

# Natural England's Condition Assessments for Marine Features

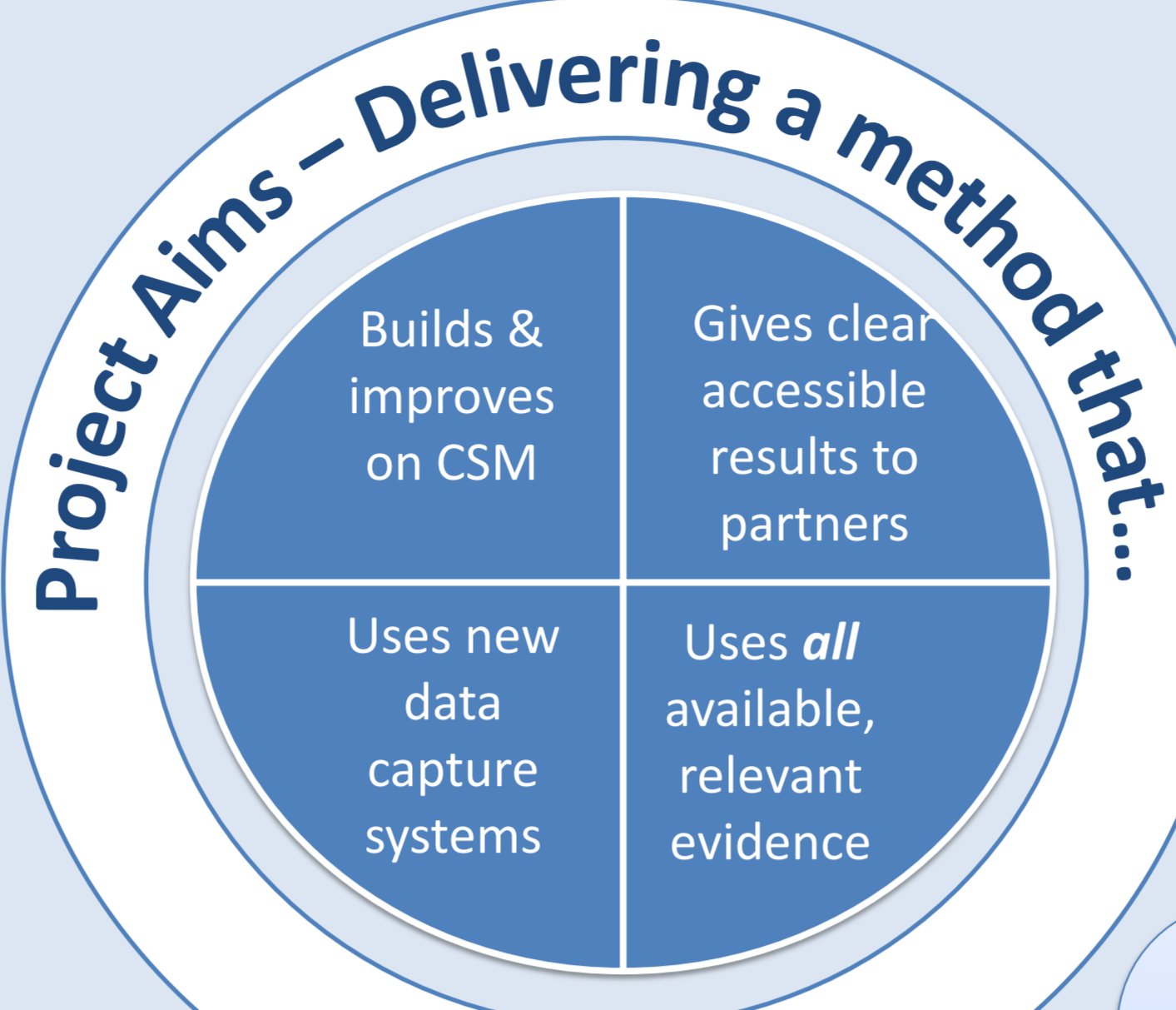
## The need for condition assessments

Condition assessments are needed to support decision making for MPA management. Using condition information can:

