



Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone workshop - Day 1: Summary report of the West of Copeland Area of Search Breakout

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

December 2016

JNCC Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone Workshop: Summary report from Breakout session for the West of Copeland Area of Search

This report is an account of the discussions that took place during day 1 of the JNCC Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone workshop in November 2016 on the Area of Search (AoS) in the Irish Sea CP2 region. Further details about the workshop and the AoS can be found in the Workshop Guide¹ and Options Summary paper produced as supporting workshop materials².

During the sessions stakeholders were asked two key questions:

- Are there particular parts of the AoS that are of greater interest to you?
- Are there additional human activity or marine habitats and species datasets available in relation to the AoS that we have missed?

Summary

- There were no significant concerns raised in relation to this AoS;
- There is an overlap with the consented Walney wind farm extension. This should be taken into consideration in terms of impacts but also data availability;
- Unlikely to impact UK fisheries as this is a relatively low intensity fished area, although it was noted that there may be some under 15m vessels that use this area; it could also be an access area for Nephrops fishermen into the adjacent mud and could cause displacement;
- Both French and Belgian fisheries representatives confirmed there is no interest in this area;
- There was a suggestion to refine the boundary to align with the bank feature; and
- There was support from the NGOs and it was noted the bank feature could be important for foraging seabirds.

Specific interests or concerns

- The Crown Estate/ NFFO: Walney Extension wind farm is currently in construction phase and expected to be fully commissioned in 2018. Defra: Co-location isn't necessarily a problem;
- In general this AoS was considered by all to have a relatively low impact on fisheries;
- Unlikely that under 15m vessels fish in the AoS;
- No French fishing interests in the AoS;
- AFBI: Low fishing activity in AoS. Suggestion that a bigger buffer around AoS needed because the sand bank feature is mobile;
- NFFO: Potential issues around access in to the prawn ground in Mud Hole rMCZ;

¹ Workshop Guide for the JNCC Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone Workshop 2016. Available online at http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/MCZWS02_T3_Workshop_Guide_Final.pdf

² Option Summary for the West of Copeland Area of Search in the Irish Sea. Available online at http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/MCZWS06_IrishSea_OptionsSummary_vFinal.pdf

- Rederscentrale: Previous fishing in area for sole and plaice but there has been no TAC in the last few years so they don't go there anymore. Last 2 years fishing data is not representative, so check activity over 4/5 years. Taking into account 2012-2013 would be more representative of fishing activity;
- Rederscentrale: Sole predictions are that recruitment is getting better so predicting quota will go up but will take time. MMO: forecasting is not great at predicting what is happening. Fish favour some areas at different times and not others; and
- MoD: MoD firing/danger area over Mud Hole rMCZ extends halfway into the north of West of Copeland. No mine counter measures on seabed. Unlikely to be an issue.

Comments regarding data

- Walney wind farm developer data and EIA including for the extension;
- Under 15m vessel data including for Isle of Man fleet (from MMO);
- It was suggested that using old ground truthing data may reduce confidence in data;
- 2006-2008 AFBI survey data as an ecological whole and consider mobile nature of sandbank for buffers;
- Consider ICES fishing effort predictions over the next 4/5 years;
- Find planned cabling route for wind farm extension;
- As we are using averaged data but 12-15m vessels have had VMS since 2012, this may affect data;
- AoS shape files were requested;
- Two Impact Assessments on the recommended MPAs in the Irish Sea published by Seafish and the University of the West of England. See Moore *et al.* 2016 Marine Policy and Seafish website (report and data);
- Oil and gas activities in the area need to be checked because the most recent licensing round for the Irish Sea was within the last few years;
- Questions over the approach taken to identifying the proportion of features in this region and the gaps through the MPA network analysis;
- Holderness Fishing Industry Group: Concerned that modelled and ground truthing data don't match up. More ground truthing points might be needed to capture habitat types and protect the real habitat; and
- MCS: At ecosystem level this could be quite a diverse area irrespective of grab samples not matching model.

Alternative AoS options

During the breakout sessions any suggestions for movement or modification of the AoS were recorded and presented during the plenary session to be considered further and for further information to be gathered regarding these. No alternative AoS were suggested for West of Copeland.

General stakeholder comments

- Broad support from WWF and MCS;
- MMO: The region is favoured for Nephrops by Northern Irish and Irish fishermen;

- Displacement was raised as a potential issue by a number of people. In particular, the Scottish White Fish Producers Association Ltd had concerns about vessels being displaced into 6a;
- A suggestion was that areas of deeper sediment could be considered in this region for addressing the gap for Subtidal coarse sediment;
- SWFPO: AoS well picked to avoid scallop dredging and queen scallop trawling areas;
- MMO: Sometimes VMS data might be on a fishing vessel that is operating as guard ships during construction and not actively fishing. Some wind farm developers have agreements with smaller vessels to fish in the area;
- MoD: Representative did a PhD on wind farm effect on seabed and found that sediment was finer where the wind farm was due to scouring and change of water flow. Highlighted that the long term effects are unknown. MCS: if all scoured away we'll have to find new site. MoD: Trawlers were going around wind farm so sea life diverse in site; and
- RSPB: Could be important foraging area for seabirds due to less than 30m depth (species and time of year dependent) as they overwinter in Irish Sea.