

Cromer Shoal MCZ Project Board Meeting Notes

Meeting Time/Date:	15 15 hrs 7 th July 2023	Venue:	Via Microsoft Teams
Attendees:	Jennifer Love, Natural England Sue Ranger, Agents of Change Inge Smith, Eastern IFCA member Julian Gregory, Eastern IFCA Samantha Hormbrey, Eastern IFCA Judith Stoutt, Eastern IFCA Ron Jessop, Eastern IFCA Kristina Gurova, Eastern IFCA Luke Godwin John Davies	Apologies:	Jon Butler, Eastern IFCA

The notes from the previous meeting were accepted as true record.

New Actions Arising and Ongoing Actions		
Actions	Owner	Update
<i>New Actions Arising</i>		
Look at project planner to help narrow down dates for permit conditions consultation etc. to enable the planning of the next SG meeting.	LG/KG	

Put together a straightforward protocol for amateur divers and/or possibly include this as an agenda item at the next SG meeting.		SH/RJ/SR	
<i>Ongoing Actions</i>			
22/5/2023	Compile a project plan for the natural disturbance study to include: clarification on roles and responsibilities, the core minimum that needs to be undertaken each year (milestones) to answer research questions, and long term financial projections.	SH/RJ	<p>7/17/2023 Ongoing. SH has updated the project plan and shared it with a consultant from Tritonia for peer review.</p> <p>We are awaiting final quotes and costings and will share these with the Project Board for review when finalised.</p>
22/5/2023	Organise a call and go through Natural England's key feedback on the ARM plan.	SH/JL	<p>7/17/2023 Ongoing. There are no major concerns or changes. Some additional detail has been requested, particularly around the first suite of permit conditions and evaluation criteria. NE understands that this may be subject to change as per ARM process.</p> <p>Eastern IFCA will address NE's comments and share a final draft with them before publishing.</p>
22/5/2023	Collaborate on a strategy to encourage uptake of trackers.	LG/SH	<p>7/17/2023 Ongoing. The key need for trackers is for natural disturbance study. A campaign to roll-out trackers will be relaunched at the Blue Marine Foundation meeting with industry to agree final closed areas.</p> <p>It was noted, in relation to this update, that it may be difficult to get a meeting with all of industry in the next three months and that speaking to fishers individually and systematically might be a good start.</p>

22/5/2023	MCNAG Conference - JL to discuss internally whether resource is available to inform a consideration for a joint presence between Eastern IFCA and Natural England.	JL	<p>7/17/2023 Ongoing. Eastern IFCA and NE will not be attending due to the timing of the event and the availability of key personnel. JG has circulated details of the event with Authority members.</p> <p>Eastern IFCA will prepare a short, recorded presentation on the key updates and highlights from the recent months.</p> <p>JL has also made NE colleagues aware of the event should they wish to go in a private capacity.</p> <p>IS has recently spoken with MCNAG and highlighted that the timing of the conference makes it very difficult to attend.</p> <p>MCS will not be attending for various reasons including resource availability.</p>
27/3/2023	Societal Value Study	JL/SR/JSt	7/17/2023 Ongoing. No update.

Progress updates and new actions and decisions

Natural
Disturbance Study:
Marking closed
areas

Update:

- Discussions around the approach for marking out closed areas are ongoing. The Wells Harbour Master and a representative from Hydrosphere have both provided the same advice that due to local conditions and the time buoys would be deployed for, they would need to be relatively large (1200 ltrs). This is mainly because smaller buoys are only built with plastic mountings for the chain which have a tendency to break, but also the buoys need sufficient reserve buoyancy to remain afloat, particularly when stormy conditions coincide with full tidal flow. The main concern is around the shallowness of the inside markers (3m) - there is a risk that the buoys could be subject to surf like conditions that could result in their anchor weights dragging and/or the buoy itself to bottom out on the seabed. Both of these would cause far more damage to the sensitive features than the fishery and natural impacts that we are trying to monitor.
- Currently considering a number of alternatives
 - 1. Marking the two northerly corners of the box and asking fishermen to avoid fishing 150m shoreward of the outer buoys**
 - Pros are that only 6 buoys are required, halving the costs, and buoys can be placed off the rugged chalk.
 - Cons are that this is hard to achieve accurately in practice and hard to monitor ourselves from shore.
 - 2. Running the closed areas to shore, marking the two northerly corners of the box and line up with landmarks on the shore**
 - Pros are that only 6 buoys are required, halving the costs. Buoys can be placed off the rugged chalk and this option is more achievable and feasible than option one.
 - Cons are that areas/buffers might need to be moved to line up with landmarks and that a larger area than required for the study will be closed.
 - 3. As option 2 but change the shape of the closed area so it is longer and narrower (reducing the overall area closed to the fishery but survey area remains the same size)**
 - Pros are as with 1 and 2, that only 6 buoys are required, halving the costs. Buoys can be placed off the rugged chalk and this option is more achievable with accuracy in practice than option 1.

