

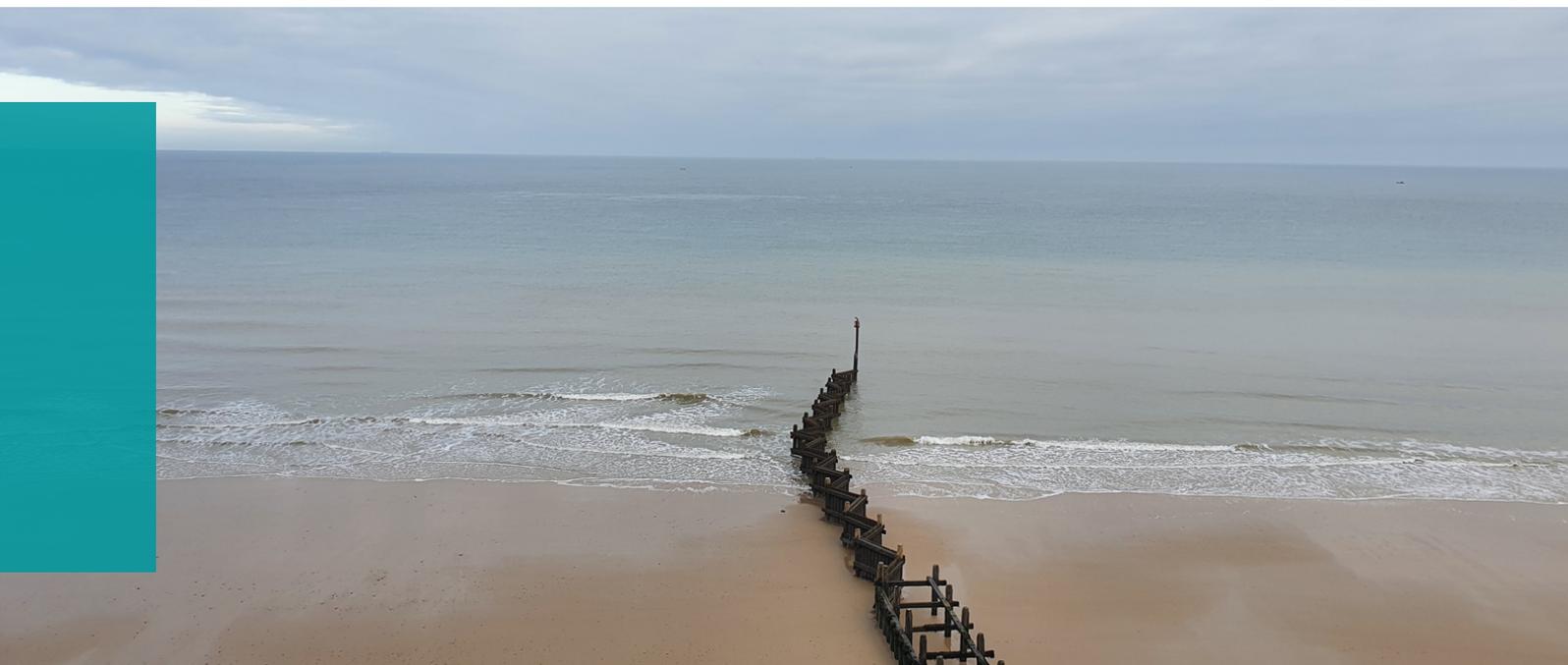
EASTERN IFCA UPDATE

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority have taken a flexible, adaptive and responsive approach to the management of potting activities within Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone, known as Adaptive Risk Management. This is an evolving process where research and management constantly inform each other.

The Adaptive Risk Management approach was taken after receiving updated advice from Natural England which stated that potting can damage raised, outcropping chalk, and that this damage could hinder the achievement of the Conservation Objectives for the Marine Conservation Zone.

The research and management aspects of the Adaptive Risk Management process are being developed by two Task and Finish Groups ('Research and Development' and 'Management'), bringing academics, fishermen, conservation interests and other key advisors together in a partnership approach.

This update contains the latest information about the ongoing research and management work being undertaken by Eastern IFCA, our partners, and stakeholders.



RESEARCH UPDATES

For more information on our research work, please read our research plan:

<https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2021-2022-Research-Development-Task-Finish-Group-Project-Plan.pdf>

MAPPING FISHING ACTIVITY

Eastern IFCA have continued working closely with fishermen to collect information on potting activity in the MCZ by using trackers. Since July 2021, 12 fishermen have voluntarily agreed to carry trackers on their boats. . The trackers send GPS positions (known as pings) at regular intervals allowing us to map the positions of fishing boats as they are potting.

