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# LIMITS IN THE SEAS

No. 23  
STRAIGHT BASELINES:  
UNITED KINGDOM

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No. 23

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June 26, 1970

Office of the Geographer  
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

**STRAIGHT BASELINES: UNITED KINGDOM**

The United Kingdom, by Order in Council, created on September 25, 1964 a series of straight baselines which join the Hebrides islands to the west coast of Scotland. The same Order in Council established the executive machinery for bay closing lines. The text of the Order is as follows:

**AT THE COURT AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE  
The 25th day of September, 1964**

**Present,**

**THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY IN COUNCIL**

Her Majesty, by virtue and in exercise of all the powers enabling Her in that behalf, is pleased, by and with the advice of Her Privy Council, to order, and it is hereby ordered, as follows:--

1. This Order may be cited as the Territorial Waters Order in Council 1964 and shall come into operation on 30th September 1964.

2.--(1) Except as otherwise provided in Articles 3 and 4 of this Order, the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea adjacent to the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man is measured shall be low-water line along the coast, including the coast of all islands comprised in those territories.

(2) For the purposes of this Article a low-tide elevation which lies wholly or partly within the breadth of sea which would be territorial sea if all low-tide elevations were disregarded for the purpose of the measurement of the breadth thereof and if Article 3 of this Order were omitted shall be treated as an island.

3.--(1) The baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured between Cape Wrath and the Mull of Kintyre shall consist of the series of straight lines drawn so as to join successively, in the order in which they are there set out, the points identified by the co-ordinates of latitude and longitude in the first column of the Schedule to this Order, each being a point situate on low-water line and on or adjacent to the feature, if any, named in the second column of that Schedule opposite to the co-ordinates of latitude and longitude of the point in the first column.

(2) The provisions of paragraph (1) of this Article shall be without prejudice to the operation of Article 2 of this Order in relation to any island or low-tide elevation which for the purpose of that Article is treated as if it were an island, being an island or low-tide elevation which lies to seaward of the baseline specified in paragraph (1) of this Article.

4. In the case of the sea adjacent to a bay, the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured shall, subject to the provisions of Article 3 of this Order--

- (a) if the bay has only one mouth and the distance between the low-water line of the natural entrance points of the bay does not exceed 24 miles, be a straight line joining the said low-water lines;
- (b) if, because of the presence of islands, the bay has more than one mouth and the distances between the low-water lines of the natural entrance points of each mouth added together do not exceed 24 miles, be a series of straight lines across each of the mouths drawn so as to join the said low-water lines;
- (c) if neither paragraph (a) nor (b) of this Article applies, be a straight line 24 miles in length drawn from low-water line to low-water line within the bay in such a manner as to enclose the maximum area of water that is possible with a line of that length.

5.--(1) In this Order--

the expression "bay" means an indentation of the coast such that its area is not less than that of the semi-circle whose diameter is a line drawn across the mouth of the indentation, and for the purposes of this definition the area of an indentation shall be taken to be the area bounded by low-water line around the shore of the indentation and the straight line joining the low-water lines of its natural entrance points, and where, because of the presence of islands, an indentation has more than one mouth the length of the diameter of the semi-circle referred to shall be the sum of the lengths of the straight lines drawn across each of the mouths, and in calculating the area of an indentation the area of any islands lying within it shall be treated as part of the area of the indentation;

the expression "island" means a naturally formed area of land surrounded by water which is above water at mean high-water spring tides; and

the expression "low-tide elevation" means a naturally formed area of drying land surrounded by water which is below water at mean high-water spring tides.

(2) For the purposes of this Order, permanent harbour works which form an integral part of a harbour system shall be treated as forming part of the coast.

(3) The Interpretation Act 1889 (a) shall apply to the interpretation of this Order as it applies to the interpretation of an Act of Parliament.

