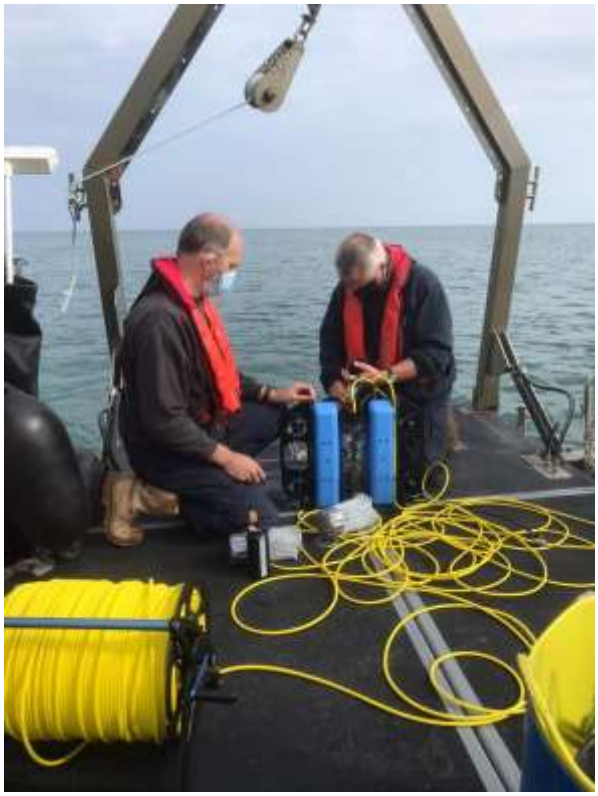
Research Update: The BlueROV 2 and the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ



Eastern IFCA are taking an Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) approach to the management of potting in the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ. 'Learning by doing' is at the heart of this approach. This recognises that management should be flexible and that managers are able to adapt and respond to changes in our knowledge and understanding of the interactions between the potting fishery and the subtidal chalk, one of the features for which the MCZ was designated.

ARM requires further research and ongoing monitoring of habitats and potting activity, and the effects of their interaction to inform appropriate management of the site. Importantly, ongoing research and monitoring is done so that we can develop a fuller picture on which to base management decisions, rather than taking decisions based on a single snapshot in time. This takes into account, for instance, the fact that the levels and intensity of potting activity within the MCZ may vary throughout the seasons and over time.

As part of this work, the Research & Development Task and Finish Group have identified several research objectives in order to progress ARM of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ. These include mapping the extent of the sensitive rugged chalk features within the MCZ, assessing the impact of gear on these features and, where possible, identifying and assessing alternative gear types.

In order to inform these workstreams and conduct relevant research, the Authority has purchased a new remotely operated vehicle (ROV), a BlueROV 2 which is a type of underwater drone fitted with video cameras. Over recent weeks, marine science officers have started using the BlueROV 2 to collect seabed imagery and so far, it has proved to be a valuable piece of kit! The flexibility and manoeuvrability of the BlueROV 2 has allowed us to collect high quality imagery of the seabed which we will be able to use to identify and map the extent of the rugged chalk that is sensitive to potting. We have found that over slack water we have sufficient

control to be able to steer the BlueROV 2 around a string of pots, and manoeuvrability to allow careful examination of rugged chalk to investigate whether there is any evidence of damage. By continuing surveys with the ROV during neap tides over the coming months, Eastern IFCA will be able to build an up-to-date and robust base of evidence to best inform our management decisions.

Keep an eye on our MCZ page, our News Page and Facebook and Twitter for further updates on this work.