

Eastern IFCA Enforcement Policy – Wash Fishery Order 1992 (WFO) Regulation 17(1)(b): Prop-washing

WFO cockle fishery 2021



Date agreed: 23 July 2021

Background

WFO Regulation 17 is intended to restrict prop-washing activity within the Wash cockle fishery so that it doesn't cause a significant impact on site integrity of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast Special Area of Conservation and the Wash Special Protection Area (the Wash Marine Protected Areas).

Prop-washing is an established fishing practice within hand-work cockle fisheries. It involves fishermen turning a vessel in tight circles so that the propeller of the vessel washes cockles out of the sediment and into a more accessible heap. Prior to the implementation of Regulation 17, the practice of prop-washing was restricted only via the Code of Best Practice – a voluntary code which was agreed between the Authority, fishing industry and Natural England.

Sub-paragraph 1(b) states that a person must not “*conduct prop-washing in such a manner as to cause more than one ring to be formed in the seabed*”. This reflects what was, at the time of making the Regulations, an established principle within the Code of Best practice.

However, when cockle stocks are in low densities, a single prop-wash ring is not sufficient to uncover the daily quota of cockles (two tonnes per calendar day in the 2021 cockle fishery). As a result, prop-washing is more likely to be undertaken in such a way that the resultant rings are deeper (i.e. remove an excessive amount of the surface sediment) which can result in a greater impact on the sediment and make it less likely for cockles to re-settle in the sediment. As such, it can lead to impacts on the fishing industry and the SAC and the Code of Practice was amended to reflect this to the following:

From point 4 of the Code of Best Practice

Propeller wash activity should be restricted to the minimum required to uncover the cockle that can be harvested in one day bearing in mind the [Daily Vessel Quota]. As cockles occur just below the surface, only use sufficient wash to uncover the cockles so as not to create deep rings in the sediment...

Therefore, sub-paragraph 1(b) will not be consistent with the revised Code of Best Practice in years where cockle stocks are at lower densities.

Policy

During the 2021 cockle fishery, non-compliance with subparagraph 1(b) of Regulation 17 of the Wash Fishery Order Regulations will not result in enforcement action **unless more than two prop-wash rings are created.**

Rationale and Justification

The management measures for the 2021 cockle fishery are intended to be mitigation against potential impacts caused to the SAC as a result of the fishing activity. The Habitats Regulations Assessment concluded that, mitigating the impacts of prop-washing in accordance with the Code of Best Practice (i.e. without a limitation on the number of rings) was sufficient to conclude no adverse impacts on site integrity.

Given that the density of cockles is considered to be low this year, this would naturally result on the use of more than one prop-wash ring being produced by each vessel. As such, the Enforcement Policy is in keeping with the conclusions of the Assessment and will still mitigate impacts on site integrity.

Review

This policy will be under continuous review and will be revised as necessary for the purposes of meeting the conservation objectives of the Wash and North Norfolk Coast Marine Protected Areas, to ensure stock sustainability or to provide industry viability.