

## Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone: Adaptive Risk Management Project

Project Board Meeting	
Meeting date / time: 24 March 2025 / 1530hrs	
Venue: via Microsoft Teams	
Attendees:	Julian Gregory ( <b>JG</b> , CEO Eastern IFCA, <i>Chair</i> ), Samantha Hormbrey ( <b>SH</b> , Senior MSO, <i>Project Manager</i> ), Luke Godwin ( <b>LG</b> , ACO Eastern IFCA), Ron Jessop ( <b>RWJ</b> , Senior MSO Eastern IFCA), Emily Parsons ( <b>EP</b> , Project Officer Eastern IFCA), Jenifer Lover ( <b>JL</b> , Natural England), Inge Smith ( <b>IS</b> , Eastern IFCA Member), John Davies ( <b>JD</b> , Eastern IFCA Member).
Apologies:	Ellie Collishaw ( <b>EC</b> , Project Officer Eastern IFCA)

Meeting notes
<p><u>ARM Plan progress (SH)</u></p> <p>SH gave a brief update on ARM plan progress:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers have started the interim report which is due to be published end of June</li> <li>• The MCZ risk assessment is currently being reviewed</li> <li>• Management workstreams are on track for Q2. There are some delays with the development of the phase 2 permit conditions. It is currently still on track, but any further delays would mean it could fall behind</li> <li>• Delays in several of the research projects, but no further delays since the last meeting</li> <li>• Still behind on two milestones: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Baseline fishing activity</li> <li>○ Value of rugged chalk study</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>Project risk assessment review (SH)</u></p> <p>SH gave a brief update on the risk review. SH highlighted the risks which have had their risk scores changed since the last risk review, highlighting the rationale behind these changes:</p>

- Inability to secure funding to the project (**high risk**):
  - This risk changed from medium to high risk due to an increase in likelihood. Two funding bids have been unsuccessful since the last risk review and alternative funding has not yet been secured. The actions that were determined to mitigate this risk were to seek agreement from the authority to use the reserves to fund the project and to continue to seek to identify alternative sources of funding.

An action was created below to address this.

A brief discussion followed this regarding the difficulties of securing funding. JL has asked around Natural England in case anyone knows of any funding streams but no results from that yet. Natural England has put in a bid for money for this project in the same way that they did the last two years to get some funding through for their monitoring budget but are not hopeful as Natural England is also in a difficult funding situation. JL indicated that this funding is unlikely but will find out in the next couple of months. SH to keep an eye out for another round of FASS funding.

- Non-compliance in voluntary management measures (**moderate risk**):
  - This risk changed from high risk to moderate risk due to a decrease in likelihood from “likely” to “possible”. This was due to the action taken following the last review, which was to implement the voluntary measures for the natural disturbance study as mandatory, agreed at the last Authority meeting. The closed areas will still be monitored closely.

A brief discussion followed regarding the need for trackers now that i-VMS is due to come into effect this spring. It was conveyed that, due to the importance of tracking potting vessels to the project and the modest cost of the trackers, the plan is to still use the trackers until i-VMS is fully operational and can be relied upon. Trackers will also provide a back-up should there be issues with i-VMS. Members agreed that this was the right approach. Previous issues with Eastern IFCA’s access to i-VMS data were also discussed and it was clarified that this was due to i-VMS being voluntary, but once they are mandated by the MMO as a licence condition we will have access to this data.

- Lack of stakeholder buy-in for management measures (**moderate risk**):
  - Previous error in reporting where the risk rating was scored at 9 (high risk) but reported as moderate. Upon review of the scored it was deemed more appropriate to score the likelihood as “possible” rather than “likely”. This was due to management proposals generally being supported by industry.

A brief discussion followed where it was reiterated that stakeholder buy-in can be seen through the uptake in the use of trackers and through the support of mandating the closed areas. There was a particular focus on ensuring that all fishers were consulted with for the inshore potting vessel restriction measure of the phase 1 permit conditions.

- Unable to deliver research projects (**moderate risk**):
  - This risk changed from high risk to moderate risk due to continued careful planning and project management. Previous flexibility in planning for a multibeam survey, where the multibeam kit was provisionally hired for 2 weeks, meant that the survey could be planned around adverse weather. By continuing to work this way with contractors and suppliers will help further mitigate the risk of this component of the work not being delivered
  - Alternative contractors for data analysis were also identified, which helped mitigate against the withdrawal of the previous provider for data analysis. Envision mapping has now been contracted to analyse the ROV footage, and other contractors have also been identified that could be contacted for future work

A brief discussion followed as to how this risk relates to the risk of the inability to secure funding. It was explained that although there is some link between this risk and funding, it is kept as a distinct risk to focus on the challenges of delivering research from a practical point of view. It was confirmed that funding has not been secured for the next multibeam survey which is planned for October. It was expressed that keeping each risk separate is logical as they are distinct risks to the project, but that it would be helpful if they were next to each other in the risk table. It was also highlighted that i-VMS is now planned to come into effect this spring, and so this risk can be amended.