6. This Order shall be published in the London Gazette, the Edinburgh Gazette and the Belfast Gazette.

W. G. Agnew.

### Article 3

#### SCHEDULE

#### POINTS BETWEEN CAPE WRATH AND THE MULL OF KINTYRE JOINED TO FORM BASELINES

|    | Co-ordinates of latitude and<br>longitude of point |    |    |                |    |    | Name of Feature   |
|----|--|----|----|----------------|----|----|-------------------|
|    | Latitude North                                     |    |    | Longitude West |    |    |                   |
|    | °  | '  | "  | °              | '  | "  |                   |
| 1  | 58   | 37 | 33 | 5              | 00 | 00 | Cape Wrath        |
| 2  | 58   | 31 | 14 | 6              | 15 | 46 | Lith Sgeir        |
| 3  | 58   | 29 | 08 | 6              | 20 | 27 | Dell Rock         |
| 4  | 58   | 18 | 16 | 6              | 48 | 18 | Tiumpan           |
| 5  | 58   | 17 | 40 | 6              | 52 | 54 | Mas Sgeir         |
| 6  | 58   | 17 | 06 | 6              | 55 | 31 | Stac nam Balg     |
| 7  | 58   | 14 | 33 | 7              | 02 | 00 | Gallan Head       |
| 8  | 58   | 13 | 56 | 7              | 03 | 00 | --                |
| 9  | 58   | 10 | 38 | 7              | 06 | 58 | Eilean Molach     |
| 10 | 57   | 59 | 03 | 7              | 17 | 50 | Gasker            |
| 11 | 57   | 41 | 15 | 7              | 43 | 00 | Haskeir Eagach    |
| 12 | 57   | 32 | 33 | 7              | 43 | 46 | Clettan a Fer     |
| 13 | 57   | 14 | 25 | 7              | 27 | 24 | Rudha Ardvule     |
| 14 | 57   | 00 | 46 | 7              | 31 | 36 | Greian Head       |
| 15 | 56   | 57 | 21 | 7              | 33 | 43 | --                |
| 16 | 56   | 56 | 56 | 7              | 34 | 19 | Ard Caolas        |
| 17 | 56   | 56 | 00 | 7              | 34 | 51 | Biruastil         |
| 18 | 56   | 49 | 16 | 7              | 39 | 32 | Guarsay Point     |
| 19 | 56   | 48 | 00 | 7              | 40 | 00 | Sron an Duin      |
| 20 | 56   | 47 | 07 | 7              | 39 | 37 | Berneray Island   |
| 21 | 56   | 19 | 22 | 7              | 06 | 48 | Skerryvore        |
| 22 | 56   | 08 | 00 | 6              | 38 | 03 | Dubh Artach       |
| 23 | 55   | 41 | 36 | 6              | 32 | 03 | Frenchman's Rocks |
| 24 | 55   | 40 | 20 | 6              | 30 | 55 | Orsay Island      |
| 25 | 55   | 35 | 19 | 6              | 20 | 12 | Mull of Oa        |
| 26 | 55   | 17 | 57 | 5              | 47 | 52 | Mull of Kintyre   |

## EXPLANATORY NOTE

(This Note is not part of the Order, but is intended to indicate its general purport.)

This Order establishes the baseline from which the breadth of the territorial sea adjacent to the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man is measured. This, generally, is low-water line round the coast, including the coast of all islands, but between Cape Wrath and the Mull of Kintyre a series of straight lines joining specified points lying generally on the seaward side of the islands lying off the coast are used, and where there are well defined bays elsewhere lines not exceeding 24 miles in length drawn across the bays are used.

The bay closing lines are not specified in the order but on the map "Foreign Fishing Rights and Concessions within the Fisheries Limits of the British Isles", prepared by the Hydrographer, 1965 closing lines have been indicated for the following bays:

- a) Firth of Clyde
- b) Solway Firth including Luce and Wigtown Bays
- c) Morecambe Bay
- d) Tremadoc Bay
- e) Bristol Channel including Carmarthen Bay (all on the west coast of Great Britain);
- f) The Thames Estuary
- g) The Wash
- h) The Humber Estuary
- i) Firth of Forth
- j) Firth of Tay
- k) Moray Firth (all on the east coast of Great Britain); and
- l) Belfast Lough (in Northern Ireland)

In addition, on the south coast of Great Britain, straight baselines appear to have been drawn from the mainland to the western tip of the Isle of Wight and from the southern point of the same isle to Selsey Bill, also on the mainland. These lines enclose the Solent, the harbor of Southampton. Since they are not included within the straight baselines, the assumption is that the United Kingdom considers the water a juridical bay or a harbor roadstead.