Cons are that, as with option 2, areas/buffers might need to be moved to line up with landmarks and a larger area than required for the study would be closed. This option also reduces the width of closures and we need to ensure sufficient rugged chalk features occur to achieve full survey complement.

4. Issuing GPS plotters to commercial and recreational fishermen who don't already have them instead of marking with buoys

- Pros are that no marker buoys are required which reduces costs. This option is easy to achieve accurately in practice. It removes any risk to the environment and the minimum area required would be closed.
- Cons are the cost of buying plotters (around £300 each) and there would be no visual markers which could result in accidental potting in the closed area.

5. Combination of 2 and 4. Provide plotters to fisherman but also mark the two northerly corners of closed areas and have a closed corridor for those who don't have plotters.

- Pros are only 6 buoys are required, halving the costs. Buoys can be placed off the rugged chalk. A visual marker is still provided. Fishers are encouraged to use plotters increasing accuracy. Larger closed area is only applied if fisher doesn't have a plotter (would work with recreational users).
- Cons are the costs of buying plotters which would be additional to costs of marker buoys.
- Need to identify which of these options PB is happy with so that we can take to fishers for feedback. SH and CS have engagement planned for Tuesday 18th July to discuss with fishers.
- Marine licence application is out for public consultation, deadline is the beginning of August.
- Crown estate licence application has gone through, but they won't send us the licence until we send the final positions.
- Positions and depths have been taken and provided to Wells Harbour and DiveTech for quotes.

Discussion:

- IS recalled that using helical screws was previously the preferred option and questioned what had changed. SH explained that there is still the same issue because the area is so shallow which would risk a large buoy bottoming out on sensitive features that we are trying to protect. RJ agreed that it is not possible to overcome the shallowness of inshore areas and associated problems.
- JD noted that train wheels are designed for mud. A chain will act as a wrecking ball spinning in the swell and causing a huge amount of damage.

