



Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone workshop - Day 2: Summary report of the Northern North Sea & Southern North Sea CP2 region conservation advice Breakout

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

December 2016

JNCC Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone Workshop: Summary report from Breakout session for the Northern North Sea and Southern North Sea CP2 region.

This report is an account of the discussions that took place during day 2 of the JNCC Tranche Three Marine Conservation Zone workshop in November 2016 on the conservation advice and recommended marine conservation zones (rMCZs) in the Northern North Sea and Southern North Sea CP2 region. Further details about the workshop and the conservation advice can be found in the Workshop Guide¹ and Conservation Advice papers produced as supporting workshop materials².

During the sessions stakeholders were asked two key questions:

- Are there any comments the group may have on any one of these areas to consider as we move forward in the preparation of scientific advice on MCZs for Defra?
- Are there any comments on the information presented in the conservation advice papers in the context of the sites on the table in the region?

Summary

- General and site-specific concerns were raised regarding the impact of the North Sea rMCZ options on the fishing industry were further restrictions placed on fishing effort in the area. There are some fishing grounds in this area which are very important to UK and non-UK fishers and there was strong concern around loss of income;
- It was noted that while displacement is unpredictable it is already likely to result from imminent measures for nearby designated sites and the development of a nearby offshore wind farm. It was felt that should any further restrictions be placed on fishing effort in the area it would further displace fishing effort, likely giving rise to gear conflict in some areas. This could lead to a general squeeze on fishing activities in the North Sea and have knock-on implications for the UK in terms of delivering on obligations under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- On a related but slightly different note, the group raised the need to understand the implications on proposed new sites of imminent fisheries measures for nearby designated sites, as this is perhaps not well understood;
- The group raised the issue of a very rapid and significant increase in Danish and Swedish fishing targeting sandeel stocks in the area, noting this change is too recent to have been captured in the fishing data currently available. In addition to this there are areas within the region which are well within access to smaller vessels which are also not captured in the data available;
- The RSPB voiced strong concerns around a lack of consideration of Special Protection Areas in this process. They advised that in particular, the needs of foraging species should be considered in advice and management going forward,

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 Conservation Advice documents can be found on the Workshop materials page of the JNCC website. Available at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7325>

noting that in some of the sites, sandeels are present and could support foraging birds and marine mammals if managed appropriately;

- NGOs expressed strong support for the process and were keen to see sites designated to protect the features being put forward and some were glad to see Ocean quahog, in particular, being put forward. There was general agreement from the NGOs on the activities listed in the conservation advice; and
- Some members of the group have kindly have offered to provide more information on activities in the area to support JNCC's advice going forward e.g. under 12m vessel fishing, Ministry of Defence exercises and Crown Estate assets.