This will help us understand more about potting activities, including how fishing effort levels differ across the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and throughout the year. This will inform the development of future management measures and our impact assessments.



Image: Example tracker data plotted in GIS

MAPPING SENSITIVE CHALK FEATURES

Since purchasing the BlueROV 2 – a type of underwater drone with a video camera – in 2021, Eastern IFCA has captured many hours of footage of the MCZ seabed to improve our understanding of the locations and extent of sensitive chalk habitats (also called ‘rugged chalk’).

Understanding where the more sensitive rugged chalk is located is critical to developing appropriate and proportionate management (if required), as the more accurately we can map rugged chalk features, the less precautionary we need to be.

Eastern IFCA has been working closely with Natural England to analyse the BlueROV 2 video footage.

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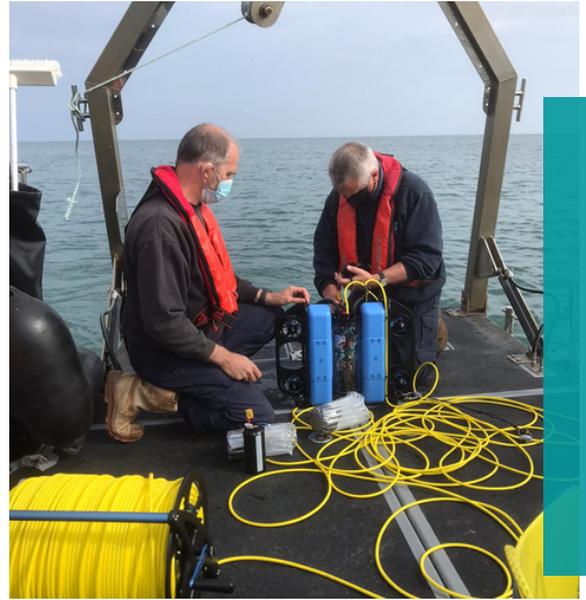


MAPPING SENSITIVE CHALK FEATURES

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To help us with this Natural England commissioned external contractors to assess the footage from summer 2021. We are pleased to announce that the final contractors report is now complete and available on our website: <https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022-Cromer-Shoal-Chalk-Beds-MCZ-Imagery-Analysis.pdf>

We have resumed ROV surveys this year and are actively working to refine our map of the rugged chalk.



Examples of some of the footage we have collected is available on our website: <https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/research-update-preliminary-observations-and-examples-of-bluerov-2-footage-showing-different-habitats-in-the-cromer-shoal-chalk-beds-mcz/>

In 2021, Natural England also funded a project with Cefas to re-analyse raw data from multi-beam surveys using a higher resolution than before. This aimed to provide a clearer definition of MCZ seabed features and distinguish areas of rugged seabed from smooth or gently sloping/rolling seabed. This re-analysis also showed how rugose the seabed is, identifying the deepest and shallowest points of seabed next to each neighbouring area.

