturbed water and tidal races and the rocky shores and cliffs adjacent with associated seabirds. There are wide views to the sea and islands from the peninsula. There are strong sea smells and wind exposure in most places, with crashing noise of waves in rough seas. Marloes Sands is a popular beach and can feel sheltered. Tranquillity can be reduced in summer. However, overall there is a high degree of naturalness, remoteness and tranquillity along the coast and the islands.

The peninsula hinterland is smooth and bleak with few trees and low hedgerows or walls. The settlement of Marloes feels isolated and exposed.

#### **Cultural benefits and services**

The area contributes significantly towards leisure and recreational services in the form of wildlife watching, walking and beaches, to natural heritage in the form of the unspoilt coast, marine and national nature reserves, geological and nature conservation importance, and to cultural and spiritual services in respect of the diverse history and a strong sense of space and escape.

Forces for change								
Summary	Key forces for change							
<p>Generally low erosion north of Albion Bay. Shoreline management plan states ‘do nothing’.</p> <p>Skomer MNR may increase no take areas and may restrict boating and other activities in some areas.</p> <p>Visitor pressure on peninsula attractions eg Marloes Beach and access, Martins Haven and associated car parks.</p> <p>Fossil hunting on Marloes Beach.</p> <p>Coast path compaction and erosion in places.</p> <p>Any development pressure in Marloes would be likely to be prominent in an open landscape with few trees.</p>	<b>Special Qualities</b>	Natural processes/ climate change	Visitor pressure	Marine use- commercial and fishing	Offshore energy or minerals	Development pressure	Land management changes	MOD use
	Coastal Splendour							
	Islands							
	Diversity of Landscape							
	Remoteness, Tranquillity and Wilderness							
	Diverse Geology							
	Richness of Habitats and Biodiversity							
	Rich Archaeology							
	Distinctive Settlement Character							
	Cultural Heritage							
	Accessing the Park							
	Space to Breathe							
	<b>Key</b>		Change occurring in the area affecting the selected special quality					
Key factors to be taken into account when assessing sensitivity to change								
Factors contributing to potentially higher susceptibility and value					Factors contributing to potentially lower susceptibility and value			
<p>Remote, unspoilt, and open rural coastline and islands of nature conservation and geological importance.</p> <p>Views out to sea and across St Bride’s Bay.</p> <p>Sensitivity to further light pollution from Milford Haven waterway oil and gas facilities.</p> <p>Historic character of the area.</p> <p>Coast Path as a sensitive receptor.</p> <p>Biodiversity, historic and landscape designations.</p>					<p>Visitor activity and car parks.</p> <p>Presence of established recreational use.</p> <p>Large ships passing on way to Milford Haven or anchored in St Brides Bay.</p>			