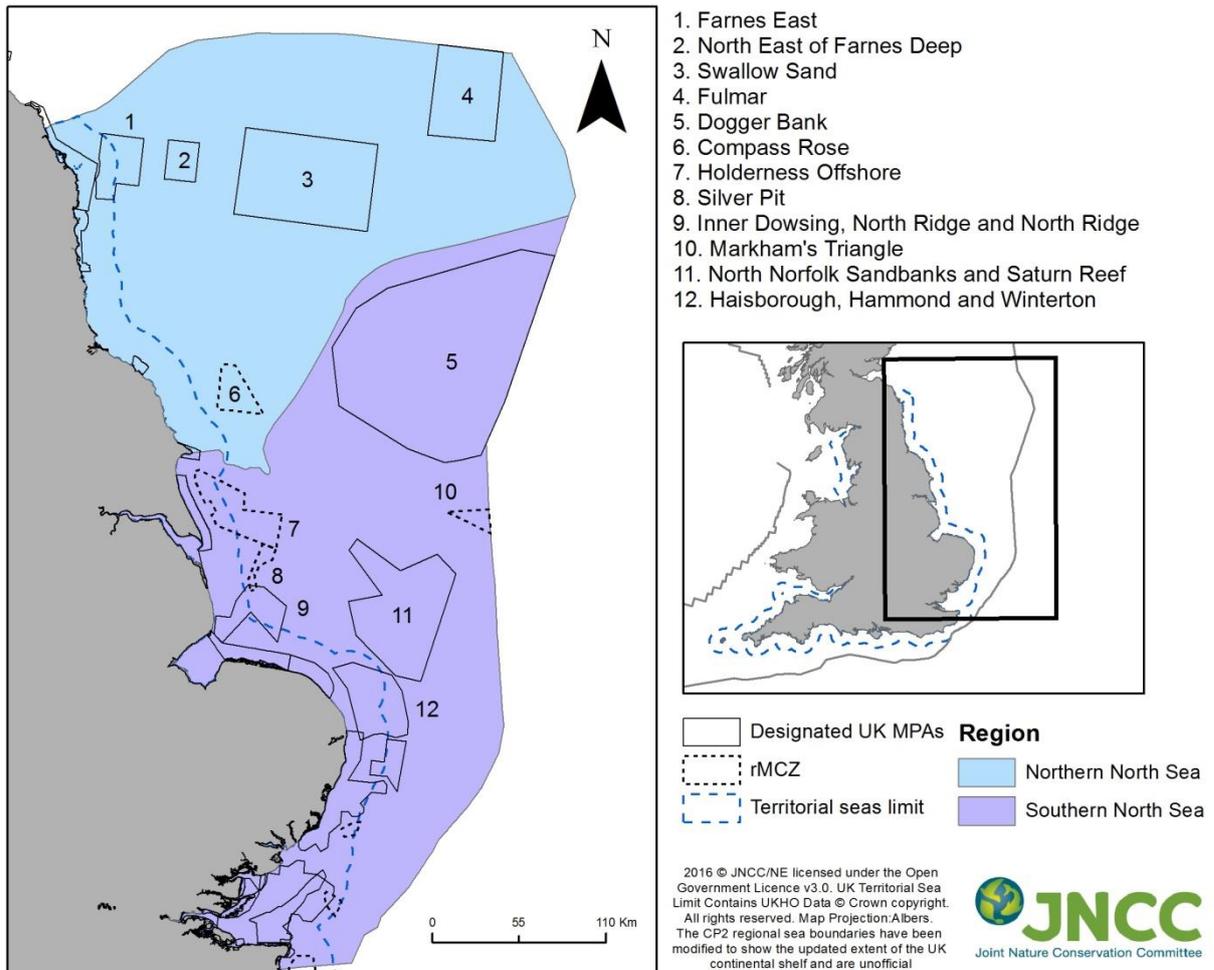


Figure 1: MPAs in the Northern North Sea & Southern North Sea CP2 region

Specific interests or concerns

Silver Pit rMCZ

- The NFFO informed the group that this is a fishing hot spot in the region, especially along the geological feature. NFFO has had concerns regarding this site option from the start of the regional project process. Concerns were raised that management would result in high levels of displacement for scalloping and knock on effects for the

- static gear fisheries in the region as trawls would likely move into previously un-trawled areas (potting grounds) resulting in gear conflict;
- Regional Committee of Marine Fishers (RCMF) highlight that there is a Gentleman's agreement between UK and French fleet to the north of Silver Pit rMCZ. This Agreement is currently under renegotiation due to displacement of UK fishers from wind farms and noting that further restrictions may complicate this;
 - NFFO queried why Links Belt (inshore rMCZ) is not being considered as an alternative to Silver Pit rMCZ. Additionally, if the MPA network requires deeper areas of seabed such as in Silver Pit rMCZ could there be alternatives? Suggest 'Sole Pit' to the east. Holderness Fishing Industry Group has concerns over Silver Pit rMCZ due to its importance for the Holderness fleet, raising concerns over displacement and that a lot of under 15m boats fish here which is not currently captured in the data available;
 - MCS, RSPB and WWF state their support for this rMCZ;
 - VisNed cannot confirm the interest of the Dutch fleet at this point in time, though any activity would likely be demersal, pulse or beam trawling (though no pulse trawling occurs beyond 55° or within the 12nm);
 - French Government states that there is some French interest but less compared with the Channel area;
 - Brittany (BFO) does not currently have any fishing interest in the site option, though there is some interest from the Belgian fisheries, with approximately 30-50 pings a year in the area of Silver Pit rMCZ for beam trawling; and
 - The Crown Estate has multiple assets in the area including the Viking connector³ (not yet consented) and possibly some licensed aggregate areas⁴ which are very close to the rMCZ boundary which may result in indirect impacts. This has already been flagged to Defra.

