Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ

Stakeholder Group Meeting 10 Summary

Date: 06 November 2024

Time: 18:00 – 20:00

Location: Online

Attendees Summary:
A total of 19 attendees joined the meeting, with representatives from the Wildlife Trust, Natural England, The Wash and North Norfolk Coast Marine Partnership, volunteer conservation organisations, Eastern IFCA authority members, fishing industry and other local or interested stakeholders.

Speakers:

- Julian Gregory (CEO) – Chair
- Luke Godwin (ACO) – Management Task and Finish Group Chair and Evidence Sub-Group Chair
- Ron Jessop (SMSO - Research) – Research & Development Task and Finish Group Chair
- Samantha Hormbrey (SMSO – Projects and Policy) – ARM Project Manager

Summary of updates and discussion

1. Welcome

The chair (Julian Gregory) welcomed members to the meeting, reminded of the etiquette previously agreed for meetings and briefed on the order of events.

2. Research Update

Senior Marine Science Officers (Ron Jessop and Samantha Hormbrey) delivered a presentation providing updates on research workstreams (Annex 1) including:

a) Mapping Sensitive Features
b) Mapping fishing activity
c) Adaptive Gear Trials (AGT)
d) Crab Value Study
e) Social Value Study
f) Natural disturbance study (NDS)

Feedback	Follow up
Research robustness: concerns were raised about the robustness of research projects, including the 2024 habitat review being informed by limited data, the social value study lacking baseline data and the design of the Natural Disturbance Study.	The 2024 habitat review used multiple data sets, including dive data, considered confidence in each data set and its limitations as part of the review and it is intended that future habitat mapping work will build on aspects where confidence is lower. The social value study will be reviewed in detail once it is published to understand its limitations. An independent review of the Natural Disturbance Study has been commissioned to ensure it is robust and sufficient to meet its objectives.
Incursion management: there was a concern around the lengthy delay in managing and reporting incursions into the Natural Disturbance Study closed areas.	It was clarified that whilst there was a delay in publishing the incursion report online this did not reflect a delay in responding to and managing incursions. Such included immediate communication with those responsible for the incursions, increased monitoring at sea and from the shore, enhanced marking of the closed areas and making the closures mandatory rather than voluntary. Similarly, the delay in publishing the report will not impact upon the project as the findings will be considered in analysis.
Closed area displacement: the Natural Disturbance Study closed areas may be displacing effort immediately outside closed areas and accelerating impacts in these areas.	Consideration of areas of accelerated impacts is an evidence sub-group action.
Adaptive gear trials: proposed adaptations could increase the amount of plastic going into the sea and the weight of potting gear which in turn could create more impact. There was also a lack of support of trialling gear in intertidal areas because of the sensitivity of chalk there.	This project has been paused to further develop the survey and method design in the context of limited funding and concerns around the robustness of the study. Further consideration will be given to the most appropriate adaptations to test as part of the redevelopment of the project.

3. Rates of damage assessment

A presentation providing an update on the rates of damage assessment, which estimates the rate at which potting is impacting chalk features, was delivered by the Project Manager (Samantha Hormbrey) (Annex 1). This included information on the data used to inform the assessment, feedback provided by Natural England and Authority members and a recent gap analysis completed to identify where research should be prioritised to increase confidence in it.

Feedback	Follow up
Data adequacy: concerns that since ARM was established insufficient data remains to conclude the impact on the chalk.	Delays are acknowledged but it was emphasised that evidence gaps are gradually being filled, improving understanding of risk. In terms of fishing activity data, several of the delays are outside of Eastern IFCA's control but officers are working closely with the MMO to try and resolve issues surrounding IVMS and catch data whilst also identifying alternative means of obtaining data. Research is being targeted to address other aspects of the assessment where confidence is low and as more data becomes available the rates of damage assessment will be updated to reflect the new evidence.
External data sources: particularly expertise on chalk regrowth could be provided by local diver observations and from studies completed for the Bacton pipelines.	Chalk regrowth is already being explored through an Evidence sub-group action and will include seeking information on Bacton pipeline regrowth studies.
Natural mechanisms: queries around the extent to which natural process are being investigated alongside potting impacts, such as the large volumes of flint which are routinely washed up onshore.	This is being addressed in part via the Natural Disturbance Study which compares areas which are open and closed to potting.