The straight baselines of the Order in Council have been plotted on a large scale chart for the following analysis:

| Line Sector | Length in n.m. | Comments  |
|-------------|----------------|---|
| 1-2         | 40.25          | Joins the mainland of Scotland with the northern point of Lewis and Harris; closes the Minch, the main passage between the Hebrides and the mainland. |

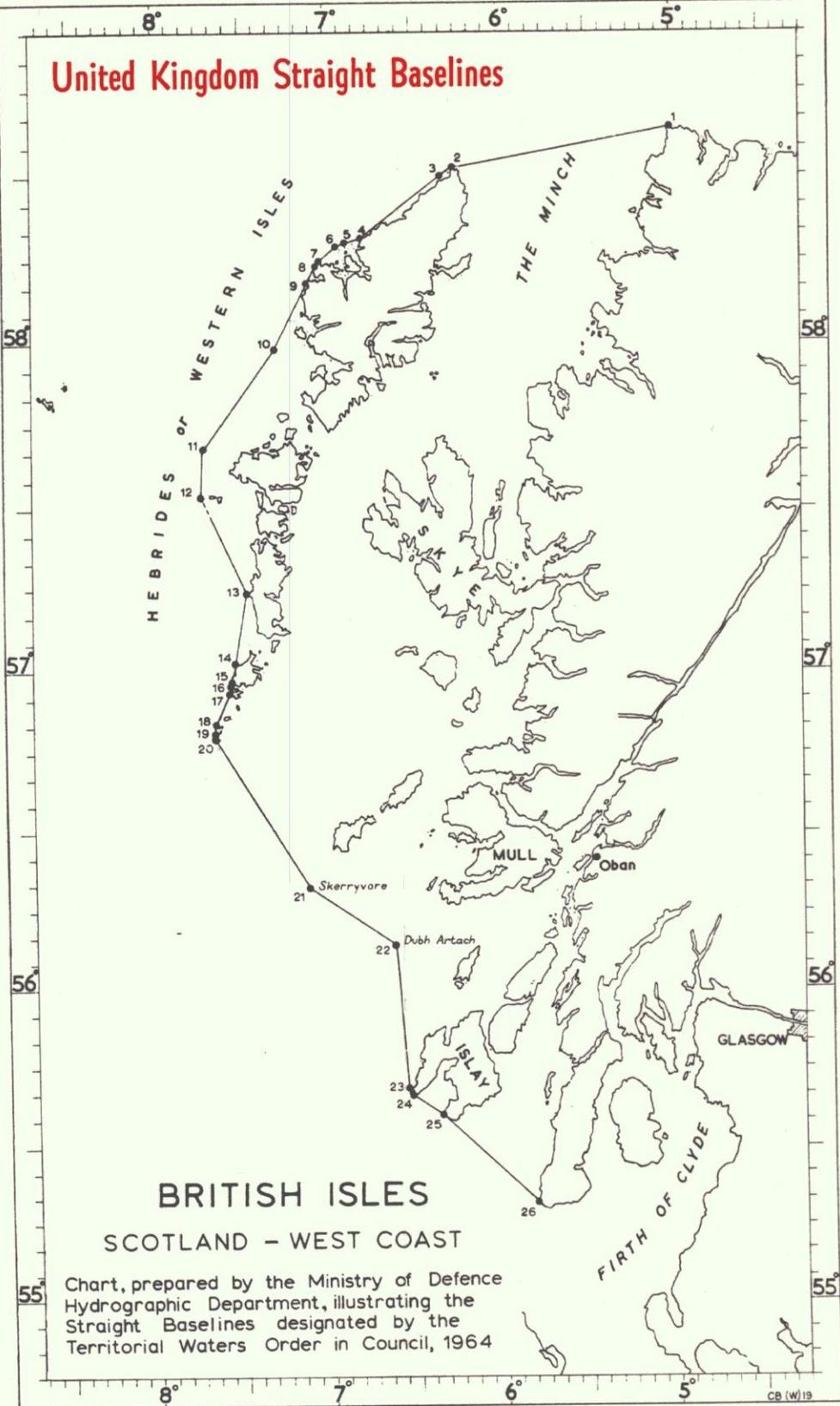
| Line Sector | Length in n.m. | Comments   |
|-------------|----------------|--|
| 2-3         | 3.1            | Parallel to the general direction of the coast; joins offshore rock situated within 1 nautical mile of shore.  |
| 3-4         | 18.5           | Line skims the coast at a distance of approximately 1.5 nautical miles on the average; coast indented but not markedly; no offshore islands or rocks.  |
| 4-5         | 2.4            | Line from 4 to 7 enclose a deep bay on Lewis; 4-5 within 10° of general direction coast.   |
| 5-6         | 1.4            | Same general situation.  |
| 6-7         | 4.3            | Completes bay closing by returning to mainland cape on Harris.   |
| 7-8         | .8             | Closes small bay.  |
| 8-9         | 3.8            | Joins small rock immediately adjacent to coast; closes a deep bay.   |
| 9-10        | 12.8           | Approximately 6° from the general trend of the coast; joins island nearly 6 nautical miles from the shore; numerous islets and indentations.   |
| 10-11       | 22.1           | Departs from the general direction of the coast by approximately 16° to close the Sound of Harris, an inter-island passage; island situated slightly over 7 nautical miles from shore; Baselines 1-11 leave the Flannan islands and St. Kilda group outside of straight baselines. |
| 11-12       | 9.0            | Change in general trend of the coast; line joins Haskeir islands with islands, both situated approximately 7 nautical miles from the shore;  |
| 12-13       | 20.4           | Line joins main island cape at an angle of approximately 35°, as determined by the general trend of the Uist islands; necessary if Heiskar group to be enclosed.   |
| 13-14       | 13.9           | Generally parallel to the trend of the coast; encloses the Sound of Barra, an inter-island passage.  |
| 14-15       | 3.6            | Headland to headland; enclosed bay-like coastal depression.  |
| 15-16       | .75            | Joins Barra and Vatersay islands enclosing narrow inter-island passage.  |
| 16-17       | 1.2            | Follows general trend; joins offshore islet.   |
| 17-18       | 7.2            | Follows general trend of the coast; joins islet with Mingulay island.  |
| 18-19       | 1.5            | Follows general trend of the coast.  |
| 19-20       | 1.4            | Begins to change direction to tie the Hebrides back with the mainland of Scotland.   |