Holderness Offshore rMCZ

- This is the prime fishing ground for the Holderness offshore fishing (potting) fleet operating out of Bridlington. Displacement would be a big issue, and could result in gear conflict, noting there are very limited options if the fleet is forced to diversify out of potting;
- MCS suggests that designation of the rMCZ could actually help the potting industry by reducing conflicts between UK static and mobile gear within the site. However, the Regional Committee of Marine Fishers does not agree with this and believes it will create new gear conflict nearby due to displacement, especially when fishers are already displaced locally due to wind farm developments;
- Regional Committee of Marine Fishers (RCMF) highlight that there is a Gentleman's agreement between UK and French fleet in the vicinity of this rMCZ which is currently under renegotiation;

³ This has since been checked and does not intersect the rMCZ.

⁴ There is one licensed aggregates area within the site and one further option agreement within the area which is going through the process of becoming a production agreement.

- The NFFO flagged uncertainty about what the management of static gear such as potting would involve, need to note that site covers the core of the fishing grounds.
- WWF voiced support for including Ocean quahog as a feature in the site, noting it is a species of interest for WWF and is a long-lived species in need of protection.
- MCS, RSPB and WWF state their support for this rMCZ;
- There is interest in the site from the French fleet, but the activity is not very intense, noting some boats in the north west of the site;
- VisNed cannot confirm the interest of the Dutch fleet at this point in time, though any activity would likely be demersal, pulse or beam trawling;
- MMO note that a high proportion of landings from this area is by the under 15m fleet. There is recent EMF funding on the Holderness coast to increase the number of smaller vessels so can expect effort to increase;
- There is no fishing activity in the Holderness area by the Belgian fleet;
- Crown Estate highlights that there is natural gas storage within the site;

Compass rose rMCZ

- NFFO has concerns regarding this rMCZ by the UK otter trawl fleet;
- Similar to Silver Pit rMCZ and Holderness offshore there is French benthic fishing activity and potentially some pelagic gear in the site. The main fishing area for French fleet in North Sea is between Silver Pit rMCZ and Compass Rose rMCZ. Not fishing whole year, just 2 to 3 months a year as fleet prefers to fish in the eastern channel, so depends upon quota;
- The rMCZ overlaps with a MoD firing area;
- MCS, RSPB and WWF state their support for this rMCZ. RSPB supports the inclusion of Ocean Quahog in this site and highlights that Quahog is an important feature for the MPA network;
- VisNed cannot confirm the interest of the Dutch fleet at this point in time, though any activity would likely be demersal, pulse or beam trawling. There is interest in the area from the Normandy (otter trawling) fleet, and concerned over displacement issues;
- According to the Crown Estate there is an export cable route to the east of the site, 2 telecoms cables and 1 active gas pipeline intersecting the site. There are low levels of activity by the Belgian fleet; and
- MMO highlighted that in the past 18 months there has been increased levels of fishing in the North Sea by the Danish and Swedish fleets in the site which may not be captured in the current VMS.