- JL agreed that chain on the seabed is not desirable and asked how far offshore the sites for the buoys are, noting that they look really close inshore from SH's charts. SH responded that some are 300-400 meters offshore. The ones further off are deeper and there is less environmental risk of them bottoming out. They are also typically off the rugged chalk where the habitat is less sensitive.
- JL questioned whether the near shore markers are needed? Can we bring the closed area all the way to shore, is there a bigger impact on industry? SH explained that the plan is to get industry feedback on this to explore the viability of this option.
- JD noted that ideally these things would have been worked out before going to the industry. Agreement was achieved at the last meeting with Blue Marine Foundation and there is a risk in going back with altered proposals. JG acknowledged this but highlighted that this is the nature of project work. Industry agreement was needed in principle from the outset before project planning could be pursued. It is unavoidable that we will come up against things and have to find solutions that may differ from the original plans and proposals. It is more important to change the plan than to let the project falter.
- JD's preference is for the last option (option 5) – it seems sensible. Plotters are much cheaper and there are markers on the cliff (e.g. Sheringham lifeboat have visual marks) which would be a good enough guide. As soon as fishers are made aware of where they are, there would be no issue. Maintaining those buoys for three years will incur substantial costs. Providing fishers with plotters can also facilitate buy-in. Providing plotters should be on the condition that a tracker will be used. This will strengthen the integrity of the project.
- JL also prefers option 5. It is logical to have a couple of visual points to cover the people who won't have a plotter. JL likes the idea of not having any anchors on the chalk. Cost-wise, it would probably be cheaper to buy plotters. As long as we have a good amount of surety that it would work, then option 5 seems like a good middle ground.
- SR noted that there are mobile phone apps that alert you when you enter or exit a place. You can set a parameter and the alarm will go off when you enter and leave the place. This is accessible and very low cost.
- LG observed that there is a question of budget and asked if the budget can stretch to buoys, land markers and plotters. LG's understanding is that there is some uncertainty around the longevity of the funding. It might be wise to go for plotters if buoys require regular maintenance.
- JG added that there is a 6th option – using transit lines and plotters. Helical screws could perhaps be used with lighter buoys just in the summer months.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was overall agreement by the Board for using plotters in combination with some sort of marking, starting perhaps with transit lines and then moving to secondary marking in the form of buoys. It was felt that an approach to combine plotters with trackers could really strengthen the integrity of the project. • IS asked if SH could share her slides to give members the opportunity to consider the options further and provide additional feedback.
Research T&FG Update	<p><u>Update:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disturbance study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Contract has been drawn up with BMF for funding. ◦ NE have secured a further £25,000 funding towards the project - this will be prioritised towards the baseline dive surveys. The money will go to University of Essex as the dive contractor. ◦ Essex University are happy to use FPV Sebastian Terelinck (Eastern IFCA patrol cabin rib) for dive surveys with a tender, we are in the process of having one of our dive ladders adapted for use with this vessel. Jon is pulling together a dive plan for baseline dive surveys, with final costings. Hoping for dives to start August/September time. University of Essex are a commercial dive contractor – we will just provide the boats. ◦ At this point, JG emphasised the importance of having established protocols on health and safety. ◦ IS noted that HSE have a scientific diver category which only requires passing the HSE medical against a cost of £150. There are several distinct categories under HSE but we could use this scientific diver category which is much cheaper. ◦ Essex University has advised confirmation of PhD scholarship. The PhD work is due to start in October. ◦ Draft project plan has been shared with a consultant from Tritonia for final peer review of the proposal, dive plan will also be shared with Martin once complete. Looking to start diving in August/September. ◦ ROV surveys were completed in the last week of June to provide further information in order to identify final experimental areas. 6 experimental areas have been identified and closed sites picked at random.

- **ARM plan:** Eastern IFCA has now received NE's feedback on the ARM plan. Feedback is generally good with no major concerns - need to include more detail about the first suite of permit conditions that we are considering for the byelaw and adjust the structure of the plan slightly. Once the comments have been addressed, the plan will be shared with NE again before being published online.
- **Habitat Mapping**
 - Eastern IFCA has recommenced habitat mapping surveys, with side scan and ROV surveys completed last week targeting area northwest of Cromer and peat and clay exposures. More surveys planned in July.
 - Report detailing analysis of last year's ROV surveys is now final but not yet available online.
- **Adaptive gear trials:** Devices that can be used to monitor gear movements when in situ are being considered. Eastern IFCA is hoping to get the LobsterCam from NE this week.
- **Fishing activity mapping:** 15 trackers are distributed across the fleet and Eastern IFCA are continuing to collect spatial data on activities from these. We have seen a decline in use of trackers and are focusing engagement at the moment to address this.
- **Chalk value study:** Biosampling is ongoing.
- **Social value study:** No update, not currently a priority

Discussion:

- NE's diver team is reviewing the protocols for diving. There are quite a few hoops that the University of Essex have to jump through to undertake this work. NE are funding this work so have to be satisfied with the plan and that all health and safety is adhered to.
- SH is also looking into doing transects with the ROV instead of some of the dive surveys. This would be quicker and more realistic.
- JD observed that there appears to be a lot to get through before getting someone in the water and expressed concern about timescales slipping and what can be achieved this year. He noted that the visibility is perfect at the moment.
- JG questioned whether we have a plan with milestones setting out the points at which things have to happen. SH explained that we are limited by the summer. Dive surveys need to get done in August/ September and ROV surveys should be able to get done in one or two days in the same months.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JG emphasised the need to move swiftly with plotters and that issuing a plotter with a signed agreement across the fleet could be achieved in a matter of weeks. • JD questioned what the approach would be if someone disagreed at this time or if there was non-compliance after the launch of the study. JD believes there may be an issue with one or two people. • JL noted that NE are doing what they can in terms of being pragmatic within the legislative parameters. The normal approach in the case of uncertainty is precautionary. This approach isn't being taken in this instance for many reasons. The natural disturbance study is the best way of answering the question on the significance of potting damage on the site's conservation objectives and on what appropriate management for fishing in the site is. This is the key message. • IS questioned whether fishermen came fishing from outside the area and how to ensure that they are aware of the closed areas. • LG reiterated that we have no realistic way of requiring trackers without a byelaw. • JD suggested that Blue Marine Foundation is involved in communications as industry might be more receptive to the message coming from them as opposed to from the regulator or NE.
Management Task & Finish Group Update	<p>Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are finalising the 'byelaw package' this week having incorporated the stakeholder group consultation feedback into the outcome document • We faced some delays as we had to temporarily divert resource towards the cockle fishery but we are now back on track. • We will send the consultation outcome document to the Management T&F Group for review prior to sending the package to our lawyer for advice. <p>Permit Conditions Consultation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intention is to launch this consultation when the byelaw package has been sent to the MMO and to approve the first suite of permit conditions at the December Authority meeting. <p>Code of Best Practice Monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We had some engagement with industry in May to seek to better understand the sorts of weather events that require gear to be made safe or removed from the water. • The intention is to agree a threshold and amend the Code of Best Practice to make expectations clearer and more specific (as currently the Code only refers to 'bad' or 'rough' weather without setting out the parameters for these terms).

