Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ
Project Board
Meeting 26

Date: 23 September 2025

Time: 1530hrs

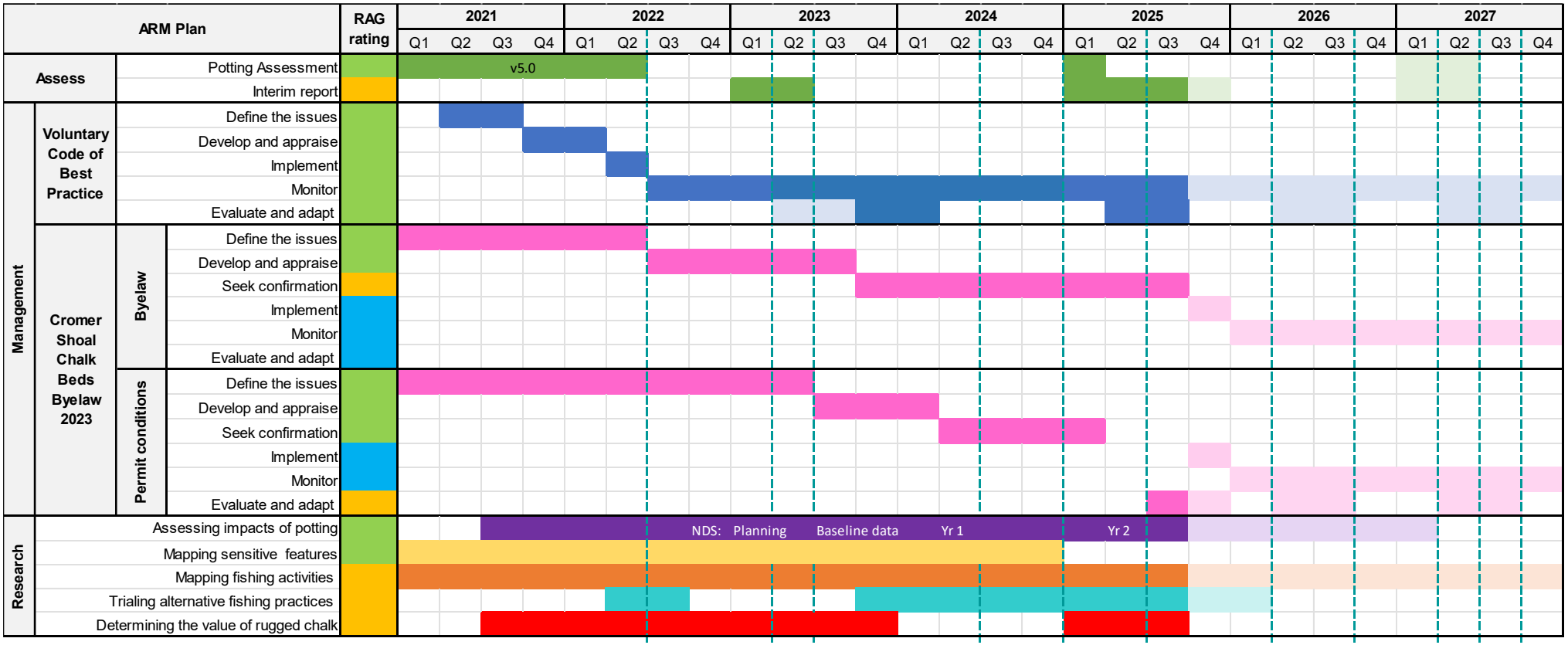
Venue: Online via Teams video conferencing

Agenda:

1. Apologies
2. Notes of last meeting
3. Actions and Decisions
4. Progress against ARM plan (SH)
5. Risk review
    a. Project Risks (SH)
    b. MCZ Risks (SH)
6. ARM budgets and Funding (SH)
7. Adaptive Gear Trials (WW)
8. Stakeholder meeting proposal (EC)
9. Research Task & Finish Group update (RWJ)
10. Management Task & Finish Group update (LG)
11. Stakeholder Group update (EC)
12. Evidence subgroup (LG)
13. Communications update (EC)
14. Date of next meeting (SH)
15. AOB

Item 4: Progress against ARM plan

Verbal update. Please see progress tracker below.



