

## Developing a participatory approach to the management of fishing activity in UK offshore Marine Protected Areas



### Vision

Bringing together the fishing sector, regulators, conservation bodies, scientific advisors and academic researchers; building stakeholder stewardship to develop and trial a consistent approach for managing sedimentary habitats in MPAs in light of scientific uncertainty.

### Background

Fisheries provide an essential source of food for the UK and provide employment for coastal communities. However, detailed information on the effect of fishing on some seabed habitats (such as sandy or gravelly sediments) is limited. There is uncertainty about the condition of such sedimentary habitats, the impact of fishing activity and how fishers use fishing grounds. This uncertainty affects our ability to make appropriate management decisions, which can potentially compromise livelihoods as well as conservation goals. In the face of this uncertainty, fisheries managers have applied precaution in their approach to management measures to ensure seabed protection. However, there is also a desire for management to allow continued sustainable use of marine resources within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) where this is compatible with conservation goals.

Where specific fishing activities pose a risk to the condition of sedimentary MPA features, the UK is pursuing a policy to reduce that risk through the introduction of fisheries management measures. In the offshore, a zonal approach to management of fishing over most sedimentary features has been adopted. This approach aims to ensure that an MPA will achieve its conservation objectives, whilst not disproportionately impacting the fishing industry. As we reduce uncertainty through better knowledge of feature condition, sensitivity and exposure to activities such as fishing, we can develop more targeted measures to ensure continued conservation benefits and sustainable use.

It is important to effectively engage stakeholders in management decisions and improve awareness and support for MPAs. We also need to understand, and how best to use stakeholder information in the decision-making process. Exploring these issues in a collaborative environment will aim to build consensus and improve awareness of the cultural and economic importance of the fishing industry, and the value of protecting marine biodiversity.

**Focus:** English offshore waters

**Period of work:** 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020

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**Project partners:** JNCC, Bangor University, MMO, Natural England, NFFO

**Total project value:** £249,751



**Key words:** Marine Protected Area, Sedimentary habitats, Fisheries management, Uncertainty, Adaptive management, Communication, Stakeholders, Natural capital, Ecosystem services, Decision-making processes

## Project aim

JNCC, Natural England, Marine Management Organisation, National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and Bangor University ("the Project Partners") have been awarded funding under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) for a two-year project exploring participatory processes for establishing, evaluating and adapting fisheries in offshore MPAs with sedimentary habitats as protected features.

The overarching aim of the project is to develop and trial a framework and tools to deliver a participatory approach to managing fishing activity in MPAs, ensuring fair and effective management in the face of uncertainty. The project will bring together the fishing sector, regulators, NGOs, conservation bodies, scientific advisors and academic researchers to explore the challenges of managing sedimentary habitats in MPAs, and use key case studies to aid the development of a management toolkit which can be applied to other MPAs.

## Deliverables

- A fully-tested governance framework and participatory process to integrate stakeholders within the management review process, seeking to build awareness and consensus;
- A model and associated guidance to predict ecological outcomes of different management scenarios, testing this with real-life examples. Recognising the limitations of such models, the project will also focus on how to overcome data limitations to achieve effective management;
- Educational materials aimed at stakeholders designed to raise awareness of the marine environment, the fishing industry and MPAs as a conservation tool;
- Stakeholder engagement manual aimed at regulators and stakeholders, designed to support active participation in adaptive management processes. This will include technical information on data requirements and associated thresholds; and outlining the participatory process tested by the project and lessons learned.

The project will not aim to draw conclusions about the validity of policy-decisions for MPA management measures, rather it will develop and test a participatory process for making management decisions, ensuring that this is fair, transparent and uses the best available evidence.

## Project Governance Structure

An effective governance structure will be integral to the successful delivery of the project and future work in relation to fisheries management in MPAs. It will enable the processes needed to implement and review management measures, ensuring that they are effective, efficient and aligned with both legislative and societal requirements. Equally importantly, the governance structure will be transparent, and will encourage and enable input from those who will be affected by measures, as well as those who have responsibility for implementing them.

### Project Management Group

- Representatives from project partners
- Review progress against project plan, assess risks and issues, monitor budgets
- Meet quarterly

### Project Advisory Group

- Project partners and wider stakeholder groups e.g. fishing industry representatives, NGOs
- Provide technical expertise and advice to the project
- Meet every six months, mostly remotely but face to face as necessary

### Regional Stakeholder Group 1 – Irish Sea

- Stakeholders with an interest in the Irish Sea case studies
- Could include representatives from national and regional stakeholders, and other Member States

### Regional Stakeholder Group 2 – Southern North Sea

- Stakeholders with an interest in the Southern North Sea case studies
- Could include representatives from national and regional stakeholders, and other Member States