

UK scientists unite for seabed survey off the south-west coast

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A four-week seabed mapping survey will bring together scientists from 11 organisations to improve understanding of the marine environment.

The UK Centre for Seabed Mapping (UK CSM), a group of over 30 public sector organisations with a shared commitment to collect and share high-quality marine data, will undertake a seabed mapping survey – CSM2026 – to explore and map the seabed along the UK's south-west coastline.

Throughout the four-week survey, using cutting-edge survey technology deployed from the Research Vessel Cefas Endeavour, a team of 26 scientists from across the field of maritime research will collect vital hydrographic, geological and environmental data when they set sail from Lowestoft on 20 April.

Convening multiple government agencies, the survey represents an unprecedented level of collaboration within the maritime sector. By combining their skills and capabilities in a single survey, the team aim to secure data to deliver the UK government's commitments and make advances in how our seabed is mapped, understood and managed.

11 UK CSM member organisations are involved:

- Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
- UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO)
- British Geological Survey (BGS)
- Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- The Crown Estate
- Historic England
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Northern Ireland (AFBI)
- Natural England
- Royal Navy

Over the course of the survey, the scientists on board will have the opportunity to work with experts from other public sector organisations, share skills, and source key seabed mapping data that supports a wide range of applications including offshore energy and infrastructure, marine ecosystem science, safety at sea, marine policy, and defence.

The four-week research survey is due to take place between 20 April and 19 May. This will consist of two survey legs, starting in Lowestoft, Suffolk and ending in Falmouth, Cornwall. All organisations are supporting the planning of alternative sites to maximise the opportunity.

Marine Minister Emma Hardy said:

The UK is at the forefront of marine protection with a comprehensive network of 374 Marine Protected Areas, protecting more than 38% of our waters.

This survey is an excellent example of our work in partnership to improve our understanding of our maritime estate, providing data to deliver our commitments and make advances in how our seabed is mapped, understood and managed.

Andrew Colenutt, Chair of the CSM2026 Project Team and Head of Hydrography and Meteorology at the MCA, said:

This is the first time that such a large-scale, multi-agency, collaborative survey has been undertaken in the UK and it's a really exciting venture. We are fortunate to have expert scientists and surveyors from across government who will collect a wide range of highly valuable data. The partnership approach provides opportunities to share knowledge and expertise, as well as providing invaluable training and offshore fieldwork experience.

The alliance of organisations is working together to increase efficiencies for data collection, processing and analysis under the gather once, use many times philosophy.

Seabed mapping data provides the UK with a foundational basemap of its marine estate. Such valuable datasets are increasingly underpinning the maritime economy and energy security, enabling sustainable management of marine resources, development of marine policies and planning, and improves our understanding of the marine environment.

Alison Pettafor, Oversea Territories Country Lead, Cefas, co-chair of the Project Team and Surveyor in Charge during the first survey leg said:

This survey is an exciting opportunity and highlights the strength of UK Government organisations working together. It clearly demonstrates the benefits of a 'collect once, use many times' approach - combining expertise, sharing data openly and building a clearer picture of our marine environment to support better decisions for the future.

The project has received strong support from all partners involved and represents the most ambitious collaborative surveys undertaken on RV Cefas Endeavour to date. It could mark the beginning of a new era in how we map and understand our seabed.

Rear Admiral Angus Essenhigh OBE, UK National Hydrographer & Director of Data Acquisition at the UKHO and chair of the UK CSM Steering Committee said:

This joint survey is a fantastic example of what public sector collaboration can achieve when expertise, capability and purpose are aligned. By bringing together organisations from across the UK maritime sector through the UK Centre for Seabed Mapping (UK CSM), we are not only improving how the seabed is mapped, but deepening our collective understanding of the ocean environment, while also providing an opportunity for various experts to learn from one another.

High-quality seabed mapping underpins everything from safety at sea and environmental protection to sustainable development and supporting national security. Working together through the UK CSM allows us to maximise the value of data, share knowledge, and deliver insights that no single organisation could achieve alone.

About the UK Centre for Seabed Mapping (UK CSM)

The UK Centre for Seabed Mapping, administered by the UKHO, was established in 2022 and coordinates the collection, management and access of seabed mapping data. Through collaboration, the UK CSM aims to improve understanding of the UK's maritime estate and inform the effective management of marine resources. There are currently over 30 public sector organisations who are members of the UK CSM with an interest in marine geospatial information and data.

Find out more about the UK Centre for Seabed Mapping (UK CSM).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-scientists-unite-for-seabed-survey-off-the-south-west-coast>