

Cromer Shoal MCZ Research and Development Task and Finish Group

Terms of Reference

Context

Natural England have advised Eastern IFCA that rugged chalk (raised structures of exposed chalk) is damaged by potting. The pots that are most damaging to the rugged chalk are those left in the water for longer periods (e.g. lost gear). Natural England have also advised that, whilst incidents of damage to rugged chalk by normal potting activity are individually small, they accumulate into a level of impact that hinders the conservation objectives of the site.

Rather than needing to take a precautionary approach, in which any interactions between potting and complex outcropping chalk would need to be stopped with immediate effect, Natural England advised that an Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) approach would be more suitable for this fishery. Under an ARM approach, appropriate management measures would be developed through an iterative process over the coming years whereby management and research inform each other in a feedback loop.

The issue of pots left in the water for long periods, such as lost pots, is required sooner and management to enable fishing effort to be monitored may also be required.

A Project Board has been established to coordinate and oversee the ARM approach. Task and Finish groups are established to progress the various workstreams that will be required to successfully deliver evidence informed adaptive management. These Task and Finish groups will be overseen by and report to the Project Board.

Purpose

The Cromer Shoal MCZ Research and Development Task and Finish Group has been established to provide the scientific evidence required by the Project Board to inform the ARM approach. A set of over-arching Aims and Objectives have been agreed for the group to achieve (see appendix 1)

Membership

The group will comprise members who can bring relevant scientific and technical skills and/or expert local knowledge of the area and local potting fishery to the group. Membership of the group will be reviewed periodically but at inception will comprise representatives from:

- Eastern IFCA
- Natural England
- Fishing industry

Further individuals and organisations with required skills and/or local expertise will be invited to join the group as and when required.

Function

The functions of the group include:

- Development of appropriate monitoring plans and research projects designed to capture the information required to satisfy the Aims and Objectives of the group.
- Establishing and overseeing the workstreams associated with the agreed monitoring and research projects.
- Reporting regular feedback of project progress and results to the Project Board
- Utilising scientific evidence and expert knowledge, to provide advice to the Project Board for informing management steps within the ARM approach.

Drawing on wider sources of information, knowledge and expertise available within the Stakeholder Group, where appropriate and as advised by the Project Board.

Timeframe

The task and finish group shall continue until the completion of the aims and objectives. Achieving these is anticipated to take a minimum of two years, with a target end date of February 2023. This target deadline is subject to the following caveats:

- a. It may well be that there are workstreams that don't deliver results within that time frame, but which are important and continue beyond the notional "end date". This could include long-term monitoring.
- b. Adaptive management is an iterative and systematic approach for managing risk within the context of scientific uncertainty. Evidence is fed into a structured process that reviews this information and responds, where appropriate, by adjusting the site management measures. Management measures should be introduced as soon as possible after being recognised as necessary in order to ensure that the site's conservation objectives are not hindered.

Accountability

Both Natural England and Eastern IFCA have statutory responsibilities and Task and Finish Group representatives will be accountable to their respective organisations.

Eastern IFCA are the relevant regulator and are ultimately responsible for decision making with regard to the implementation or not of any actions.

Notwithstanding the above, the objective is to work collaboratively and wherever possible to achieve consensus.

Administration

Chair and Vice-Chair – these roles will be undertaken by Marine science officers from Eastern IFCA

Meeting frequency: Fortnightly initially, but as required

Location: Meeting locations will be agreed by the group at the preceding meeting but during the pandemic will be via Teams

Deputising: In their absence members may nominate a deputy to attend in their stead. This will usually be an individual with relevant experience and expertise to provide technical information / support, or local knowledge

Documentation: Minutes to comprise actions and decisions only. A draft version will be circulated to members only and approved notes will be published on the Eastern IFCA website.

Appendix 1 – Aims and Objectives

- Overall Aim 1 - To ensure that the information required to implement an effective Adaptive Risk Management approach of the impacts from potting fishing activity on the rock (chalk) seabed of the Cromer Shoal MCZ is available.
- Overall Aim 2 - To identify if impacts are within an acceptable range, in respect of the conservation objectives of the site.
- Overall Aim 3 - To identify viable alternatives to existing fishing methods (practices and/or gear) through an Adaptive Risk Management Approach.

- Objective 1 - Determination of the locations of the chalk feature which is sensitive to damage from potting -
 - a) Definition / Description of what character of “chalk” renders it susceptible to effects from potting.
 - b) Determination of the range of sensitivities of chalk to different types (characteristics – equipment and methods) of potting.
 - c) Determination of effects that changes in the physical structure of the chalk due to potting have on the species and ecology.
 - d) Determination of the location of Chalk of varying sensitivities.
- Objective 2 - Characterisation of potting fishing activity within Cromer MCZ – where, when, how (methods, equipment), how much. Where feasible, identify the drivers for particular approaches to potting.
- Objective 3 - Determination of the effect of potting on the sensitive chalk feature -
 - a) Determination and quantification of effects from potting, and how this varies within the range of potting activities conducted in Cromer Shoal MCZ and the varying sensitivities of chalk.
 - b) Determination of the “acceptable” level of impact to be consistent with the conservation objectives of the site.
- Objective 4 - Identification if there are viable alternative ways (equipment, techniques, methods, locations) of potting that will have an effect within the “acceptable” range.