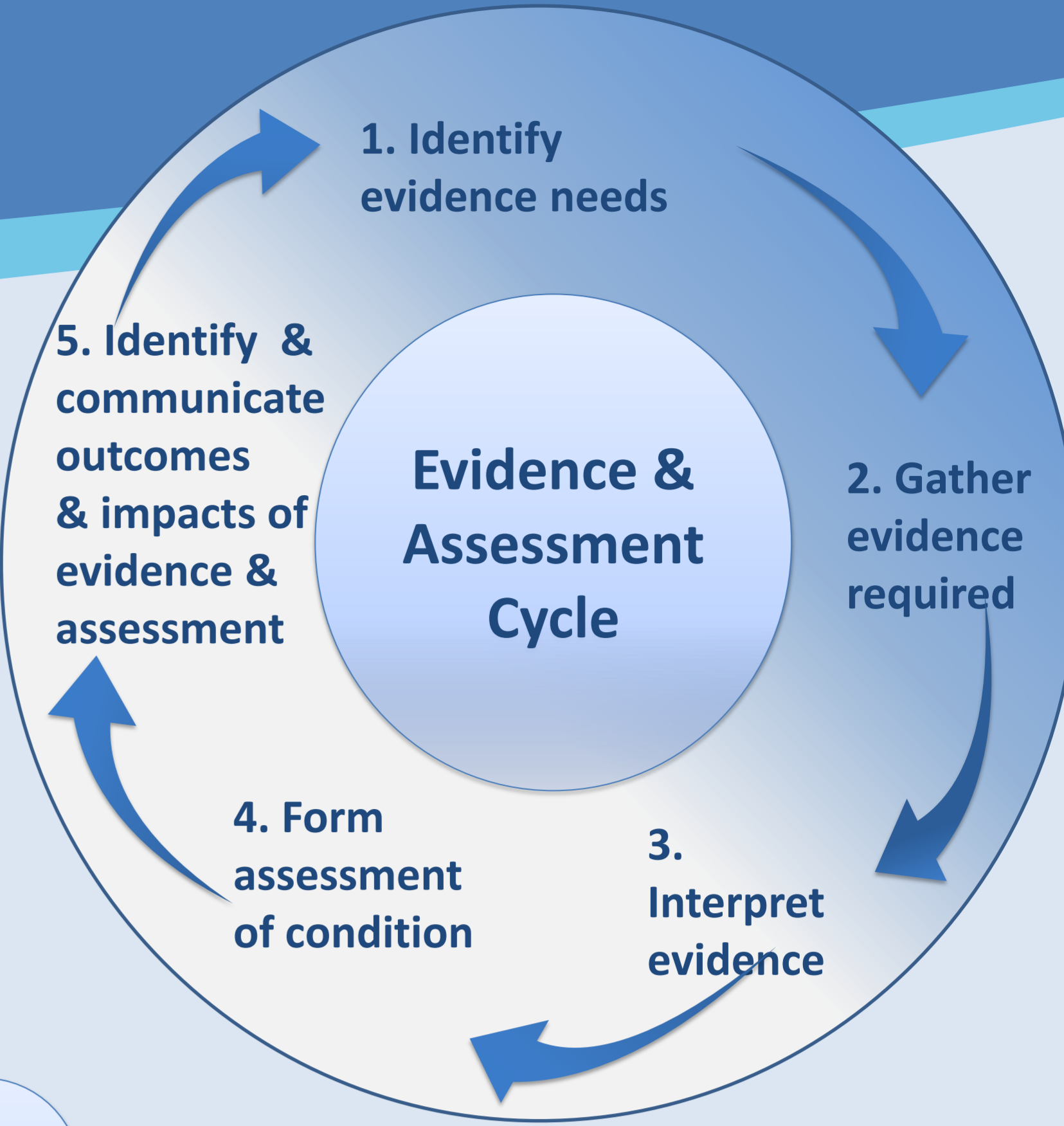
- Establish appropriate management responses
- Adjust existing measures as necessary
- Identify threats or risks to a feature that need surveillance.
- Form an essential step in the evidence/assessment cycle which allows for adaptive management

A formal process that was achievable and allowed data capture that was easily available to partners was lacking for marine.