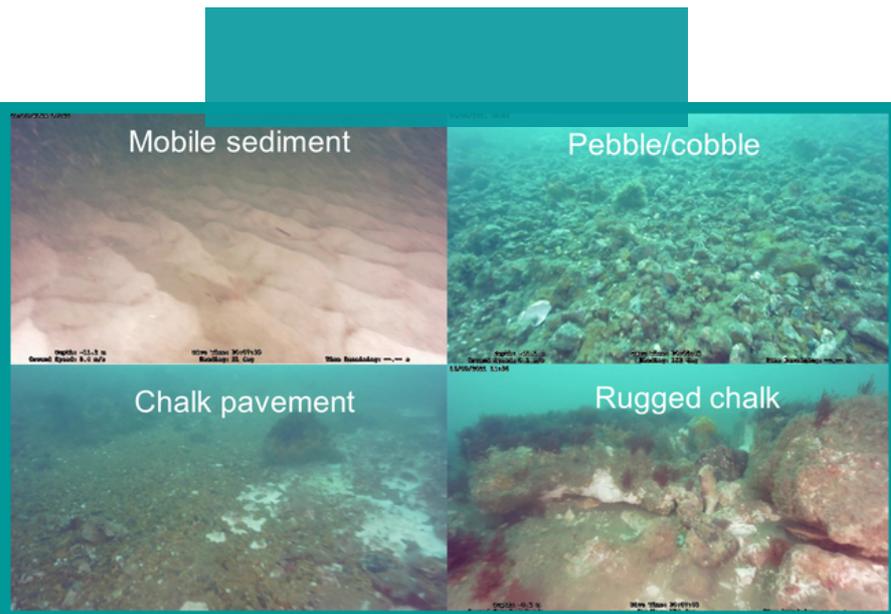


Image: Examples of the different types of habitat observed in the MCZ

Another study commissioned by Natural England has now been completed by the Marine Conservation Society and looks at the distribution of seabed habitats in the MCZ, and their taxonomic composition, using records from past Seasearch surveys. The aim of this study was to use Seasearch data and local knowledge to improve our understanding of spatial distribution of habitats and structural features, taxonomic diversity and presence of associations between species and structural features. A report for this study is in its final stages but has not yet been published.

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF POTTING

In February 2022, officers completed a scientific literature review investigating the impacts of potting on rock habitats. Whilst most studies related to potting on hard rock habitats (chalk is a soft rock, for which there was a scarcity of information), we could make some conclusions around the effects of potting on seabed habitats and their associated sea life.

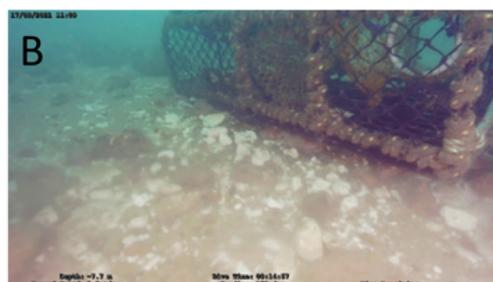
Our literature review, along with the Natural England's dive survey findings (published August 2020), were key to informing the updated potting assessment. Eastern IFCA re-submitted this assessment in April 2022 to Natural England, concluding that:

Over very long timescales, the risk of the potting fishery hindering MCZ conservation objectives could not be ruled out, although in the short-to-medium term, it is unlikely that the conservation objectives would be hindered by the potting fishery.

As hindering the conservation objectives over the long term could not be ruled out, Eastern IFCA has a duty to apply mitigation to reduce the risk of long-term deterioration of the seabed. Mitigation of this risk is ongoing through Adaptive Risk Management (ARM). With this process in place, Eastern IFCA is satisfied that it is unlikely that potting will hinder the conservation objectives for the MCZ in the short to medium term.

Natural England is currently considering this updated assessment and will provide updated formal conservation advice to Eastern IFCA (expected sometime in Autumn).

Eastern IFCA has also been using the ROV to survey the interaction between pots and exposed chalk features. This involves closely following a shank of pots so that impacts can be identified and categorised. Analysis of these surveys completed last year is also detailed in the Natural England commissioned report of ROV analysis on our website (see above).



Example observations of potting gear interacting with chalk features. A – ground rope cutting into raised chalk outcrop. B – pot laying on flat chalk seabed.

