

2025 Wash Cockle Fishery: management proposals

Proposed Seal Haul-out site closure

Harbor Seals are a protected species within the Wash Marine Protected Areas. The population is in decline, in contrast to the grey seal, and the current conservation advice is to take a precautionary approach to mitigating potential impacts.

Seals are particularly prone to disturbance during the 'pupping season' between 1 June and 31 August. During this time, seal pups are fed on 'haul-out sites' – drying sands and banks within the Wash. Hand-working near haul-out sites can cause disturbance causing seals to leave the haul-out site and reduce the feeding of young which in turn may reduce the likelihood of pups surviving.

Harbor seal haul-out sites are monitored annually by the Sea Mammal Research Unit who provide data to Eastern IFCA to consider whether the cockle fishery will impact the seal population. Within the Habitat Regulation Assessment, seal data is analysed to determine which areas are important seal haul-out sites and whether they are likely to be visited by fishers in the cockle fishery.

The 2025 assessment identified one area as being at particular risk to the fishery and it is proposed that this area is closed to the fishery during the sensitive pupping period. Several other areas which represent important haul-out sites are not proposed as closed on the basis of the assessment because the likelihood of disturbance was much lower (e.g. because a sand-bank will block seals from seeing fishing activity).

The proposed closed area is set out in Chart 6 (below).

The closed area encompasses a 'red area' which supports more than 2% of The Wash population (on average, around 186 seals over the last three years) and two 'amber areas' which support between 0.3 and 2% of the total seal population. The closed area also encompasses two areas which would have otherwise been closed because they contain high density (>1000 per m^2) juvenile cockles which are marked on the chart as 'Juv1' and 'Juv2'.

For the purposes of the consultation, the chart includes information on the biomass of cockles excluding 'year-0' cockles. It is estimated that the closure will incorporate 750 tonnes of fishable cockles.

Proposed seal closure on Hook Hill/Mare Tail



Seals

- 2025 Proposed Seal Closure
- 100m buffer
- Medium usage seal haul-out sites (2022-2024)
- High usage seal haul-out sites (2022-2024)

Proposed management

- Proposed Closed Areas for juvenile cockles

Cockles

2025 Total Weight (excluding Yr0) g/0.1m2

- 23 - 70
- 70 - 164
- 164 - 314.2

Date: 20/05/2025; Drawn by: EDC; Projection: WGS 84; Data: SMRU, EIFCA

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