Q1: Jan - Mar
Q2: Apr - Jun
Q3: Jul - Sep
Q4: Oct - Dec

RAG rating:

- On track/complete
- Delayed
- Not started/ significant delay
- Scheduled

Key Milestones:

- Potting Assessment updated
- Code of Best Practice launched
- Byelaw agreed by the Authority
- Interim report 2023 published
- Permit conditions confirmed
- Final rugged chalk extent defined
- Baseline fishing activity determined
- Value of rugged chalk determined
- Interim report 2025 published
- Byelaw comes into effect
- First review of permit conditions
- Findings from adaptive gear trials
- Second review of permit conditions
- Findings from disturbance study
- Potting Assessment updated
- Third review of permit conditions

Item 5a: Project Risk Assessment Review (March 2025)

Verbal update. Please see risk review below.

Project Risk Assessment Review (September 2025)

Identified Risk	Risk Score (last review)	Action taken	Current risk		Further action required to mitigate risk
Non-compliance with voluntary and mandatory management measures.	**6**	No action required.	**3**	Severity: high (3) - no change Likelihood: unlikely (1) – reduced to reflect the high level of compliance over the last period with no incursions detected.	No further action required.
The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 is not confirmed or is significantly delayed	**4**	No action required.	**4**	Severity: very high (4) – no change Likelihood: unlikely (1) – no change Despite some delays in the Byelaw being confirmed no major issues have been identified throughout the QA process with the MMO which increase the likelihood or the byelaw being significantly delayed or not confirmed.	No further action required
Failure to implement management measures which are proportionate to the risk posed and adequately precautionary	**8**	No action required.	**8**	Severity: very high (4) – no change Likelihood: possible (2) – no change	No further action required
Failure to evidence effectiveness of management measures	**4**	No action required.	**4**	Severity: very high (4) – no change Likelihood: unlikely (1) – no change	No further action required
Lack of stakeholder buy-in for management measures	**6**	No action required.	**6**	Severity: high (3) - no change Likelihood: possible (2) – no change	No further action required

				A revision to the inshore vessel restriction permit condition was agreed at the 60th Authority meeting and was generally supported by industry members. The change resulted from additional engagement with industry members who were not included in the original consultation.	
Change in Natural England advice (i.e. that a precautionary approach is required)	**3**	No action required.	**3**	Severity: high (3) - no change Likelihood: unlikely (1) – no change	No further action required
Inability to secure funding for the project	**8**	No further sources of funding have been identified, however, one of the two funding sources applied for was successful. The FASS application is still ongoing.	**4**	Severity: very high (4) - no change Likelihood: unlikely (1) – decreased as some funding has been secured for this financial year and some reserves are available if required.	Continue identifying other sources of funding.
Inability to deliver research projects (particularly practical components including vessel breakdown, research equipment / contractors unavailable, poor weather, lack of internal resources)	**6**	Continued careful planning and project management.	**6**	Severity: high (3) - no change Likelihood: possible (2) – no change	Continued careful planning and project management.
Vessel positional data not available to monitor fishing activities and Natural Disturbance Study Closed areas.		New risk identified.	**5**	Severity: high (3) – data is required to assess and monitor potting activities and to monitor activity in the open and closed experimental areas for the Natural Disturbance Study. Likelihood: possible (2) – data from Succorfish I-VMS units is no longer currently being transmitted to the UK	Continue to provide vessel trackers to those who do not have working I-VMS.

				VMS hub resulting in a data gap for some vessels. However, associated risk has already been mitigated in part by the mandatory requirement for vessels to provide vessel positional data at regular intervals under Byelaw 11 and the provision of vessels trackers to those who don't have working I-VMS, prioritizing those who fish on the rugged chalk.	

Item 5b: MCZ Risk Review

Report by: Samantha Hormbrey, SMSO

Purpose:
To provide an update on the latest MCZ risk review.