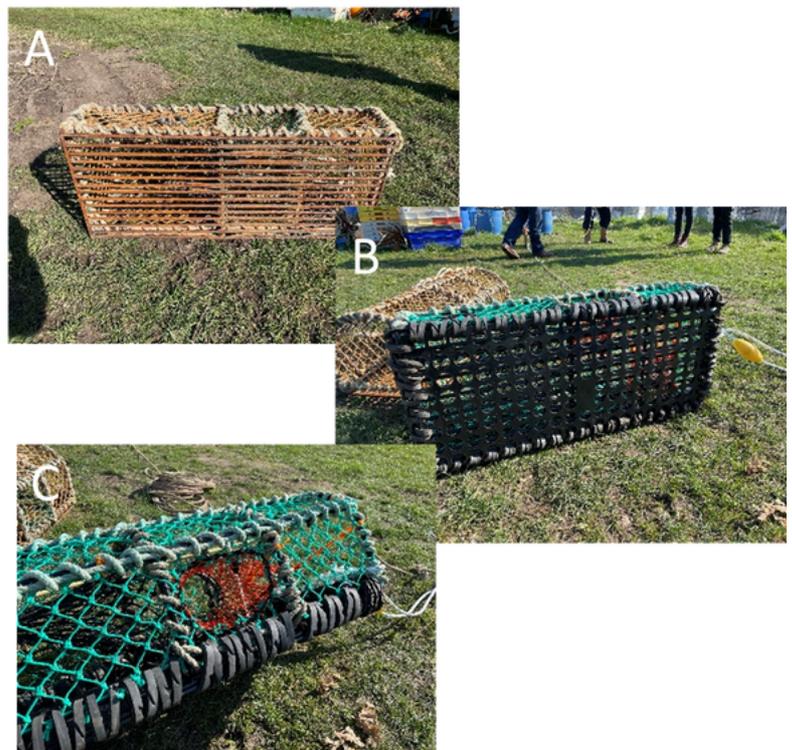
TRIALLING ALTERNATIVE GEAR TECHNOLOGIES & FISHING PRACTICES

Trials into possible gear adaptations are commencing this year (2022). The focus is on trialling adaptations which could potentially reduce the impact of potting gear on the rugged chalk. One trial will look at soft armouring on pots to reduce the potential for pot strikes on rugged chalk. Another trial will involve attaching floats to the drop lines on shanks to help ropes float higher over rugged chalk features, thereby reducing the chances for cutting the chalk.

Eastern IFCA have purchased a shank of pots so that we are able to have more control over experimental design.



The potting fisheries have been taking place in the area for hundreds of years. Over this time, fishing practices have been continuously evolving and adapting. This photo depicts 7th generation fisherman and Chair of North Norfolk Fishermen's Society, John Davies.



Standard parlour pot (A) compared to a rubberised parlour pot (B and C)



Float attached to drop line of a parlour pot

DETERMINING THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF RUGGED CHALK TO THE LOCAL FISHERY

The rugged chalk areas within the MCZ have been closely tied with the local fisheries for hundreds of years. Local fishermen attribute the quality of the nationally famed Cromer crab directly to the rugged chalk.

To understand the economic importance of the rugged chalk and its links with catch quality, Eastern IFCA is conducting twice monthly sampling of crabs caught by a local fisherman on and off the rugged chalk. This research was initiated this year and preliminary findings will be shared once enough data has been collected.



Eastern IFCA conducting onboard bio-sampling of crabs

POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS AND CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR THE MCZ

The Research and Development Task and Finish Group has been in contact with several partner organisations about potential new research for the MCZ that that we like to see developed. Some ideas which have been discussed include assisting with the geo-referencing and analysis of the Seasearch image database, a study into the societal value of the Cromer crab fishery and a study to understand natural change in the MCZ and how this compares to change resultant from potting activity (focusing on changes to the structure of exposed chalk features). Blue Marine Foundation and Marine Conservation Society have expressed an interest in taking two of these projects forward. We are pursuing discussions with them on this and will keep stakeholders updated as to progress

Just like partner organisations can contribute with valuable information and expertise, so too could individuals engaged in citizen science (see the Management Updates for an example of how beach cleaners are contributing to our work). Recognising this, we have set up an Evidence Review Group as part of the MCZ Stakeholder Group. This Group brings together stakeholders actively involved in the collection of data to explore where Eastern IFCA currently have evidence gaps that citizen science can contribute towards filling and where there may be opportunities to improve the information we already have. The Evidence Review Group is also exploring how the data collected by stakeholders can best be standardised so that it is in a usable format that can meaningfully feed into the work of the Research and Development and Management Task and Finish Groups .

For more information on how active citizen scientists can get involved, please get in touch with Project Manager Samantha Hormbrey by contacting the office at mail@eastern-ifca.gov.uk or on (01553) 775321.

MANAGEMENT UPDATES

EASTERN IFCA IS DEVELOPING A BYELAW TO MANAGE POTTING IN THE MCZ

Eastern IFCA are now at a stage in the Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) process where we need a byelaw in place through which we can implement and adapt management measures as identified through ARM. Developing a byelaw involves extensive consultation with stakeholders .

Eastern IFCA is undertaking the first phase of an informal consultation on the development of the byelaw by doing a scoping exercise with the fishing industry to get initial views on management. A wider community informal consultation will follow to gather the views of all stakeholders, including via the MCZ Stakeholder Group, to inform development of the byelaw with a view to present this to the Eastern IFCA Committee in December 2022.

How to let us know SNAGGED, MISSING OR LOST GEAR

If any of your fishing gear has gotten snagged or is missing or lost and you cannot find or retrieve it, please notify Eastern IFCA:

by texting or calling us on 0774818205 or
by emailing us at mail@eastern-ifca.gov.uk

Please include as much detail as you can:

- YOUR NAME
- NAME & PLN OF YOUR VESSEL
- TYPE & QUANTITY OF GEAR THAT IS MISSING, SNAGGED OR LOST
- WHEN THE GEAR BECAME MISSING OR WHEN YOU LAST SAW IT
- LAST KNOWN POSITION OF THE GEAR



Have you found gear that is not yours that you suspect or know is lost?

Please let us know via text or email so that we can facilitate recovery and returning the gear to its owner.