Markhams triangle rMCZ

- NFFO: concerns from UK (Anglo-Dutch) and French. French fleet operates bottom and pelagic trawls in the area. May not have same gear conflicts as in other sites as not much static in the area;
- MCS, RSPB and WWF state their support for this rMCZ;

- VisNed cannot confirm the interest of the Dutch fleet at this point in time, though any activity would likely be demersal, pulse or beam trawling. Expects Dutch fishing is occurring in the site and has already provided a value map (landing value and VMS). There are gullies just to the south of the site which are important access to the fishery grounds;
- The RSPB raised a query regarding the timing of designation of this site in relation to an ongoing consenting process for an offshore wind farm application which overlaps the western portion of the site. It was noted that MCZs only become material consideration once they've gone to public consultation. Since T3 sites will not go to public consultation until after this project goes through the consenting process, Markham's Triangle does not have to be considered during the wind farm's consent process;
- This is an important area for the Belgian fleet with a few hundred VMS pings a year, compared to the other rMCZs; and
- The Crown Estate notes that the Hornsea 3 Offshore Wind Farm project intersects the western part of the site.

Swallow sand rMCZ

- MCS, RSPB and WWF state their support for this rMCZ. RSPB supports the inclusion of Ocean quahog in this site and highlights that it is an important feature for the MPA network;
- RSPB would like to know if the area is important for sandeels, as the presence of sandeel fisheries would suggest so. RSPB would like to see sandeels considered in the conservation advice for the site, especially considering their importance for bird features of other MPAs;
- French fishing industry suggests that if there is less fishing in the site then there will be a negative impact on birds as they feed on the discards. The RSPB did not share the same view, noting that that they expected a decrease with the implementation of the discard ban anyway. As many birds are opportunistic feeders, RSPB accepts that whilst there may be a lag/drop there is hope they will recover to healthy levels;
- MMO highlights that the UK is nearly at the consultation stage for the management measures for this site. Defra are currently awaiting pre-agreement with Member States before going to formal consultation and management will likely be in place within 18 months. The proposals involves leaving the Swallow Hole geological feature open to facilitate the end of the tow for UK (Scottish) nephrops fishing. VMS does not look like it is reflecting how busy the area is. It is likely that the majority of the MCZ will be closed to demersal trawling. It may be that some of the Subtidal mud or sea-pens may be incidentally protected in the current proposal;
- NFFO states that there are low levels of fishing in the site apart from in the Swallow Hole geological feature located in the north east of the MCZ. Concern was raised that the addition of the new features would mean changes to the current proposal to keep the geological feature open to fishing and asked if there was actually a need to designate them here i.e. is there a shortfall for the network?
- MMO highlighted that in the past 18 months there has been increased levels of fishing in the south east of the site the Danish and Swedish fleets for sand eels and this may not be captured in the current VMS; and

- No activity from the Belgian fleet in the region.

Comments regarding data

- RSPB would like to know what information there is regarding sandeels in the region and the rMCZs and if they could be included in conservation advice; and
- MMO highlighted that in the past 18 months there has been increased levels of fishing in the North Sea by the Danish and Swedish fleets which may not be captured in the current VMS.

General stakeholder comments

- MCS agree with the potential for damage from the various activities for each habitat type included in the conservation advice papers provided for the workshop;
- WWF voiced support of the conservation advice packages and the recommendations of additional features for designation;
- MCS stated that there is a need to keep in mind that in addition to the requirement for an ecologically coherent MPA network, there are also requirements under MSFD regarding seafloor integrity, and management overall is still only in a very small amount of our sea area;
- RSPB commented that SPAs need to be better considered in relation to this work. There may be some overlap with rMCZs and SPAs generally need to be factored in to rMCZs management going forwards as they are interlinked and are meant to support each other. Additionally, RSPB raise the importance of sandeels in the region for birds and other species and enquired if there was data for sandeels in any of the rMCZs; and
- MMO noted that management in IDRNBR SAC is expected to come into place in the next 18 months. Measures have been negotiated with NFFO for gear releasing in the NW of the site for reasons of safety of navigation and this may need to be considered in combination with any management proposals for Silver Pit rMCZ.