

# Stakeholder Group meeting 8 Summary



**Date:** 21 November 2024

**Location:** Online

## **Attendees Summary:**

A total of 15 attendees joined the meeting, three from the Wildlife Trust, two from Natural England, one from The Wash and North Norfolk Coast Marine Partnership, five from volunteer conservation organisations, one from the University of Essex, one local community member and two fishermen.

### **1. Welcome**

The CEO and chair of the meeting welcomed members to the meeting. Members were also reminded of the etiquette which was previously agreed for meetings.

### **2. Adaptive Risk Management (ARM)**

For each ARM workstream an update on progress against the ARM plan was provided. The majority of management-related workstreams are on track or not yet scheduled except for the evaluation and adaption of the Code of Bed Practice. This project is slightly behind due to delayed monitoring which is now ongoing.

Several research related workstreams are delayed due to resource constraints or issues with obtaining data. Determining the value of the rugged chalk is marked as significantly delayed. This workstream includes two projects. A social study and a study looking at the value of crab on and off the rugged chalk, the former is on track but the latter has been put on hold as it is lower priority and pending review, consequently it is now significantly behind it was planned to be.

Finally, the ARM plan key milestones were highlighted and progress to achieving them discussed. Permit conditions were agreed at the 57<sup>th</sup> Authority meeting pending agreement of the rugged chalk area. Determining the rugged chalk extent milestone is on track and determining baseline fishing activity milestone is delayed due to the Statutory Instrument (SI) for Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (IVMS) being delayed, delays in receiving funding for the voluntary tagging project and delays in receiving catch data. Although there is no update on the SI, the tagging project will progress over winter.

#### Key discussion points:

- Some stakeholders felt that the study to consider the economic value of the rugged chalk was of the utmost importance because if the rugged chalk was of the same value as the rest of the MCZ, it indicated that fishing activity would not be impacted by additional management (e.g. closure) and could provide a simple solution.
- It was explained that the value of the rugged chalk was not the only reason fishing occurred over the inshore area with smaller vessels being limited in

range and crab / lobster stocks not being homogeneous across the area being two key factors. It was explained that the outcomes of this study alone would not provide sufficient justification for a closure of the inshore area, there would need to be consideration as to whether the activity hindered achievement of the site's conservation objectives. Further, it was explained that the study had the aim of informing impact assessments of management measures proposed rather than informing the development of management measures.

### 3. Management

An update on Management within the MCZ was presented which included:

- a) **The Code of Best Practice which** seeks to reduce the risk to the rugged chalk from lost and stored gear. Monitoring of compliance with the code is ongoing and the focus for this project has been on refining our understanding of fishing practices in relation to weather events. There has been a small delay to the evaluation report whilst focusing on redevelopment of the stakeholder group, however, various aspects of the code have now been included in the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 to enable better monitoring and compliance.
- b) **The Pot tagging trial funded by WWF-UK Wholescape Programme.** The trial is in progress and intended to identify the most suitable pot tags. The purchase of tags for all those potting in the MCZ is currently in development. Finally, knowledge exchange is intended to facilitate gear compliance checks at sea, whilst still in early stages, is continuing to be developed and will be dependent on remaining funding.
- c) **The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds byelaw 2023** is intended to provide a flexible management mechanism capable of delivering Adaptive Risk Management. Currently the byelaw is at the formal Quality Assurance stage with the Marine Management Organisation, with the second round of QA only consisting of minor amendments. Finally, as a reminder, the phase 1 permit conditions were summarised; the inshore vessel restriction has been agreed, and the winter closure was also agreed in principle and is pending agreement on a 'rugged chalk management area'. An update of the progress on the phase 2 permit conditions was provided, intended to further develop measures to continue to reduce risk and will draw on ideas from earlier consultations.

#### Key discussion points:

**Engagement following consultation:** Some stakeholders reported that they felt the consultation responses they had provided had not been fully addressed and that outcome documents were difficult to find on the Eastern IFCA website. The importance of providing feedback to all consultation responses was noted by the CEO. It was explained that the outcome document for phase 1 permit conditions was yet to be published pending a final decision on the rugged chalk extent by the Authority and would be published in due course.

**Voluntary measures:** Following discussion about the permit conditions intended to support ARM, there was discussion around the effectiveness of

some of the measures used to inform the management measures. This included the code of best practice which was viewed by stakeholders as a weaker method than others. Some also agreed that adding other monitoring measures such as iVMS and pot tagging are not an effective measure for protecting chalk. It was clarified that monitoring was not itself a protective measure, but that it is required to inform the assessment of potting on the chalk and to properly monitor the effectiveness of management measures.