| Line Sector | Length in n.m. | Comments   |
|-------------|----------------|--|
| 20-21       | 33.2           | Extends southeastward to tie the Hebrides to Skerryvore, an isolated rock approximately 37 nautical miles from the mainland and 9 nautical miles from Tiree; closes the Sea of the Hebrides which with Little Minch, North Minch and The Minch forms main passage between Scotland and the Hebrides. |
| 21-22       | 19.6           | Joins Dubh Artach, a rock situated approximately 34 nautical miles from the mainland and 13 nautical miles from Mullisland.  |
| 22-23       | 26.5           | Parallel to the general trend of the coast; joins to rock immediately offshore from large island of Islay; closes Firth of Lorne, a fjord.   |
| 23-24       | 1.0            | Turning point in change of coastal direction.  |
| 24-25       | 7.9            | Follows general trend of the coast; closes Loch Indaal, a true bay.  |
| 25-26       | 25.5           | Rejoins mainland at peninsula of Kintyre; departs from general direction of coast by approximately 40°; necessary to close mainland; encloses Sound of Jura, an insular "fjord."   |
| Total       | 282.10         |  |

The U.K. straight baselines total 282.10 nautical miles; the average length of a segment is approximately 11.25 nautical miles. There are four segments over 24 miles in length; the longest sector (1 - 2) is 40.25 nautical miles. The sector closes the island-mainland passage in the north. The southern sector is closed by lines 20 - 22 which measure 52.8 nautical miles in total.

The Hebrides and associated islands "screen" virtually all of the mainland coast. The water area enclosed by the straight baselines is estimated to exceed the land area enclosed by a ratio nearly identical with that of Norway, i.e. 3.5:1.

# United Kingdom Straight Baselines



Chart, prepared by the Ministry of Defence Hydrographic Department, illustrating the Straight Baselines designated by the Territorial Waters Order in Council, 1964