Recommendations:
It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report

Report

Background
Earlier this year, a footprint approach was developed to assess the rate at which potting is impacting the MCZ using newly available data. It was intended that the outcomes of this assessment would inform a risk review and, subsequently, the development of the next iteration of permit conditions. On completing an initial assessment (V1) in January 2025, feedback was sought from Natural England. Natural England provided initial informal feedback in March 2025, followed by further discussions and dialogue ongoing. Consequently, the development of permit conditions has been delayed (originally planned in for Q1 and Q2 of 2025).

Assessment of the Rates of Damage
The assessment used a footprint approach to calculate the mean area of impact per pot which was then scaled up with total number of pots deployed on the rugged chalk annually and calculated as a proportion of the rugged chalk. The proportion of the chalk impacted annually was then projected over time to determine the number of years it would take to reach thresholds for habitat deterioration using previous cases where small scale impacts were considered[1].

The data used to inform this assessment is listed below:

- Maximum pot dimensions – provided by fishermen and local IFCO's
- Number of pots in the MCZ – provided via the voluntary tagging scheme
- Vessel positional data – sourced from vessel trackers
- Number of fishing trips (annually) – sourced from MMO catch data
- Pots hauled/deployed per trip - sourced from MMO catch data
- Frequency and scale of impacts – provided from in situ observations gathered during ROV and dive surveys (Tibbitt et al., 2020 and Dell and Dewey 2022)
- Area of rugged chalk – 2024 Rugged Chalk Review[2]

It is important to note that there are a number of caveats and limitations associated with the approach and the data used, of note the data is limited and considers the rugged chalk as a 2D structure rather than a 3D one, likely overestimating the

[1] NECR205. 2016. Commissioned by Natural England. Small-scale effects: How the scale of effects has been considered in respect of plans and projects affecting European sites - a review of authoritative decisions.
[2] https://www.eastern-ifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024_12_11_Rugged_chalk_extent_review.pdf

proportion of the rugged chalk impacted annually. Consequently, it was emphasised that the assessment should be seen as a starting point to build on in future iterations as more data becomes available.

Feedback received from Natural England

The initial feedback so far received on the assessment from Natural England is summarised below:

- Natural England support work to improve its accuracy and to inform the development of future management.
- Natural England do not support the approach of deriving thresholds from decisions made in past case law to determine the amount of time potting may take to undermine the Conservation Objectives of the MCZ as few cases relate to irrecoverable features.
- The methods used to determine rate of impact per pot are subjective and are likely to underestimate the level of damage attributed to potting as they do not consider all structural impacts caused by potting to chalk and are collected during favourable conditions when seabed energy is lower.
- Damage to the 3D structure of the chalk should be considered as habitat degradation.
- Habitat attribute targets for the rugged chalk that would be hindered by the damage (through loss of structural complexity/niche availability and associated reduction in diversity of benthic communities in a given area) should be taken into account and which include:
    - *Recover the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal chalk communities.*
    - *Maintain the surface and structural complexity, and the stability of the subtidal chalk.*
    - *Maintain the species composition of component communities.*
- Any level of impact, over and above that caused by natural processes, will result in the feature being taken further away from the Conservation Objectives and, therefore, should be considered as material.

Version 2 of the assessment

Since the initial assessment was completed in January 2025, additional fishing activity data has become available for 2024 (MMO catch data and tracker data). This has triggered an update of the assessment to the new available data which also considers the initial feedback received from Natural England and subsequent discussions. Version 2 of the assessment is currently being finalised, but early indications suggest that 2024 saw a greater proportion of activity on the rugged chalk, increasing the rate at which rugged chalk will be impacted and reducing the projected time frame for hinderance to site conservation objectives.