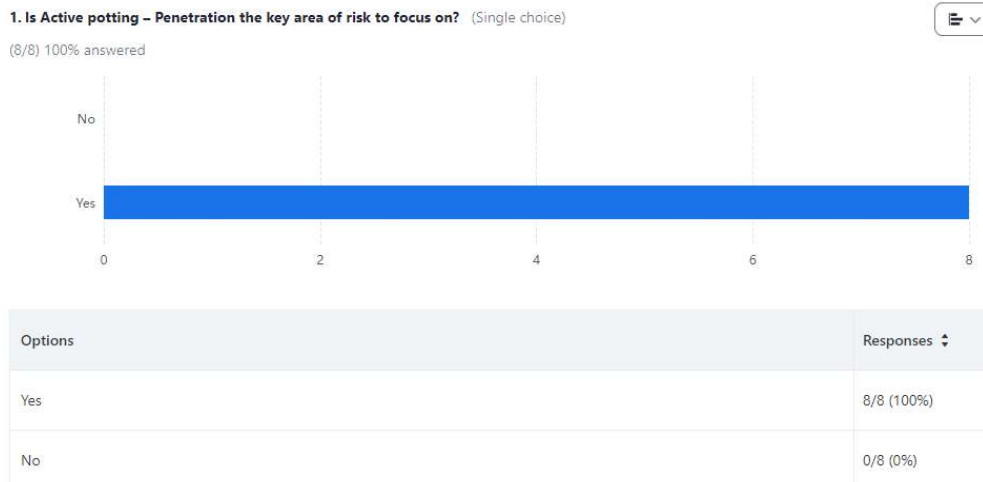
**Impacts of longer soak times** – the increased risk associated with longer soak-times for pots (i.e. the length of time left in the water) was queried. It was explained that this is based on the principle that a pot left in situ for longer has more opportunity to interact with the same rugged chalk feature which was therefore more likely to cause more severe damage. It was acknowledged that this was not based on studies which show this to be the case but was based on a logical consideration of what is likely to happen.

**Key Directed Discussion points: Phase 2 permit conditions:**

The chair of the Management Task and Finish Group explained the intention to develop additional measures to further reduce risk to the rugged chalk and explained that stakeholder views were to be sought on what potting / rugged chalk interactions posed the greatest risk and therefore what should be focussed on for development. Three questions were posed and discussed.

**Question 1 poll: Is Active potting – Penetration the key area of risk to focus on?**

Stakeholders were in agreement that the ‘penetration’ component of potting damage was the highest risk area. Penetration in this context referred to ropes, pots and anchors cutting into or breaking off parts of the rugged chalk. The question was posed to the stakeholder group as a Zoom survey and the results presented below. It should be noted that the voting function did not appear to work as intended, with some attendees not being given the opportunity to vote, and so responses should be considered in this context.



Question 2 Discussion: Are there any other forms of management to consider to address this risk?

**Soak time:** Understanding the impact of maximum soak time on pot setting and hauling practices is crucial. There are differences in how maximum soak time and proper setting methods affect various vessels; these factors do not always align. Adhering to maximum soak time alone is ineffective if good setting practices are not followed, making the soak time pointless. Therefore, if soak time is important, so is the method of pot setting. Additionally, gear left set for long periods tends to break down, so recovery timescales for pots should be considered. While effort limitations can reduce risks, it is essential to understand the current level of effort being applied. Finally there was also some suggestion that there should be impact limitations rather than effort limitations

**Grappling:** Managing grappling within the MCZ was discussed as an idea to minimise damage and could include a range of management approaches from a requirement to change the current method of grappling all the way to a full ban. This was seen as a potentially useful route to reduce risk as grappling is known to create a risk to the chalk. However, it was highlighted that it could potentially create more risk in the future as removing this method of retrieving lost gear could mean more gear is lost and left in situ for longer, creating an increased risk to the chalk from lost gear.

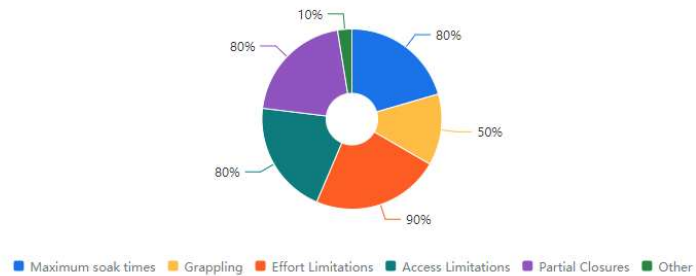
Question 3 poll: What form of management measures should be the focus of Phase 2 Permit conditions?

The group then discussed if the group had any preferences on what form of management should be the focus for consideration under Phase 2. As with question 1, a Zoom survey was used to gather feedback, and the results are presented below. However, it should be noted that the voting function did not appear to work as intended, with some attendees not being given the opportunity to vote, and so responses should be considered in this context.

1. What form of management measures should be the focus of Phase 2 Permit conditions? (Multiple choice)



(10/10) 100% answered



Options	Responses
Maximum soak times	8/10 (80%)
Grappling	5/10 (50%)
Effort Limitations	9/10 (90%)
Access Limitations	8/10 (80%)
Partial Closures	8/10 (80%)
Other	1/10 (10%)

#### 4. Research Update

##### a. Mapping sensitive habitats

The updated Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ rugged chalk extent was presented. Following the review of additional data, there is now more confidence for the inside area and more certainty on the presence of rugged chalk there. The results also show that there are two different types of rugged chalk habitat in these areas, with sensitive chalk being less frequent in some areas and, consequently, the likelihood of an impact in these areas is lower.