#### MCZ risk review

- It was considered appropriate to review the existing MCZ risk assessment. Part of this was the development of a footprint approach to quantify the impacts of potting over time, which will serve as a starting point which can be built upon and used to identify areas where more evidence is needed. This was shared with Natural England who have provided feedback. Feedback will be carefully considered and discussed to see how this component can be moved forward.

#### ARM Budget and Funding (SH)

SH gave a brief update on the budget and funding situation:

- Unsuccessful in securing the Hornsea Three community fund for the **Natural Disturbance Study** and the Esme Fairburn funding for the **Adaptive Gear Trials** which the Wildlife Trusts had applied for on our behalf.

- There is a possibility that funding used to cover staff and vessel costs from previous year could be put towards future project work, though this would require agreement from the Authority.
- There are some additional costs relating to the **Mapping Fishing Activity** project, which amounts to just over **£1000**, resulting from the provision of trackers to provide positional vessel data until i-VMS comes into effect.
- Unfunded costs for 2025/2026 include **£48,000** for the **Natural Disturbance Study** and **£40,000** for the **Adaptive Gear Trials**
  - An error in the costs for the adaptive gear trials was highlighted and it was noted that the estimated project costs do not include vessel and staff costs, and thus this should be edited in the ARM budgets and funding paper.

A discussion followed on the costs for these projects and whether they could be brought down. It was mentioned that the **Adaptive Gear Trials** is currently being reviewed to see what elements could be scaled down, including potentially dropping an element of the study due to a feasibility study determining it ineffective. The data analysis has also been scaled down, and other areas are being reviewed in order to reduce costs.

A decision was made at this point that, in the event that funding streams cannot be secured and project costs cannot be reduced, that the **Natural Disturbance Study** be prioritised over the **Adaptive Gear Trials**. This decision was agreed by members and noted below.

#### Adaptive Gear Trials (WW)

WW gave a brief update on the status of the **Adaptive Gear Trials** project following the feasibility study:

- The feasibility study proposed to remove the rope modification (the floats on the pot lines). The study showed that floats were ineffective at raising the main line when the shank is pulled taut. It was found that the main line would raise when there was sufficient slack in the shank of pots.
  - Dialog with stakeholders found that common practice amongst fishers potting in the MCZ is that gear is set taut due to weather and strong tides. It was mentioned that tight gear fishes better and reduces limb loss which can impact catch value.

Members were asked to agree to the recommendation that the rope modification be removed from the trial. Instead, soft armouring on pots would be prioritised. A short discussion followed regarding the removal of this element from the project and how it reduces the costs of the project overall. Members acknowledged the outcomes of the feasibility study.

Members noted the contents of the report and agreed upon the recommendation to remove the rope modification from the trial.

#### Research Task & Finish Group update (RWJ)

RWJ gave a brief update on value of the **rugged chalk study**. This study was previously on hold but has been picked back up recently.

- Data from 2022 and 2023 sampling was analysed and revealed several findings regarding crab and lobster catches on the rugged chalk versus non-rugged areas:
  - Size comparison: Crabs and lobsters caught in rugged chalk areas were larger than those caught in non-rugged areas, and this difference was statistically significant
  - Whitefooted crab abundance: The abundance of whitefooted crabs was lower in rugged chalk areas compared to non-rugged areas
  - Sex ratio: A higher proportion of male crabs were found in rugged chalk areas, whereas a higher proportion of female lobsters were found in non-rugged areas
  - Soft-shelled lobster: There was a higher incidence of soft-shelled lobsters in rugged chalk areas compared to non-rugged areas
  - Discard rates: The discard rates for both crabs and lobsters were lower in rugged chalk areas than in non-rugged areas
- A discussion on how to move the project forward was had and identified some key areas:
  - Previous sampling took place on JD vessel, and it was noted that JD does not necessarily fish on the rugged chalk, but rather along its edge or just off of it. Following this, it was recommended that rugged chalk areas are targeted in any sampling that takes place this year, so that samples can be collected on and off of the rugged chalk. JD has suggested a few fishers that fish exclusively on the rugged chalk.
- It has emerged that assessing the quality of the crab could be more difficult than initially thought. Anecdotally, crab from the rugged chalk is better quality than crab caught off of the rugged chalk. Following discussions with JD and other industry members it appears that this is due to meat yield, taste and the colour of the meat. Meat yield is a measurable quality, however the taste and colour of the meat would be harder to quantify.
  - There are two options for acquiring crab to assess the quality, which are to buy crab and collect the data manually, or to work with the processors themselves.
- It was also discussed as to whether the study be more qualitative rather than quantitative, where anecdotal evidence is used rather than quantifying meat yield and quality.