Next steps

A paper setting out the approach to assessing the rate of impact was taken to the 61st Eastern IFCA meeting where it was resolved by members to:

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

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

To refine the assessment and increase confidence in the model, the following actions should be prioritised by the Research & Development Task and Finish Group over the coming year to better inform the level of risk to the site:

- Incorporation of 2025 tracker and IVMS data to refine the spatial distribution of potting activities and proportion of activity on the rugged chalk. Use of trackers became mandatory by the fleet in April 2025, prior to the use of IVMS (inshore vessel monitoring systems) also becoming a national requirement in May 2025. The introduction of these measures means that vessel positional data will be available for the whole potting fleet, improving the accuracy of calculations determining the proportion of activity on the rugged chalk.
- Completion of the analysis of imagery collected by officers in 2022 and 2023 from in situ gear surveys using the BlueROV2 and analysis of other available data (particularly from diver stakeholders through the evidence sub-group). Incorporation of this data will build on the O'Dell and Dewy 2022 study, increasing the overall sample size and robustness of data used to calculate rate of impact per pot.
- Development of a project to understand the timeframe for recovery of faunal turf on the surface of chalk following impact. Determining the recovery rate of faunal turf will enable a better understanding of the timeframes for which observed impacts have occurred when analysing seabed imagery.
- Calculation of the surface area of the rugged chalk using available multibeam bathymetry data. This will enable a more accurate estimation of the proportion of rugged chalk to be impacted by the fishery on an annual basis.

In terms of developing permit conditions and options for management, this remains a high priority for the Management Task and Finish Group.

Item 6: ARM Budgets and Funding

Report by: Samantha Hormbrey, SMSO

Purpose: To provide an update on project costs and secured funding for ARM related workstreams to inform members of the financial restraints and requirements and to ensure transparency.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report

Report

This report provides an update on the financial projections for each ARM workstream:

Fishing Activity Mapping

No external funding has been identified for this project for the 2025/2026 financial year.

Interim measures were agreed at the 59th Authority Meeting (12 March 2025) to mandate the provision of vessel positional data from vessels fishing in the MCZ using Byelaw 11 (Development of Shellfish Fisheries). To facilitate compliance with interim measures the Authority have provided trackers to fishers who require them. The total cost of this to the Authority so far has been £849.82 (excluding VAT) for the current financial year. The national requirement for IVMS has now come into force and so further subscription renewals will be reviewed on a case by case basis depending on the availability of IVMS data for individual fishers.

Tagging Project

Specific project funding for this project ceased at the end of 2024, consequently, additional costs to the Authority have so far been £260.70 (excluding VAT) for the current financial year.

Adaptive Gear Trials

This project has been put on hold due to resource constraints and competing higher priority projects.

Natural Disturbance Study

Officers have been successful in securing £12,000 of funding from the MBIEG[3] for multibeam data analysis. A FASS[4] funding application has also been submitted for a further £95,000 which we are currently awaiting the outcome.

A breakdown of estimated costs for the project for the current financial period is provided in Table 1.

[3] Marine Biodiversity Impact Evidence Group

[4] Fisheries and Seafood Scheme

Table 1: Breakdown of estimated costs for the 2025/2026 financial period for the Natural Disturbance Study.

Project component	Estimated cost (Ex VAT)
Multibeam surveys	£33,000.00
ROV data analysis	£16,000.00
Multibeam data analysis	£12,000.00
Marker buoys	£1,000.00
Accommodation	£1,000.00
Vessel fuel	£4,500.00
Travel	£2,500.00
Officer time	£60,000.00
Total	**£130,000.00**

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Item 7: Adaptive Gear Trials

Report by: William Wade, MSO

Purpose: To provide an update on the adaptive gear trials project and discuss the future of the project following an unsuccessful funding bid and challenges associated with achieving a robust method.

Recommendations:
It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report
- **Agree** to place the adaptive gear trials project on hold.

Report

In March 2025, the Authority was notified that their funding application to the Esmée Fairburn Foundation was unsuccessful. Funds were intended to cover the purchase of accelerometer equipment and expert data processing costs, with supplier quotes exceeding £20,000, for the Adaptive Gear Trials.