4. Evidence Sub-Group

A summary of the projects being developed by the Evidence Sub Group was provided by Luke Godwin (Annex 1). Projects include:

a) Dive data and imagery
b) Encrusting rates
c) Dive protocol
d) Beach cleaning
e) Fishing activity and to damage outside of closed areas

Feedback	Follow up
Stakeholder input: generally the Evidence Sub-Group was welcomed as providing an avenue for stakeholder input however some felt it was not yet clear how this evidence will inform ARM.	Outputs from the group will feed into research projects and contribute to the growing evidence base informing ARM.

5. Management Update

The Management Task and Finish Group chair (Luke Godwin) provided an update on management workstreams, including a presentation outlining the proposed management plan for the ongoing development of permit conditions (Annex 1). Updates included:

a) Monitoring and development of voluntary measures
b) Confirmation of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw
c) Development of permit conditions

Feedback	Follow up
Concerns were raised around fishing activity being treated as a precondition within the area of marine conservation importance.	Potting activities are being assessed against the conservation objectives of the site, in line with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and mitigated via Adaptive Risk Management (ARM). ARM requires the adoption of management which is proportionate to the level of risk posed and our current assessment of risk is that the conservation objectives of the site are not at risk of being hindered in the immediate term.
Effort reporting: it was suggested that effort reporting could be mandated to increase data available and evidencing guardianship of the area could also reduce concern.	A key component of the proposed management plan is to fully understand effort to enable effective management moving forward. Whilst officers are working closely with the MMO to address existing issues, other options will be explored including additional reporting requirements.

6. Round Up

During the round up, one stakeholder expressed concerns that the Authority were intentionally 'getting things wrong' to slow down progress towards management of the fishery, that time was being wasted 'measuring crabs' and generally that 'conservation interests' are being excluded from the project. The Chair said that whilst it is important that the Authority is held to account against its duties and that it is important that concerns are raised so that they can be discussed and explanations provided, it was also relevant to note that these matters had been raised and discussed several times previously and were, in his view, a mischaracterisation of the situation, which was not necessarily constructive or helpful in seeking to work collaboratively.

A final slide was presented by the Project Manger detailing the progress of each workstream against the ARM plan alongside the focus for the next six months and feedback was welcomed from stakeholders on the on the format, timing and content of the next Stakeholder Meeting planned in for February (Annex 1).

Feedback	Follow up
The general consensus was that February was an ideal time for various stakeholder representatives, including fishermen and divers as it is out of season. Although no specific agenda items were put forward it was suggested that longer term work be discussed and longer-term projections should be broadcast. It was also suggested that stakeholders are provided an opportunity to present on topics which they have knowledge, experience and evidence about.	These points will be considered when planning the next meeting.

Annex 1: Meeting slides

Welcome!

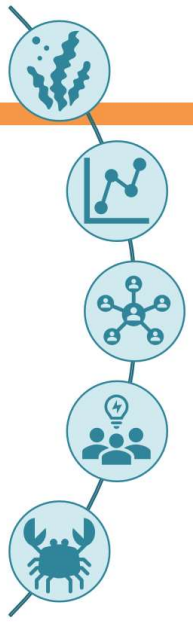
Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ Stakeholder Group Meeting 10

November 2025

Etiquette

1. Introduce yourself before speaking.
2. Be present.
3. Use welcoming and accessible language wherever possible. When not possible, explain technical terminology before progressing.
4. Be respectful of different viewpoints and experiences.
5. Actively listen to what others say before asking questions.
6. Criticism should be constructive and gratefully accepted.
7. Show courtesy and respect towards all other Stakeholder Group members. Be critical of ideas, not people.
8. Help the facilitators keep to time.
9. Focus on what is best for the whole community – we all want and need a healthy and thriving sea.

Agenda (18:00 – 20:00)



Welcome

Research Update
- Mapping sensitive features
- Mapping fishing activity
- Adaptive Gear Trials
- Crab value study
- Social value study
- Natural Disturbance Study

Rates of damage assessment

Evidence Sub-Group

Management Update
- Byelaw Update
- Permit Condition Development

Round up
- Progress against ARM plan
- Next steps
- Meeting close

Research Update

Adaptive Risk Management

Ron Jessop (SMSO) & Samantha Hormbrey (SMSO)

