

Risk-based assessments for fisheries in MPAs

Photo courtesy of NFFO

Management of fisheries in MPAs

Defra's revised approach to managing commercial fisheries activity in European Marine Sites (EMSs) requires IFCA and MMO to assess the impacts of fisheries on all designated features and habitats within EMSs in England. This is to ensure that all existing and potential commercial fishing activities are carried out in accordance with Article 6 of the European Union Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. This approach will also apply to Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs).

Seventeen bye-laws have already been established in EMSs between 0 and 12nm to protect sensitive seabed habitats (such as reef and seagrass features) which were judged to be at 'high risk' from bottom-towed fishing gear. Other types of fishing activity require further assessment, and if management is required then it should be in place by the end of 2016.



Photo by Rob Blyth-Skyrme

Assessing the potential impact of all gear types on designated features must be evidence-based in order to determine whether management measures will be required or not. There are uncertainties around impacts of some gears on some designated features (and on the effectiveness of gear modifications), the spatial extent and distribution of some designated features, and the spatial extent of fishing activity.

It is therefore important for the sustainable future of the fishing industry within EMSs to ensure that sufficient information is available on the impact of fishing gears on conservation features, the presence and extent of those conservation features, the spatial extent of fishing activity with specific gear types within EMS, and whether the fishing activity in fact overlaps with the conservation features.

Project Approach

The project will trial a range of methodologies to reduce uncertainty in the distribution and intensity of fishing activities, the effects of fishing gears on habitats and species, and the location and extent of conservation features. This will establish the potential to improve the evidence base for assessments of fishing activity in EMSs and is expected to have benefits both for conservation interests and for the future of the fishing industry.

Three EMS and/or MCZ sites will be addressed in the study, and specific fisheries in each site will be identified for inclusion. Specific sites and fisheries for the study are to be selected with the input of an Expert Advisory Group (EAG). Trial assessments will be carried out on these fisheries using the existing data and information available, to identify potential management measures that may be required to reduce the risk of fishing affecting EMS site integrity. Further details are provided overleaf.

How can I get involved?

The project runs from January to November 2015 and there are various ways you can get involved.

Fishermen

We will be working with fishermen to better assess fishing areas and intensity in the selected study sites, through the analysis of anonymised VMS, plotter and interview data. If you would like to be involved, or have data that you would share with the project, please contact us.

Expert Advisory Group (EAG)

The project will be guided by an Expert Advisory Group, who will oversee its work and review its outputs. Individuals are being contacted to take part in this group.

Technical Gear Group (TGG)

The project will work with a number of gear and habitat experts to assess the impacts of selected fishing gears and gear modifications on different habitats. If you would like to be considered for this group, please contact us (see over).

Risk-based assessments for fisheries in MPAs (cont)

Photo by Andrew Pearson

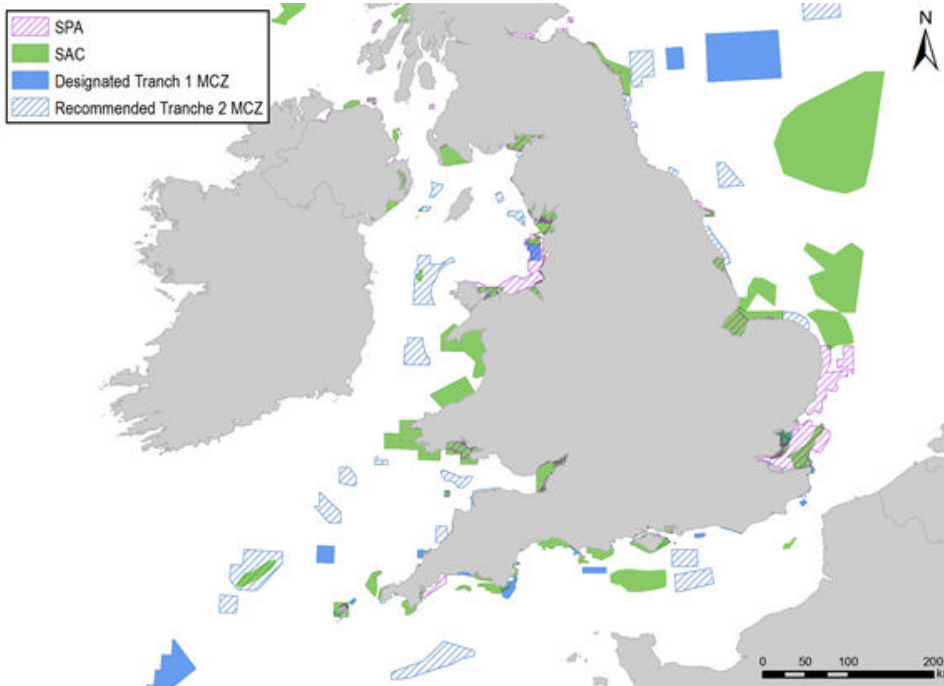
A series of project components will review and seek to improve the evidence base on fishing activity, impacts of fishing gears, and features, focussing on specific fisheries in selected MPAs:

1. Review and seek to improve the evidence base on distribution and intensity of fishing activities, through VMS and plotter data together with information on spatial footprint of gear impacts. Interview data may supplement information on inshore fisheries.

2. Review and seek to improve the evidence on fishing gear impacts on seabed habitats for specific gear types and gear modifications, by assessing impacts on different habitats of individual gear components and gear modifications, by a group of gear experts.

3. Review and seek to improve the evidence on presence and extent of conservation features, if required, through the implementation of an underwater video survey in one of the selected sites.

Marine Protected Areas: SACs, SPAs and MCZs (T1 and recommended T2)



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Trial assessments of fishing activity in the three study sites will be conducted at the start of the study, and then repeated using the evidence base gathered throughout the project.

These approaches will then be assessed for their usefulness and value as tools for improving the evidence base in the ongoing review of fishing activities in sites around the English coast.

The project was initiated by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO), and is being carried out by ABP Marine Environmental Research Ltd (ABPmer) and Ichthys Marine Ecological Consulting. The project is funded by the European Fisheries Fund and the Sea Fish Industry Authority.

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