To accommodate the lack of funding, various alternative approaches were discussed internally and with the Research & Development Task & Finish Group (RDTFG), some of which included applying a theoretical approach to the study and deploying the experimental shank of gear from land, rather than at sea. However, these approaches were determined not to be feasible as they either would not generate high quality data or because they still incurred costs higher than the revised budget.

Alternatively substantial changes were made to the project design to align with financial and data processing constraints. Firstly, one of the proposed gear modifications (floats attached to the drop lines) was removed. This decision halved the data processing requirements and followed discussions with industry, which highlighted that the adaptation was unlikely to be effective. Secondly, it was agreed that surveys completed in 2025 would solely investigate gear-chalk interactions during the setting and hauling phases. This adjustment further reduced the data processing workload and associated costs, as fewer sea days would be required and subsequently less acceleration data and camera footage would be gathered. However, some costs remained to purchase additional cameras required.

In summary, the most recent revised proposal submitted to the RD TFG differed significantly from the original project scope prior to the unsuccessful funding bid and to accommodate the limited funding and data processing capacity, the study design had to be scaled back, resulting in reduced scientific robustness.

In parallel, the recent rates of damage assessment has identified a number of evidence gaps which require resources to fill in and has led to internal discussions about where best to prioritise the available resource. On consideration, addressing gaps in the rates of damage report is more likely to provide tangible outcomes that can feed into ARM in the coming year, particularly in terms of quantifying risk to the site. Consequently, it is recommended that resource is directed towards addressing gaps in the rates of damage assessment and the adaptive gear trials project is put on hold.

Item 8: Stakeholder group meeting

Report by: Ellie Collishaw, PPO

Purpose: To agree the final format and agenda for the November Stakeholder Group meeting

Recommendations:
It is recommended that members:

- **Note** the contents of the report
- **Agree** to an online meeting in November 2025
- **Agree** the proposed agenda

Background
An online stakeholder group in November was provisionally agreed at the 25th Project Board Meeting following consideration of associated costs, resource availability and the risks and benefits of different options. The decision was made on the basis that no funding had been set aside (for an in person meeting) so would need to be sourced and that staff resourcing requirements would be lower for an online meeting. Whilst it was noted that limited resource availability could create an argument for no meeting, it was agreed that the meeting will build upon the updates from the Newsletter and was considered valuable to provide an opportunity for those who wish to participate in giving feedback, given that the last Stakeholder meeting that was some time ago.

Historically, support for online meetings has been split with attendance from fishing community members previously poor and typically showing a strong preference for in person meetings. At the time, the development of the rates of damage assessment was ongoing and the timeline for the development of permit conditions, and the need for consultation around the time of the meeting, was unclear. Consequently, an online meeting was provisionally agreed with the view that it would be reviewed closer to the time. This report considers the provisionally agreed format of the November meeting, against the progress of permit condition development and proposes a final agenda.

Report
It is the intention the next iteration of permit conditions will be taken to the 62nd Eastern IFCA meeting in December. To inform decision making and the development of permit conditions, stakeholder engagement and consultation has been planned in for September to early November, coinciding with the November stakeholder meeting (provisionally 4th November). Consequently, the meeting provides an opportunity to seek feedback on proposed permit conditions and inform their development.

Whilst concerns around poor attendance at online meetings remain, given the resource constraints, it is recommended that the format of the November meeting remains online. Given the timing of the meeting alongside the development of permit conditions, the agenda should focus on providing an opportunity for discussion around permit condition development as well as general updates on ARM. A proposed agenda is provided in Appendix 1.

To ensure fishery stakeholders who have historically shown poor attendance at online meetings have an opportunity to contribute to the development of permit conditions,

other means of engagement should be explored, such as targeted industry meetings or drop in sessions.

Relevant Documents:

2025_06_27_Meeting_notes_draft

2025_06_26_PB_Agenda_and_papers_Updated

Appendix 1: Draft Agenda

Cromer Shoal Chalk Bed MCZ Stakeholder Group Agenda (Draft)
Meeting 10: ARM update and Permit Conditions Development
Location: Online

- Welcome
- Progress against ARM plan
- Permit Condition Development
- Research updates
- Management updates
- Round up