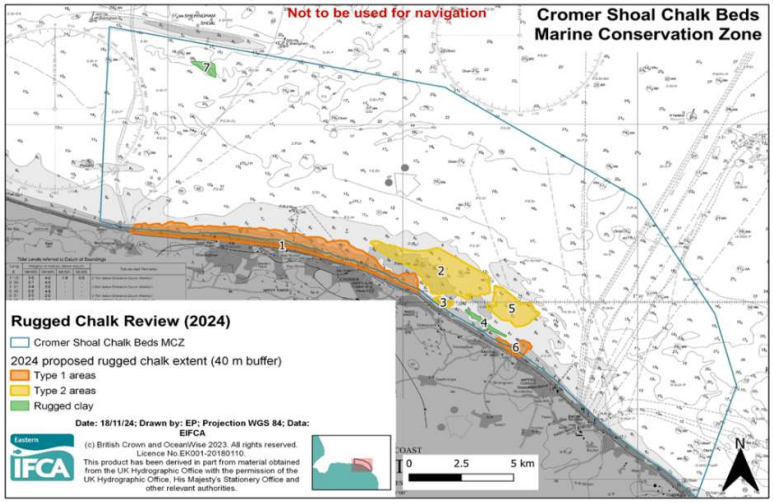
Mapping sensitive features

Status: Complete

2024 habitat extent review:

- Rugged chalk
  - Type 1
  - Type 2
- Rugged clay

→ Informed rugged chalk management area for winter closure (Jan - Feb) permit condition



Mapping fishing activity

Status: Delayed

→due to lack of data

2021 – 2024 – approximately 1/3 of the fleet carried voluntary trackers

Spring 2025 - Interim measures and requirement for IVMS

Baseline data collected by Spring 2026

Adaptive gear trials

Status: On hold

- Failed to secure funding
- Explored alternative approaches
  - Theoretical
  - Intertidal surveys
  - Reduced surveys
- Each presented multiple challenges
- Concerns around achieving a robust study → decision to put project on hold and focus resource on other ARM projects

Crab value study

Status: Delayed

Previously on hold due to limited resource

Project reviewed earlier this year and onboard sampling started again this summer

- Focus on sampling over rugged areas
- Increase in the number of vessels taking part
- Intend to incorporate spatial potting data into project

Social value of the fishery

Status: Delayed

Public Value of Coastal Fisheries

- Defra's mNCEA programme
- Newcastle University
- Cromer – 1 of 3 case studies
- Preliminary results shared at the last stakeholder meeting
- Final report with Defra, article being drafted for peer reviewed journal

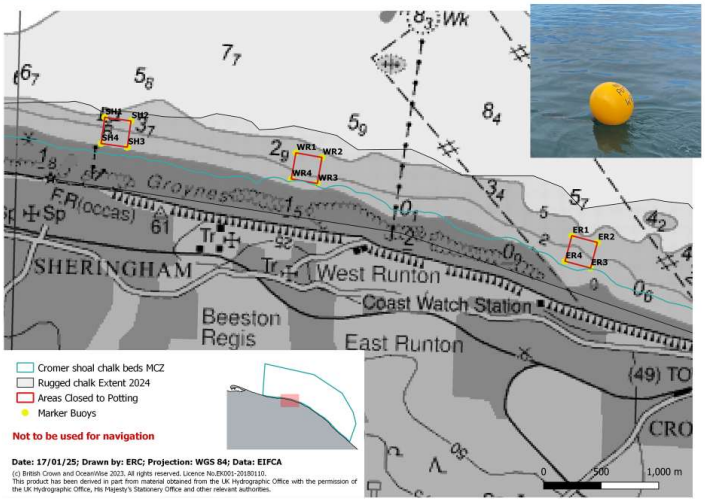
Inshore and small-scale fisheries workshops – February 2026

Natural Disturbance Study

Status: On Track

Aim: *to compare chalk degradation in open and closed potting areas*

- Closed areas now marked - made mandatory in Spring 2025
- Continual monitoring of fishing activities and weather/tidal patterns by officers
- Incursion report online
- Funded by FASS, NE, BMF, MBIEG & in-kind contributions
- Independent review ongoing

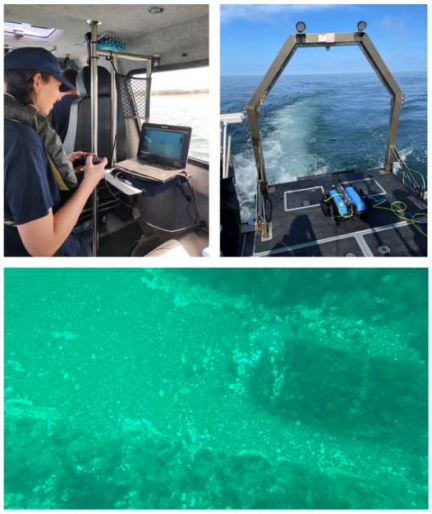


Natural Disturbance Study

Status: On Track

ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) surveys

- Annual summer surveys
- 2024 analysis completed – available online
  - No significant differences detected in terms of frequency and severity of impacts between open and closed areas
  - **However** – limited sample size and three incursions occurred in one of the closed areas 1-2 months prior to the survey – requires further consideration in analysis.
- 2025 data currently being processed internally so it can be analysed externally and included with 2024 data, increasing the overall sample size



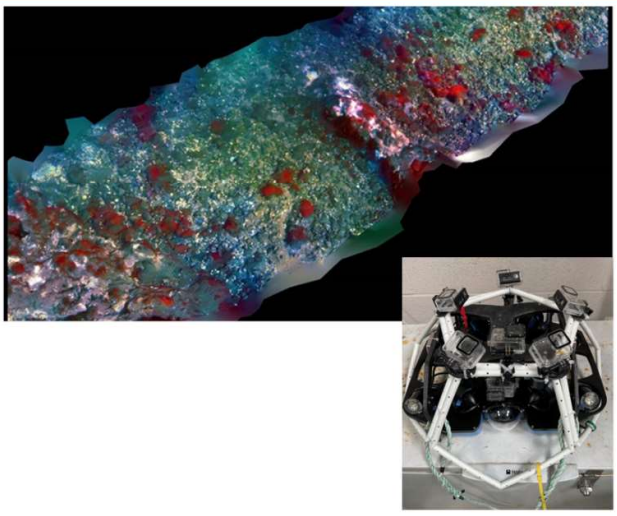
Natural Disturbance Study

Status: On Track

ROV surveys

- Annual summer surveys
- 2024 analysis completed – report available online
- 2025 data being processed
- 3D photogrammetry trial

  → value of including in annual surveys is being considered as part of the independent review

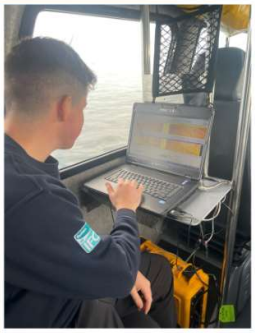


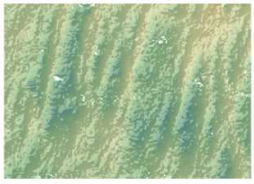
Natural Disturbance Study

Status: On Track

Acoustic surveys

- Annual Spring and Autumn surveys
  - High resolution multibeam and backscatter (gridded to 10cm)
  - Side scan sonar
- Cefas analysing first three data sets (May & October 2024, April 2025)
  - Outputs anticipated December/Early January
- Autumn 2025 survey completed with data processed
- Next surveys planned for spring 2026





Rates of Damage Assessment

Adaptive Risk Management

Samantha Hormbrey (SMSO)

Assessments of potting impact

Aug 2020

Natural England advice

- Spot count of buoys to estimate fishing activity level
- NE in situ dive survey (2019) – freq & severity of impact
- **Concluded potting was hinderin conservation objectives**

Conclusions drawn based on very limited data

Apr 2022

Eastern IFCA MCZ Potting assessment

- Literature review on potting impacts on soft rock habitats
- survey (2021) – frequency, type, xtent, position, vicinity of gear and mpact
- dustry consultation, pot buoy d IFCO knowledge used to estimate activity levels
- **Concluded hindrance to site conservation objectives could not be ruled out in the future**

Where are we now - 2025

Data	Source	Time period
Pot dimension	Fishermen Local IFCO knowledge	2025
Number of active pots in the MCZ	Voluntary tagging scheme	2024
Number of vessels which currently fish on rugged chalk	Vessel trackers Local IFCO knowledge	2024 – 2025
Vessel positional data	Vessel trackers	2021 - 2024
Number of trips / year	MMO Full Effort data	2010 -2024
Pots hauled/deployed / trip	MMO Detailed Effort data	2022 & 2023
Frequency and scale of pot impacts	In situ observations gathered during dive and ROV surveys (Tibbitt et al., 2020 and Dell and Dewey 2022)	2019, 2021
Extent of rugged chalk	Eastern IFCA's 2024 Rugged Chalk Extent Review (multiple data sources)	2024

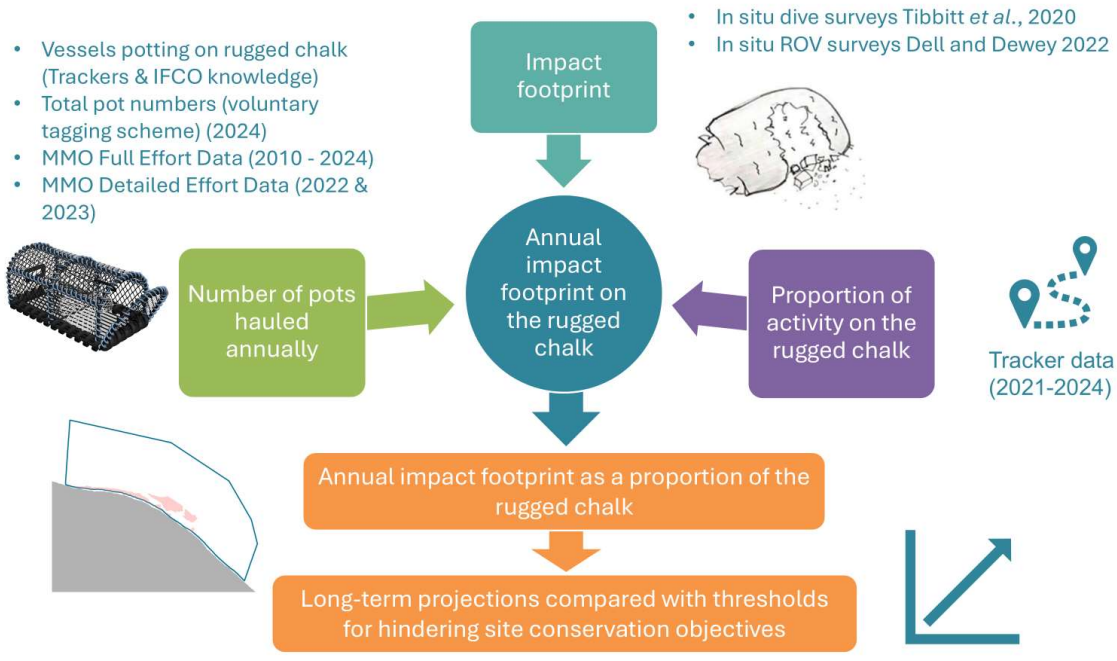
Where are we now - 2025

January 2025
- Rates of damage assessment V1
- Feedback sought from NE

March 2025
- Initial feedback received from NE

Summer 2025
- Ongoing dialogue with NE
- Development of V2 of assessment – inclusion of 2024 fishing activity data

September 2025
- Authority meeting – concerns about the confidence in the data Agreed that officers were to continue developing the approach in conjunction with NE



Summary of feedback received

- NE support work to improve accuracy and inform development of future management
- NE do not support the approach of deriving thresholds from decisions made in past case law
- Methods used to determine rate of impact per pot are subjective and likely to underestimate damage attributed to potting as they do not consider all structural impacts and data has been collected during favorable conditions when seabed energy is low
- Low confidence associated with pot impact rate due to small sample size and high variation.
- Damage to the 3D structure of the chalk should be considered as habitat degradation instead of loss

Gaps, limitations & uncertainties

Rugged chalk extent

- **High Confidence**
- 2024 habitat review
- 3D surface area unknown → use of multibeam data

Fishing effort

- **Medium to High Confidence**
- Incorporation of 2025 IVMS & tracker data
- Incorporation of 2025 catch data including pots hauled per trip

Threshold for hindering site CO's

- **Low to Medium Confidence**
- Appropriateness of using past case law to derive thresholds → seek legal advice
- How else can we answer this?

Gaps, limitations & uncertainties

Potting impact rate

- **Low Confidence**
- Small sample size → analysis of EIFCA in situ gear surveys, incorporation of dive data
- Quantify impacts during rough seas → use of ARIS sonar camera?
- Likelihood of interaction → investigate diff. between Type 1 & 2?