##### Key discussion points:

**Short term changes** to seabed need to be considered - the sand will cover and expose different parts of the chalk. Significant sand movements will occur across the area, so different areas of chalk will be exposed at different times and the area identified may change.

**b. Adaptive Gear Trials** progress was presented which included details of the current experimental design following two sea trials. The presentation led into a directed discussion regarding the setting of gear and the height of ropes:

How often is gear observed to be set taught or set with slack?

How could the ground rope be raised above chalk features?

##### Key directed discussion points:

**Setting Practices:** a variety of setting practices have been witnessed by divers which includes a variation in rope tightness. A number of stakeholders believed that rope tightness was a personal preference and there seemed to be benefits and disadvantages to both slack and taut rope. Taut rope has a risk of damage to the chalk in terms of abrasion and sawing action when set around a rugged chalk environment, however, pots which are set with a slacker rope are more susceptible to movement and can even tangle around the rugged chalk, potentially causing damage as the pot is hauled. Several members agreed that the modes of deployment and gear setting is down to personal preference, as well as external factors such as sea state and location. Even once set both have their benefits and disadvantages.

**Gear adaptation comments and other suggestions:** Following discussion on lifting ropes a number of alternative comments and suggestions for gear adaptations were made from the group. Some suggestions were made around the type of pots used in the trial and rather than looking at heavy larger pots to trial why not trial smaller and lighter pots to reduce the damage from the pot. It was also pointed out that cameras on the pots would be useful for gathering evidence and crucial to the trial. Overall there was general agreement with the proposal of adapting gear with some feeling that efforts should be made to remove the plastic on the pots when adapting the gear too.

**Diving techniques:** Finally a discussion on diving techniques was a key point of discussion, as this was used as an example for setting lines. Divers explained some of the methods they used and how a number of factors including the windage, type of buoy used, and the sea state also apply to when setting ropes with pots. Divers also use some techniques such as feeling the vibrations from the rope to test the current, there was then a suggestion that this knowledge and these techniques of testing could be transferable to setting pots.

### **c. Natural disturbance study**

A short update on the progress of the natural disturbance study was given explaining that whilst the project was delayed starting, multibeam surveys were completed in May & Oct 2024 and ROV surveys were completed July 2024. Dive surveys were removed from proposal due to concerns about achieving a robust sample size and challenges with data collection. The marking and monitoring closed areas is ongoing and the use of bags of sand/shingle to secure marker buoys during the potting season is being trialed. The incursions detected in August were followed by immediate engagement with industry, a report was produced following this considering the implications on the validity of the study. Funding for 2024/2025 has been confirmed by NE and FASS (Fisheries and Seafood Scheme) and for 2025/2026 suitable funding streams are being identified.

#### Key discussion points:

The group were generally happy with the update and agreed with the outcomes following the few incursions. Some members asked for updates on

the level of compliance since the incursions, this was reassured that there has been high compliance since August and Eastern IFCA have increased monitoring to at least once a week. Some members felt that the incursions created a feeling of uncertainty and have hindered the study. Some felt that the incursions highlighted the lack of engagement with industry and inadequate monitoring which left them with low confidence in the effectiveness of the study and increased the threat to the rugged chalk.

**d. Mapping fishing activity study** is delayed with limited uptake of the use of voluntary trackers combined with the delay to the national implementation of IVMS and limited availability and spatial resolution of MMO datasets. Additionally, the delay in receiving funding for the tagging project also had an impact. Over winter other means of gathering will be investigated.

**e. Determining the value of the rugged chalk** comprises of two aspects . The Social Value Study, which is on track, involves an MSc project developed with Newcastle University: 'Managing the balance between protecting the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds and maintaining the societal benefits of the historical Cromer crab fishery' which has now been completed. Additionally, a Public Value Study (with Cromer as a case study) has been commissioned by Natural England as part of the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme. Surveys have been completed over summer and results are anticipated in the New Year. The second aspect is the economic Value of the rugged chalk which is on hold due to being a lower priority and limited resource.

## **5. Stakeholder Initiatives**

### **a. Gear recovery protocol**

Rob Spray, Local diver and chair of MCNAG, gave a presentation on a proposed fishing gear recovery protocol. The presentation included how to identify crab and lobster pots which are lost and the proposed protocol for divers to recover this gear.

#### Key discussion points:

It was discussed following this that the project is already working with industry members and the protocol will aim to build trust between divers and fishermen. There were some questions about how this will be received by industry members but most felt that this was a positive direction for the MCZ projects and that both industry members and divers would benefit from this project.

## **6. Suggestions and ideas for future work**

#### Key discussion points:

It was highlighted to the group that some members felt that more could be done on stakeholder engagement this was noted and will be considered by Eastern IFCA going forward.

## 7. Upcoming priorities

Finally a summary of the priorities for the next few months was shared with the group, detailing the main focus over winter:

