

Vision

The Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority will lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry



Media Release

Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

The crab and lobster fisheries on the North Norfolk coast are of significant social, cultural and economic importance to local communities and 'Cromer Crab' is well known to many in the UK and beyond. A significant proportion of these fisheries take place in the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone, which contains a range of habitats including the rare sub-tidal chalk feature.

Eastern IFCA have now received formal advice from Natural England regarding the environmental impact of crab and lobster pot fishing within the Cromer Shoal MCZ. In summary their findings are that:

- Potting damages rugged chalk (raised structures of exposed chalk that are typically found more inshore);
- Whilst potting activity can damage flat chalk areas or areas of cobble and flint, this damage is not considered significant;
- Damage from Individual incidents of normal potting activity is small but cumulatively, this hinders the conservation objectives of the site;
- Pots left in the water for longer periods associated with stored or lost gear are the most damaging;
- General fishing activity over the rugged chalk could be managed by an adaptive approach, which would mean that no immediate significant restrictions are likely to be required. Such an approach would mean that management would be developed over the coming years informed by further research;
- If an adaptive approach to managing general fishing activity over the rugged chalk is not possible, then Natural England believe that EIFCA would need to take a precautionary approach and ban any interactions between potting and complex outcropping chalk as soon as possible.
- Management of lost and stored pots is required sooner and management to enable fishing effort to be monitored may also be required.

Having received the advice, Eastern IFCA intend to work closely with the fishing industry and Natural England to mitigate the impacts on chalk whilst also seeking to minimise impacts on industry.

A collaborative approach is most likely to achieve the best possible outcome for the fishing industry and the MCZ. Both Natural England and Eastern IFCA recognise the importance of industry involvement in undertaking further research and are committed to working in collaboration. Natural England are seeking funding for a

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research project which will inform an adaptive approach to managing fishing activity on rugged chalk. The key collaborative actions in the near future are as follows:

- **Lost and stored pots** – Eastern IFCA intend to start dialogue with industry in November regarding a voluntary scheme for reporting and removal of lost gear within areas of rugged chalk and voluntary agreements not to store pots within these areas (it is recognised that, in reality, pots are not routinely stored in these areas).
- **Feasibility study** – Eastern IFCA and Natural England are looking for fishermen to assist in testing a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) at sea to inform a feasibility study for further research. Funding is likely to be available for fishermen taking part.
- **Further research** – The feasibility study will inform how the further research will be undertaken. We intend to work collaboratively with industry to design and undertake this research. This would likely include industry input in innovative gear design.

Commenting on the advice from Natural England, the CEO of Eastern IFCA, Julian Gregory, said 'We are very aware of both importance of the crab and lobster fisheries to the communities of North Norfolk, and of the features and habitats of the MCZ as an important element of the wider marine environment. As a consequence, we are keen to work with all parties to seek the most appropriate outcome.'

Notes to editors

Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) are designated by an order under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. MCZ are a national designation for protecting a range of nationally important, rare or threatened habitats and species.

The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ was designated in 2016 and is an inshore site off the coast of North Norfolk, between Weybourne and Happisborough. The site is designated for a range of habitats including the rare sub-tidal chalk feature.

The conservation objectives of the site include maintaining the condition of its features in favourable condition. This includes maintaining the structure and functioning of the chalk beds.

A Defra fact sheet is available here -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-cromer-shoal-chalk-beds>

Role of Eastern IFCA

Eastern IFCA is a statutory regulator created under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and became fully operational on 1 April 2011.

It is responsible for the management of sea fisheries resources in inshore waters i.e. to six nautical miles from coastal baselines. Its duties include ensuring sustainable fishing, balancing the social and economic benefits of fishing with the need to protect the marine environment and to balance the needs of those engaged in fishing and others engaged in exploiting sea fisheries resources.

Eastern IFCA has an overriding duty to further the conservation objectives of MCZs within its district above its other duties.

The Eastern IFCA mission is to: *'Lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry'*.

Role of Natural England

Natural England is the appropriate statutory nature conservation body under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and provides advice to Eastern IFCA on impacts of fishing activity on the MCZ.

Natural England's advice may relate to what activities are capable of impacting features, how the conservation objectives of the site may be furthered or hindered by activity and how the effects may be mitigated.