Analysis of past reporting & assessments



Steps 3-4: previous gaps in NE Evidence & assessment cycle



## Definitions

**CSM:** Common Standards Monitoring  
**Condition Assessment:** Assessing the condition of protected features  
**DSS:** Designated Sites System, online portal providing MPA information

## 1. & 2. Identify and gather evidence

- Nature conservation body monitoring programmes
- Citizen science projects
- Academic institutions
- Designation verification surveys
- Casework history
- Activities and pressure mapping

Designated Sites View

Attribute	Attribute Name	Target	Assessment Date	Target Met	Confidence	Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_1_01	Extent and distribution	Maintain the total extent and spatial distribution of intertidal rock, subject to natural variation in sediment veneer.		Never		Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_2	Distribution, presence and spatial distribution of biological communities	Restore the presence and spatial distribution of intertidal rock communities according to the map.		Never		Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_3_01	Structure: species composition of component communities	Maintain the species composition of component communities.		Never		Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_3_06	Structure: physical structure of rocky substrate	Maintain the surface and structural complexity, and the stability of the reef structure.		Never		Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_3_09	Structure: non-native species and pathogens	Reduce the introduction and spread of non-native species and pathogens, and their impacts.		Never		Year	Add	View	Remove
Hab_At_4_10	Structure and function: (Plantain OR Restioid) the abundance of listed typical species, to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat.			Never		Year	Add	View	Remove

Review of data, systems, CSM & metrics for assessments



Evidence in

## 5. Using DSS to identify and communicate assessments and support MPA management

- Outcomes used to generate actions in the focus areas in Plymouth:
  - Management options for Shad
  - Control work on Pacific oysters
- Actions, threats and existing management measures along with condition information and summaries on evidence gaps will be available to public on DSS, with greater level of detail for key stakeholders to support decision making, ongoing assessments and filling evidence gaps.
- Feeds back in to the evidence gaps and monitoring priorities

Supported by NE's Designated Sites System

Draft method trialled 2016

## 3. Interpret the evidence: Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC case study

- Used team of advisors and specialists
- Looked at the way the evidence was reviewed and aggregated
- Some clear examples of use of expert judgement
- Used existing assessments for saltmarsh and other coastal features
- Emphasis placed on using citizen science data and better use of Environment Agency data across the features

## 4. Form assessment of condition: Outcomes of the assessments at Plymouth SAC (selected features)

- Step wise QA carried out
- Feature summary results provided
- Impacts identified
- Evidence gaps identified
- Summary report available in lieu of Designated Sites System
- Trial used to refine and simplify method

