

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

<b>Project Board Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting date / time:</b> 26 June 2025 / 1530hrs	
<b>Venue:</b> via Microsoft Teams	
<b>Attendees:</b>	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), Ellie Collishaw ( <b>EC</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).
<b>Apologies:</b>	

<b>Meeting notes</b>
<p><u>Progress against ARM plan (SH)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interim report is delayed and will not be published by the end of June due to competing priorities.</li> <li>• Confirmation of Byelaw is also delayed. However, whilst the byelaw has not come into effect by the target date significant delays are not anticipated. Delays are a result of the QA process rather than issues with the byelaw itself. It should also be noted that the target date itself was set as the earliest timeframe that the byelaw could come into effect, however experience has shown that in reality byelaws can take in excess of two years to be approved, much longer than set out in the ARM plan.</li> <li>• Evaluation and adoption of permit conditions has also been delayed. The associated risk, however, is limited as the byelaw is not yet in force and is unlikely to be approved imminently.</li> <li>• Natural Disturbance Study - whilst initially delayed, progress is now back on track.</li> <li>• Mapping fishing activities, whilst significantly delayed, is now progressing as a result of the interim measures which require vessel positional data and the requirement for IVMS now in place.</li> <li>• Trialling alternative fishing practice is delayed, but trials are planned for this summer.</li> <li>• Determining the value of the rugged chalk is significantly delayed as was previously on hold. This study has now been picked back up and a plan to move it forward is being developed.</li> </ul>

- The delays described above have meant that three key milestones have not been achieved:
  - Interim report published
  - Byelaw comes into effect
  - First review of permit conditions

#### Risk Review (SH)

- Project Risk
  - For risks identified the majority have stayed the same since the last review.
  - Risk associated with the inability to secure funding was high at the last review. To mitigate this risk the issue was raised at the Finance and HR sub-committee meeting and members indicated that they would be supportive of utilising reserves if necessary. Additionally, an action was set to seek alternative funding streams and so far, two streams have been identified and applications are ongoing.
  - The risk associated with the requirement for IVMS not coming into effect has now reduced as the national requirement came into effect in May. This risk can now be terminated.
  - Compliance with closures to potting to facilitate the Natural Disturbance Study has been consistently monitored since incursions occurred last year and no further instances of non-compliance have been detected. Additional mitigation (mandatory closure and requirement to report vessel positions) appears to have reduced the likelihood of non-compliance however the risk remains high because of the importance of the study to the overall delivery or ARM.
- MCZ risk
  - An update on the MCZ risk assessment has been delayed while awaiting formal feedback from Natural England on the Rates of Damage Report. Natural England have now provided relevant advice, and work is underway to finalise the rates of damage report which will inform a review of the MCZ risk assessment and incidentally inform the development of Phase 2 permit conditions.

Feedback from NE regarding the Rates of Damage report were discussed and it was highlighted that there is a need to refine some aspects of the approach. It is recognised as an innovative model however there are different perspectives on how this will inform phase 2 permit conditions and how this will evolve over time.

#### ARM budgets and Funding (SH)

- Two suitable funding streams have been identified and applications are ongoing for the Natural Disturbance Study.

### Stakeholder Group Meeting proposal (EC)

- The Cromer MCZ Engagement plan includes a commitment to at least one face-to-face Stakeholder Group meeting per year, usually in the first quarter of the year, and this took place in February. The plan also recommended an online meeting for the later part of the year if resources allow.
- Three options are proposed with cost, resources and previous successfulness considered:
  - No meeting – This option requires no additional cost or resource. Although an update will be shared in the Newsletter, the updates are brief and there will be no opportunity for discussion for information gathering.
  - Online meeting – There are no direct costs associated but staff resource will be required to prepare for and attend the meeting. Allows a verbal update to be given with opportunity for questions and some discussion, can limit participation and is historically less well attended particularly by industry.
  - In-person – Includes higher costs and resources and a large proportion of officer time. Whilst the costs are higher, in person meetings bring stakeholders together encourage discussion with and between stakeholders, increasing stakeholder participation and sense of community. Historically the most well attended format.
- If a meeting were to go ahead it is proposed that the focus would be on research and management updates. A suggested agenda is set out in the meeting paper.
- Recommendation that an online stakeholder group meeting is held in November given the topics in the proposed agenda. Furthermore, no funding has been set aside for an in person meeting in November and it is anticipated that staff resource requirements can be kept low. Efforts can be made to increase engagement beforehand to address the risk that attendance from the fishing community will be low. It is considered valuable to provide an opportunity for those who wish to participate.

