

## Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ

### Adaptive Risk Management updates - December 2024

- **ARM plan:** we are currently updating our ARM plan after receiving comments on the first draft from Natural England and we hope to have a final draft published ahead of the next stakeholder group meeting.
- **Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023:** has now been submitted to the MMO for review
- **Mapping the extent of the sensitive habitats:** ROV and side scan habitat mapping surveys have continued throughout the summer with the purpose of informing the extent and location of peat and clay exposures, as well as rugged chalk. Data collected will be processed and analysed over winter and will be used to inform an updated review of both sensitive features in 2024.
- **In-situ gear surveys:** data collected during 2022 ROV potting gear surveys has not been analysed any further. This is because the data is limited in the quantitative information it can provide us. The surveys have, however, informed the development of a longer-term study (Natural Disturbance Study – see below) designed to provide the quantitative data needed to be able to assess the level of impact across the site and compare areas exposed to potting with areas closed to potting activities.
- **Natural Disturbance Study:** this workstream has taken high priority over the summer months. Voluntary closures have been in place since September and ongoing monitoring has shown high compliance so far<sup>1</sup>. Buoys to mark these areas have not yet been deployed due to delays in receiving the Marine Licence for the works. However, this has now been received and buoys will be deployed over the winter months. Officers have been working with fishermen to ensure they are able to locate and avoid the closed areas over winter in the interim by loaning hand-held GPS plotters to those who don't already have plotters on board. Baseline data collection has commenced, with ROV tows completed in September and baseline multibeam surveys planned over winter when a suitable weather window presents. Whilst dive surveys were planned in September and October, poor weather and visibility meant that these surveys did not go ahead. Despite this, officers and the University of Essex were able to test all of the proposed dive methods to ensure they were suitable. Baseline dive surveys will now be completed early summer 2024. A short report detailing the methods tested and baseline data collection will be completed over the winter months. This work has so far been funded by contributions from Blue Marine Foundation and Natural England as well as in kind contributions from the Authority and University of Essex. Securing funding for the remainder of the project will be a high priority over winter.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the voluntary closed areas can be found on our website: <https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/cromer-shoal-chalk-beds-mcz/cromer-shoal-chalk-beds-mcz-natural-disturbance-study/>

- **Mapping fishing activity:** officers are continuing to collect data from trackers and iVMS (voluntarily used by the fishermen) to provide information on the spatial extent of fishing activities. A trial was completed in July 2023 by an external contractor to identify whether aerial imagery and artificial intelligence could be used to identify and map pot buoys in order to assess potting density levels. The data collected from this trial will be reviewed over winter to determine if further work would be beneficial.
- **Adaptive gear trials:** No further progress has been made on this workstream; it is planned to be picked up over winter with a view to commencing trials at the beginning of summer 2024.
- **Chalk value study:** Whilst a handful of on-board bio-sampling trips have been completed this summer, this workstream has been put on hold due to staff shortages, high workloads and being of lower priority. This project will be reviewed over winter.