Flyer outlining the reporting system for fishermen.

CODE OF BEST PRACTICE ON POTTING IN THE MCZ

We are pleased to announce that a Code of Best Practice on Potting in the MCZ has been launched. The Code aims to reduce the risk that lost gear poses to the environment, fisheries' sustainability, and fishing jobs by building upon and promoting existing best practice.

The Code is intended to minimise the likelihood of gear becoming lost but also inform fishermen on what to do in the event of fishing gear becoming snagged or lost. This includes a reporting system that will be used to help quantify the extent of the issue, monitor the positive effect of the Code over time and facilitate recovery.

The Code has been endorsed by the North Norfolk Fishermen's Society and the Norfolk Independent Fishermen's Association and will be a live document that will be reviewed, refined and adapted over time.

- For more on this, please read our press release: <https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/press-release-code-of-best-practice-launched-to-tackle-lost-gear-in-cromer-shoal-chalk-beds-mcz/>
- To read the outcome report on the consultation on the code, including what was said and our response, please go to: <https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/management-update-outcome-report-on-the-informal-consultation-on-the-code-of-best-practice-for-potting-in-cromer-shoal-chalk-beds-mcz-now-published/>
- The Code of Best Practice is available at: https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Code_of_Best_Practice_MCZ.pdf

VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT ON REPORTING, RECOVERY AND DISPOSAL OF ABANDONED, LOST OR DISCARDED FISHING GEAR (ALDFG) IN THE MCZ

As part of our work on lost gear management, Eastern IFCA has been working closely with fisheries and conservation stakeholders to develop a Voluntary Partnership Agreement on reporting, recovery and disposal of ALDFG in the MCZ.

This stakeholder-led initiative intends to facilitate effective collaboration between fishermen, divers and beach cleaners who wish to work together and to support and monitor their reporting and recovery actions.

Recently, the Management Task & Finish Group discussed the divers’ protocol – a proposal prepared by Seasearch divers on how they will interact with and mark for recovery any lost gear they come across during their dives. The proposal highlighted some unanswered questions relating to the recovery capabilities of local fishing vessels, health and safety, how to ascertain that gear is actually lost and where fishing industry input is required. This work is ongoing.

THE VOLUNTARY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT – HOW BEACH CLEANERS ARE CONTRIBUTING TO CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR THE MCZ

We are pleased to announce that the Norfolk Beach Cleaners Collective (NBCC) – have launched a new form for reporting lost fishing gear found during beach cleans:

<https://airtable.com/shr0l6LpJFQ6zJL7B>

This will help to build an understanding of hotspots for lost gear washing ashore, as well as seasonality to help inform management decisions. Eastern IFCA receives email alerts when any lost gear has been identified and acts as a liaison point with the fishing industry with the aim of identifying the owner of the gear where possible and/or facilitating the retrieval of bulkier, heavy-to-lift items.

Gear removed from the beach by a local fisherman who was connected with the NBCC after Eastern IFCA received a call for assistance



Gear returned to a local fisherman by a beach cleaner.



WIDER UPDATES

FISHING FOR LITTER IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND

Ørsted, the developer of Hornsea Three offshore wind farm, is working to set up a Fishing for Litter scheme at harbours and beaches on the East coast of England. This initiative is part of a number of measures which Hornsea Three is undertaking as part of their benthic compensation measures for the development of the project.

Fishing for Litter is an initiative to reduce marine litter by empowering and involving fishermen to be at the forefront of the fight against marine litter. Fishing boats are given hardwearing bags to collect the plastics, household wastes and other debris that gathers in their fishing gear during normal fishing activities. When the fishing boats come into port, they can unload the bags of litter in dedicated bins. These bins are collected regularly, and the rubbish is disposed of on land (<https://fishingforlitter.org/learn-more/>).

As part of their work to set up a local Fishing for Litter scheme Ørsted have installed bins at Grimsby, Boston, King's Lynn, Cromer and East Runton and are actively engaging with fishermen to take part in the scheme, recognising that there are many fishermen who bring litter back to shore already and that this scheme could encourage others by providing dedicated bags for storing litter onboard vessels and reliable disposal options.

More information on Ørsted's planned initiatives as part of their benthic compensation measures can be found here: <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/projects/EN010080/EN010080-003642-Hornsea%20Three%20Sandbank%20Implementation%20Plan%20WNNC.pdf>

STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETINGS

We are aware that there has not been a Stakeholder Group meeting for some time now but would like to reassure you that we are looking to arrange the next meeting for this Autumn.