It was noted that stakeholder group meetings can facilitate input into permit conditions consultations, which may be underway at or near the time of the November meeting. It was also noted that there may be other methods of engaging fishing industry in such discussions other than via the stakeholder group meetings which may be more effective.

Members provisionally agreed a meeting in November and to consider the most appropriate format in the context of requirements at that time.

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

#### Natural Disturbance Study

- Summer ROV surveys commenced last week. Due to high levels of potting gear in the survey area, a smaller open RHIB was used to undertake the survey which was more capable of navigating through the fishing gear without entanglement. Only two surveys (out of the six) were completed due to time restrictions associated with using the smaller vessel. Further trips are planned to complete the surveys. .
- The report to compare levels of damage between control and treatment areas (undertaken by Envision Mapping) has been finalised and will be published imminently.
  - The analysis found no significant difference in the total number of impacts observed between open and closed treatments.
  - There were also no consistent trends within the frequency of severity of impacts between treatments and statistical tests showed there to be no significant differences.
  - There was, however, a greater percentage cover of rugged chalk in between open and closed areas and is recommended that future comparisons take this into account in the analysis.
  - It should also be noted that three incursions were detected in June (2024) in one of the three closed areas prior to the ROV surveys being completed (End of July) and this should be considered when interpreting the results.
- Quotes are being sought for multibeam data analysis.
- Fishing activity in open and closed areas is being monitored via a combination of tracker monitoring and vessel and shore based patrols. No incursions have been detected since those identified last year. Marker buoys are also being monitored and have so far proved successful.

It was observed that fishing activity in 'open areas' could be influenced by the position of the 'closed areas' i.e. that fishing activity may be higher in 'open areas' than would be the case generally over rugged chalk. On discussion, it was noted that this could be accounted for by considering IVMS data, which would provide estimates of 'typical' fishing activity over the rugged chalk and any results from the NDS would be considered in that context.

#### Economic Value of Rugged Chalks study

- Initial fieldwork was conducted in 2022/23 aboard a commercial fishing vessel to gather information on various metrics (e.g. size, catch rates etc.) of crab on and off rugged chalk.
- Ongoing mapping projects have subsequently refined our understanding of the extent of the rugged chalk. Unfortunately, this has identified that the majority of the samples collected from areas previously thought to be on rugged chalk are actually just off the edge of the rugged chalk.
- It is intended that more surveys will be undertaken to address this and gather further information both on and off rugged chalk areas.

Work is ongoing to develop a plan for estimating the 'value' of rugged chalk with respect to crab catches which is likely to include the relative value of individual crabs, the limitations of the vessels which prosecute the fishery close inshore as well as the volume caught and relative catch rates.

Enhanced datasets from I-VMS and IFCA issued trackers will allow Eastern IFCA to map where most fishing takes place, which demonstrates in part the importance of the rugged chalk area to the fishing industry as well as the level of effort over the rugged chalk. Although the general study design was accepted there was a concern that including interviews with fishermen in the study would create a bias and the interviews could not be independent. Eastern IFCA intended to include topics such as sorting behaviours to provide context to the study rather than simply asking how important the chalk is to them. It was also noted that regardless of the interviews, other objective metrics (such as volume and value of catch, amount of fishing activity etc.) will also inform the study.