- We are now monitoring weather on a regular basis and will engage with industry when it appears that preliminary thresholds are reached with a view to monitoring adherence with the Code.
- We have also elaborated on approaches (present and future) to monitoring the Code in the ARM plan which we are in the process of finalising having received NE's feedback.

Tag Funding Project:

- We are still working on identifying tags and technology to trial with industry in order to finalise our quotes to inform our funding bid.
- We are liaising with WWF throughout the process and they are happy with the approach we are taking.
- KG and SH met with the University of St. Andrews today and are meeting with others who have conducted similar trials to see what we can learn from them.

Ghost Fishing UK – Recovery Planning

- Ghost Fishing UK have secured volunteers to come and recover reported lost gear on the 9th and 10th of September. They have also tentatively indicated the possibility for doing additional days between the 4th and the 8th of September.
- They will hire a RHIB to dive off of but will require industry assistance with removing the gear from the water. They provide on board assistance to fishers and usually assume responsibility for disposing of unclaimed gear.
- We need to identify industry members who would be willing to assist on these two days.

Voluntary trackers

- We are working on an engagement plan to encourage the roll-out of voluntary trackers across the whole fleet to support the natural disturbance study.
- We have met with Blue who have emphasised the importance of being able to produce scientifically robust results and evidence that the closed areas have indeed been closed.
- Industry needs to lead on this aspect of the research by carrying trackers on board. Eastern IFCA will facilitate by analysing data and undertaking relevant surveys but it needs to be a joint effort to succeed.
- Our understanding is that Blue will discuss this in more detail at the next industry meeting to agree the final closed areas.