Natural Disturbance

- **Very Low confidence**
- Rates of natural erosion/degradation → Natural Disturbance Study
- Significance of potting impacts → Natural Disturbance Study
- Faunal recovery rates → review of literature/anecdotal knowledge

Eastern IFCA

Evidence Sub-Group

Adaptive Risk Management

Luke Godwin (ACO)

Evidence sub-group

- **Dive data and imagery** – potential to use it to inform 'rates of damage' and other work
- **Encrusting rates** – Expert advice on fauna found on the rugged chalk on encrusting rates to provide more insight from data gathered under the Natural Disturbance Study
- **Dive protocol** – establish a mechanism to facilitate dialogue between divers and fishermen
- **Beach cleaning** – seeking funding which can enhance the work of local beach cleaner volunteers
- **Fishing activity and damage outside of closed areas** – collaborating to investigate the rates of damage caused by concentrated potting just outside of closed areas

Management Update

Adaptive Risk Management

Luke Godwin (ACO)

Management update

Workstream	Progress
□ Monitoring and development of voluntary measures	
□ Confirmation of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw	
□ *Development of 'Phase 2 permit conditions **	

Permit conditions - Background

Adaptive Risk Management

- ARM Plan includes Phase 1 and 2 permit conditions
  - **Phase 1 permit conditions** – industry ideas on ways to reduce risk to the site - **agreed**
  - **Phase 2 permit conditions** – to further reduce risk to an 'appropriate level' – postponed to enable consultation and implementation of **interim measures** and further develop our understanding of **risk**.

*"…management that is **proportionate to the risks posed** by the fishery and **adequately precautionary** in the face of uncertainty…"*

Direction from the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting

Alternative recommendations were agreed as follows:

- Agree to endorse the continued assessment and development of the approach set out in the rate of damage report in conjunction with NE.

→

- Concern raised about the rates of damage method at the Authority meeting
- Further discussions (Nick Schiller, Natural England) identified method is appropriate and will benefit from more data and further development
- Assessment should not output specific timeframes but characterise risk more broadly

- Direct Officers to further consider and develop the approach to options for Phase 2 permit conditions, dependent on what will be required, for consideration by the Authority

→

- Discussed at Management T&F Group

The issue

Risk to MCZ & Impacts to fishermen

High risk

Closure of the rugged chalk

Severe reduction in fishing effort

Some reduction in fishing effort

Capping fishing effort

Technical measures – maximum soak time…

Additional voluntary measures

Low risk

No Further Action

Disproportionate impact on industry

Any action above this line will result in a **loss of fishing opportunity** and greater impacts → Requires **more evidence and justification**

Failure to meet IFCA duties for protecting the MCZ

Outputs from Management TFG

- No consensus as to what the current level of risk is
- Natural England:
  - Do not intend to advise on current level of risk
  - Suggest that the Authority had to make a judgement on available information
- A number of pending research outputs will inform risk in the near future, particularly the initial outputs form the NDS
- Reference to 'Phase 2' permit conditions is not helpful as risk and management needs are continuously reassessed
- Management should be considered as a continually evolving process
- December 'deadline' also not helpful in this context

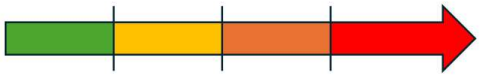
Proposed approach

Track 1 – continuous assessment of risk and adaptive management

- Adapting to changes in risk continuously
- 3–6-month process to introduce, vary of revoke permit conditions
- e.g. Initial outputs from NDS

The process can adapt quickly to revise management where risk goes over 'tipping point' – i.e. can justify loss of fishing opportunity

Track 2 – Effort management to address increasing risk over time



Process addresses higher risk over time.

- Begin process of effort management
- Industry reportedly generally in favor of pot limitations
- Develop evidence base for effort management

Summary

Next Steps

- Continue to develop rates of damage assessment
- Develop management approach with Management T&F Group and Project Board
- **First step of management** is fully understanding effort to enable effective management going forward
- Engage with stakeholders over winter to develop evidence-base towards an effort management
- Seek agreement for this approach at December Authority meeting

Round Up

Adaptive Risk Management

ARM Plan Progress → Next 6 months

Assessment	Potting Assessment	Development of rates of damage assessment and risk review
	Interim report	Publish 2025 ARM Interim Report
Management	Voluntary measures	Continued monitoring and evaluation
	Byelaw	Seek Byelaw confirmation
	Permit conditions	Evaluate and adapt permit conditions
Research	Assessing impacts of potting	NDS - data collection and analysis Rate of Damage Assessment – address gaps
	Mapping sensitive features	*Complete*
	Mapping fishing activities	Continued data collection
	Trialing alternative fishing practices	*On hold*
	Determining the value of rugged chalk	Crab value study - continued data collection Social value study – consideration of outputs

Next meeting...

Adaptive Risk Management

Thank you!

Adaptive Risk Management