#### Adaptive Gear Trial

- Developed a BACI type study to compare the differences in impact between standard and modified pots.
- Study was to include a series of Long (3-day) soaks to primarily monitor the abrasion caused by pot movements during the course of a typical soak period, and a series of short deployments to focus on the impacts caused during the setting and recovery of gear.
- Data gathered from the study would include video and stills from pot-mounted GoPro cameras, acceleration data from pot mounted accelerometers and video footage from ROVs.
- Funding sought from the Esmee Foundation, via the Wildlife Trust
- Following failure to secure funding, sought alternative means of conducting study. This included determining whether the answers could be provided using a theoretical approach based on physical laws. However, it was determined there were too many variables and unknowns to take this approach.
- An adapted method is in development in the context of a lack of funding for the project including the potential to deploy pots in inter-tidal areas of rugged chalk to reduce the need to gather and analyse data from ROV's and accelerometers.
- The feasibility of this method is being considered presently including a site visit to identify a suitable area to undertake the study.
- If it is feasible to conduct this experiment from shore, it will have several advantages over conducting the work at sea
  - Reduces vessel costs
  - Greater control over site selection for experiment
  - On-site monitoring at low water will be much more precise than can be achieved underwater using cameras, accelerometers and ROVs.

Health and Safety risks were identified including risks posed to the general public who may be bathing in the area. In addition, there is also a risk of tampering with the experimental gear. Both factors will be considered.

An Action was created below to reflect this.

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

LG gave a brief update:

- The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 is with Eastern IFCA for review and is expected to be sent to the MMO shortly.
- Focus at the moment is the interim measures, which includes assessing the requirements of the trackers following the implementation of iVMS.
- Phase 2 permit conditions were postponed. Discussions with Natural England are ongoing to progress the measures in the context of the Rates of Damage report.

#### Stakeholder Group update (EC)

The Stakeholder Group Terms of Reference has not been updated since the departure of the marine conservation society from the group. The Terms of Reference will be reviewed and updated as appropriate and brought to the next meeting.

An Action was created below to reflect this.

#### Evidence subgroup (LG)

LG gave a brief update:

- Meetings have not been held for some time due to other priorities, but it is intended that a meeting will be planned soon.
- Divers and fishermen have been liaising to coordinate the removal of gear washed up ashore in line with the agreements made at the evidence sub-group.
- One of the key workstreams of the group will be to consider utilising diver imagery and reports to inform the 'rates of damage' report and associated monitoring.

#### Communications update (EC)

- Eastern IFCA recently attended the Cromer Crab and Lobster Festival. Officers covered a variety of topics during engagement with members of the public including Cromer MCZ projects and information about the IFCAs in general.
- Updates to the Cromer MCZ page are underway and will be shared with stakeholders once published online.

- The next Cromer MCZ Newsletter is due at the end of July and will be shared with stakeholders once published online.

Date of next meeting

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025 @ 15:30

AOB

- Natural England dive surveys are scheduled for W/C 30/06/2025 at Cromer to assess biodiversity in the Marine Conservation Zone. Natural England to notify fishermen of the activity.
- Findings from the Natural England commissioned MCZ MPA monitoring report can be shared with Eastern IFCA

*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.*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Actions / Decisions</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Update</b>
26/06/2025	<b>DECISION</b> ( <i>standing item</i> ) confirmation of notes from last meeting	All	n/a	No edits required. Notes approved.
26/06/2025	<b>DECISION</b> to provisionally agree an online meeting in November but to continue to consider the format dependent on the outcome of the rates of damage report and need for consultation.	EC/LG	n/a	
26/06/2025	<b>ACTION</b> to complete a risk assessment to assess the risk to the public deploying a short shank in inshore and propose mitigation if applicable.	WW/ RWJ	Next meeting	

26/06/2025	<b><u>ACTION</u></b> to revise the Stakeholder Group Terms of Reference and share with group for comment.	SH/LG	Next meeting	
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	COMPLETE – Discussed during R&DTG update above.
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	COMPLETE – Discussed during R&DTG update above.
26/03/2025	<b><u>ACTION</u></b> Pursue additional sources of funding for the project as a priority	SH	Next meeting	ONGOING - MBIEG applied for and FASS application in process.
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	COMPLETE - iVMS now in effect.  ONGOING – To consider the effectiveness of iVMS in replacement for trackers. The coverage of all vessels is valuable but an assessment is being carried out to assess if the low ping rate of iVMS is sufficient for monitoring. Following this an assessment on the requirements and need for turning up the ping rate of iVMS will be made.