<p>Stakeholder Group Update</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The last SH meeting was held online. The notes have been written up and will be shared soon. • SR is now planning for the next SG meeting. SR had a meeting with a MCNAG representative which did not go well. This was followed up with another meeting with another individual from MCNAG. SR would like stakeholders to be more involved in the planning of the meetings to get more representation. Some stakeholders have felt that the meetings are a closed shop with no opportunity to appear and be heard. There has been criticism that there is not enough opportunity for exchange, with meetings focusing on IFCA updates. • The second member of MCNAG has agreed to assist with planning on behalf of MCNAG. SR asked the Board if they know of other stakeholders that might get involved in planning. The goal is to get broad representation and build a more diverse group to decide on what happens at the meetings. The Secretary for North Norfolk Fishermen's Society has been suggested. SR is still awaiting a response. • SR asked for the Board what their views are on this approach. JL responded that it makes sense as long as a good balance is achieved. It's good to be more diverse. At the last meeting there was some grandstanding and domination by some stakeholders. This could be because they felt excluded and wanted to insert themselves where they could. • IS agreed that it's a great idea and would be good to have stakeholders like the Wildlife Trusts involved in planning too. • There has been mixed feedback on the question of whether to have the meeting in-person or online. There is an industry preference for in-person meetings, however, some stakeholders felt these are not a safe environment for them. MCS are trying to alternate to accommodate everyone and are planning for the next meeting to be in-person. • ACTION: LG/KG to look at project planner to help narrow down dates for permit conditions consultation etc. to enable the planning of the next SG meeting. • SR questioned whether it would be possible to put together a protocol for recreational divers on the format of data that can be used to feed into ARM work. • IS noted that Seasearch data was used to help with the designation. When IS sends forms through, she receives lots of queries to make sure that the data is as good as it can be. JL confirmed that NE have used lots of Seasearch data to help with understanding habitats and species. However, recently, the data sent in by recreational divers has been accompanied with interpretation. NE's stance is that they are happy to receive data from multiple sources and to scrutinise this and form an
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	<p>independent opinion which may be different. NE cannot accept interpretation without conducting their own interpretation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SR observed it would be good to clarify the thresholds for the IFCA. • ACTION: To put together a straightforward protocol for recreational divers. (Perhaps something to discuss in the autumn at the next SG meeting).
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision not to attend MCNAG conference due to resource constraints but instead to provide a recorded presentation with an update on ARM. • JL highlighted a recent conspiracy piece about NE published in the Fishing News. Concern was expressed that it may contribute to mistrust at a time when we are successfully working with industry and where this is all the more important in the context of the natural disturbance study.
Evidence Review Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No update was given during the meeting.
Highlights and exceptions – project progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is likely that it will be September at the earliest that we will receive MMO licence for marker buoys - we are collecting baseline data this year so will need to close areas as soon as possible after collecting data • Working towards taking byelaw permit conditions to the December Authority meeting
A0B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JSt informed the Board that Eastern IFCA has received a very detailed letter from the North Sea Wildlife Trusts expressing serious concerns with Eastern IFCA's approach to ARM. The key concern relates to the pace of work and the effectiveness of management being introduced. The 11-page letter outlines why the Trusts think Eastern IFCA is at risk of not meeting its legal duties and lists the things they think we should be doing immediately. They have requested a meeting off the back of the letter. • JD expressed disappointment at this update. • JG noted that Eastern IFCA are confident with the approach taken and that strong views from both sides of a debate are not unusual.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IS stated that she shares the concerns of the Trusts. There is obviously evidence of damage, otherwise NE would not be involved in the first place. It appears, however, that things are proceeding as 'business as usual' and a precautionary approach is not being taken. • JL noted that the Trusts are coming at the situation from a precautionary angle. In general if an activity is having an effect that cannot be quantified, a precautionary approach is taken. This interpretation aligns with the legislation. They could mount a legal challenge and they have cause to. With ARM, however, NE believe we are on the right side of the line. A precautionary approach does not appear to be proportionate in this case and that is why we are pursuing an ARM approach. JL is aware that these conversations are happening. Bex from the Wildlife Trusts has been in touch with NE and asked questions. I am trying to reassure her that we are moving forward. We now have the byelaw, interim management on effort, and things are starting to visibly move this year. Potting is a conservation risk but it is not the cause for unfavourable condition of the site.
Date of next meeting	Tuesday 19th September, 15.15

Decision Log		
Date	Decision	Update
27/3/2023	Short updates on ongoing work to be shared with greater regularity.	
27/3/2023	Natural Disturbance Study: To proceed with the scattered closed areas experimental design (natural disturbance study), on the understanding that option 2 (one large closed area) will remain available if any insurmountable barriers present in relation to achieving scientific robustness through option 1.	
2/2/2022	PB meeting notes will be succinct and will show key updates and actions and decisions to support the business-like nature of PB meetings.	N/A
2/2/2022	The Chairs of the two Task and Finish Groups will provide bullet point updates at each SG meeting.	N/A
4/4/2022	Based on Management T&F Group's formal recommendation, a decision to begin the byelaw drafting process was formally taken by the Project Board.	23/5/2022 Informal consultation comms are in development

4/4/2022	A 'decision log' will be added to the meeting notes to keep track of decisions taken, as distinct from updates on actions from previous meetings.	NA
23/5/2022	The amended Stakeholder Group ToRs and Code of Conduct are to go back to the Stakeholder Group for deliberation and agreement.	
23/5/22	Moving forward, tracker data will be cross-referenced against ROV footage to enable impacts to be assessed.	N/A
20/9/2022	Progress the societal value study as a partnership arrangement with MCS.	
2/2/2023	SR and AF to formalise proposal and for it to be agreed outside of the formal Project Board meeting structure. All members agree to proceed.	
2/2/2023	Agree to the recommendations in the 2023 comms review report.	