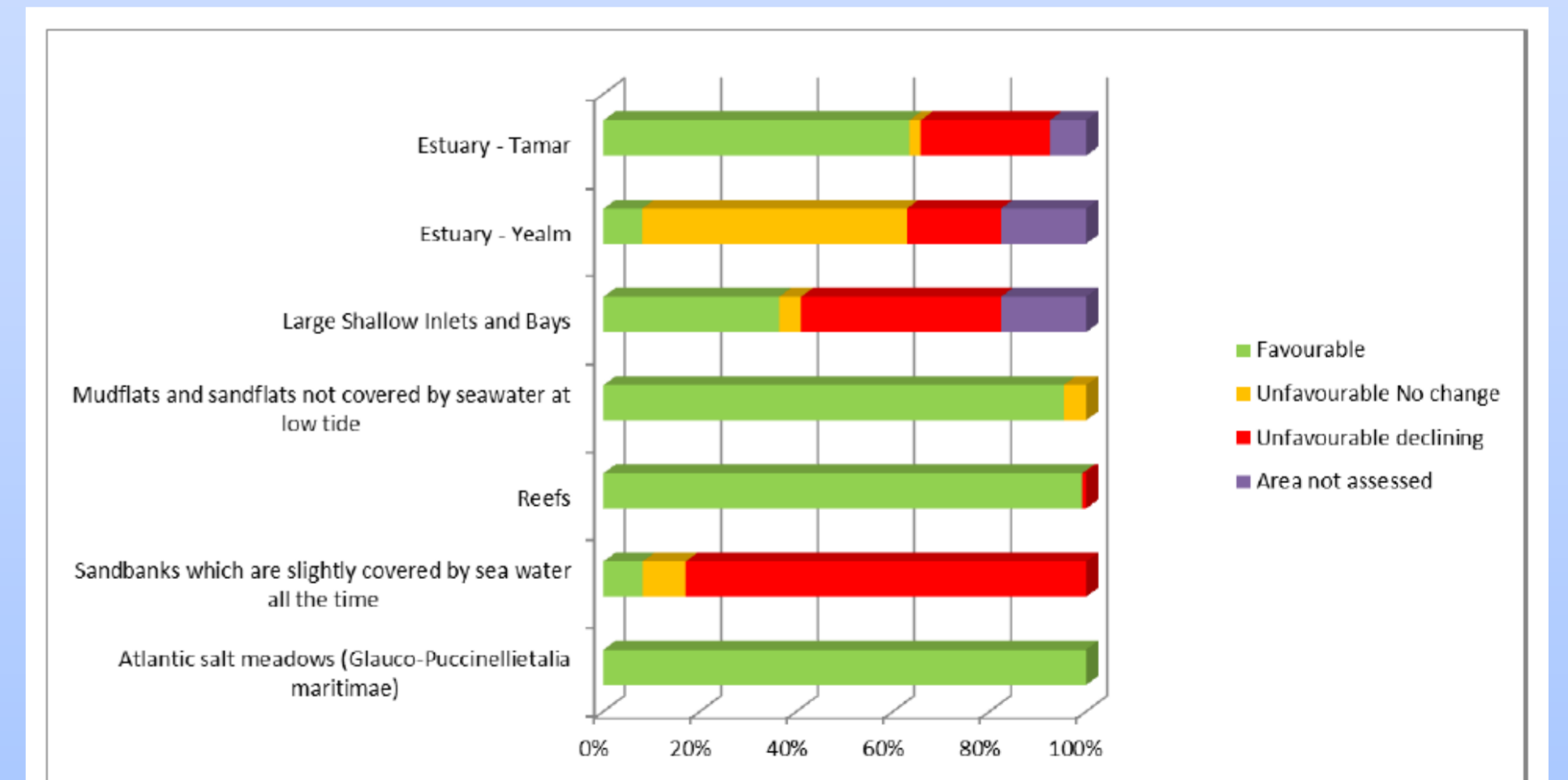
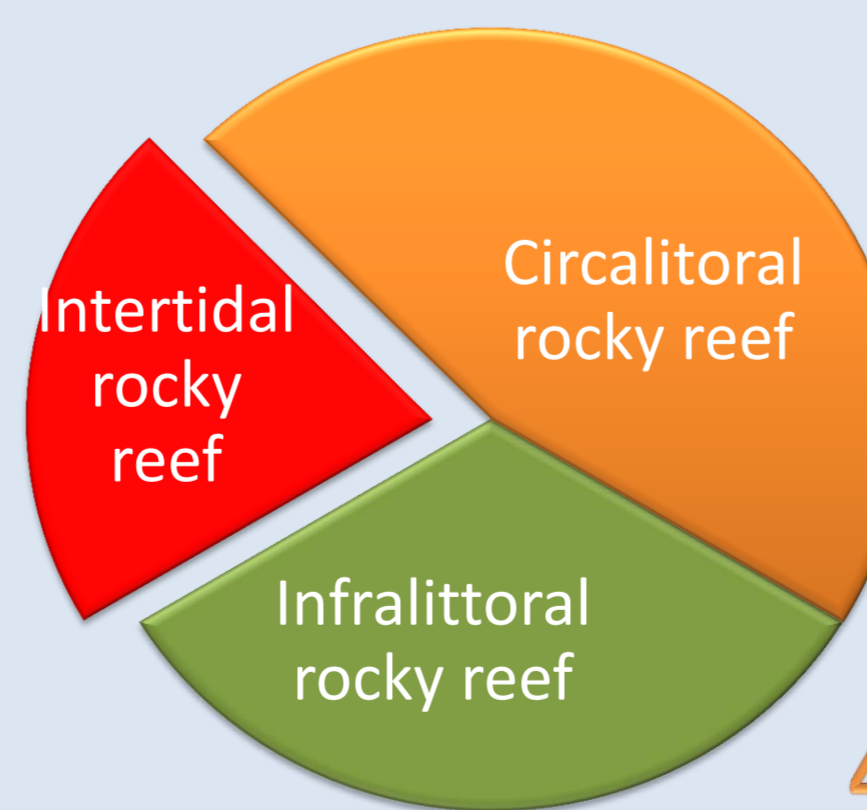
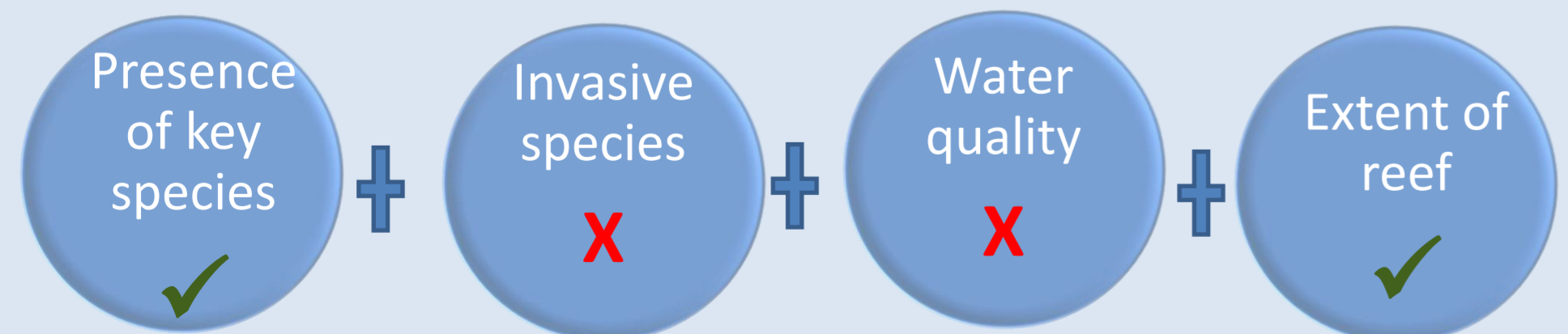


Figure 1 Percentage condition for Annex 1 habitats and complex features designated as part of the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC

## Step 4b



## Step 4c

Annex 1 Reef :  
 35% Favourable  
 20% Unfavourable declining  
 45% Unfavourable no change

Step 4a. Individual attributes are assessed on a pass/fail basis using all available evidence.

Step 4b. These results are aggregated using a systematic process sense checked using expert judgement, to inform the sub feature condition

Step 4c. Results are used to provide feature condition, presented as percentage area per condition category

- Allows confidence assessments of each step of the process to create for greater transparency in decisions made
- Enables decisions and conservation status to be linked to specific features and sub-features



More information... <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/>

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