A discussion followed regarding the aims of the study and how they could be achieved. It was mentioned that the factory does not take as many crab from the rugged chalk as the independent wholesalers. It was put forward that other sources of information that are more achievable should be explored. Members agreed upon the difficulties in quantifying the quality of crab on and off of rugged chalk were, and the many variables that would need to be accounted for were further discussed. The aim of the assessment was clarified. It was noted that a considerable amount from tracker data combined with the perspective of fishers who pot in the MCZ could be inferred, and that this could be a useful proxy to use. It was generally agreed by members that a combination of tracker/ i-vms data and information from conversations with fishers would help progress this project.

A decision was made at this point to look at this project more broadly, and to consider combining quantitative data such as tracker/ i-vms, landings etc with more qualitative data, such as conversations with fishermen, to determine value of the rugged chalk.

#### Management Task & Finish Group update (LG)

LG gave a brief update:

- The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 is still with MMO and expected to be back mid-April
- Focus at the moment is the interim measures, which includes issuing the trackers and mandating the voluntary closures
- Phase 2 permit conditions have been postponed. Discussions with Natural England are ongoing to progress them

#### Stakeholder Group update (EC)

SH mentioned that the notes from the last few meetings are now on the website and have been circulated to the group.

#### Evidence subgroup (LG)

LG gave a brief update:

- Meetings that were planned for the last couple of weeks were postponed due to work related to the Stena Immaculate/ Solong collision
- A diver and fisherman are in touch looking to recover some gear that has washed up on the beach. The next key steps to be developed for the gear recovery project are the gear recover protocols and how to use diver footage which shows interactions on gear and the chalk

Communications update (EC)

No updates

Date of next meeting

26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 @ 15:30

*Actions will be added at the time of the meeting until marked as 'COMPLETE' at which point they will remain meeting notes for one further meeting before being removed.*

*DECISIONS will be added at the time of the decision and remain on the meeting notes for one further meeting before being removed.*

*A log of all ACTIONS and DECISIONS will be maintained separately from the meeting notes for future reference.*

Date	Actions / Decisions	Owner	Target date	Update
26/03/2025	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> For the chalk value study, combine qualitative data and supporting quantitative information such as tracker/ i-VMS data as a more reasonable way to capture the value of the chalk	RWJ	Next meeting	
26/03/2025	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> In the event that funding streams cannot be secured and project costs cannot be brought down, the natural disturbance study will be prioritised over the adaptive gear trials	SH	n/a	
26/03/2025	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> Agree to remove the rope modification from the adaptive gear trial	All	n/a	
26/03/2025	<b><u>ACTION</u></b> Review project methodologies to bring down costs. Mainly for adaptive gear trials	WW/ RWJ	Next meeting	

26/03/2025	<b><u>ACTION</u></b> Pursue additional sources of funding for the project as a priority	SH	Next meeting	
08/01/2025	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> ( <i>standing item</i> ) confirmation of notes from last meeting	All	n/a	No edits required. Notes approved.
08/01/2025	<b><u>DECISION:</u></b> February Stakeholder Group meeting agenda approved	EC	n/a	
08/01/2025	<b><u>ACTION:</u></b> To pick up and review value of rugged chalk study	RWJ	Next meeting	Complete – Discussed as an agenda item. Decision made in regards on how to progress the study.
09/10/2024	<b><u>ACTION:</u></b> SH to bring project funding to next meeting  <b><u>ACTION:</u></b> LG and JG to review funding and look at finance and HR	SH LG/JG	Next meeting	Complete – Discussed as an agenda item  Complete – Taken to the finance and HR meeting
09/10/2024	<b><u>ACTION:</u></b> EIFCA to continue looking into obtaining existing partial datasets such as available iVMS data and MMO data. <b><u>ACTION:</u></b> EIFCA to consider alternative ways of obtaining fishing data in the absence of full data sets.	SH/LG  SH/LG	Next meeting	Ongoing – iVMS will be in effect from late May 2025.
20/06/2024	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> The sample replicates required to enable a scientifically robust biodiversity surveys were insurmountable and that the outputs were not necessary for the study to achieve its aims.		n/a	
20/06/2024	<b><u>ACTION:</u></b> to procure and make marker buoy systems ahead of receiving Natural England advice.	LG	ASAP	Complete – New marker buoys deployed. Comms to be sent out to industry to state that buoys are indicative markers of the closed areas.

20/06/2024	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> : provisional agreement of the Engagement Strategy	All	n/a	n/a
20/06/2024	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> : to hold a Stakeholder Group meeting in November via Teams	All	n/a	n/a
08/02/2024	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> : that an officer from the Wildlife Trust will join the Management Task & Finish Group	All	n/a	n/a
08/02/2024	<b><u>DECISION</u></b> : ARM Plan Approved.	All	n/a	n/a