

Unpacking the wide-spread opposition to the proposed Highly Protected Marine Area at Lindisfarne, Holy Island.

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What are Highly Protected Marine Areas

HPMAs are “areas of the sea that allow the protection and recovery of marine ecosystems by prohibiting **extractive, destructive and depositional uses** and allowing **only non-damaging levels of other activities** to the extent permitted by international law”.

By setting aside some areas of sea with high levels of protection, HPMAs will allow nature to recover to a more natural state, allowing the ecosystem to thrive.

The Benyon review – published in June 2020 stated that HPMAs are an “essential component of the Marine Protected Areas network and government should introduce them into secretary of state waters”. [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/442441/benyon-review-into-highly-protected-marine-areas-final-report-executive-summary.pdf)

“40% of England’s seas are designated as MPAs... However, the government’s Marine Strategy assessment shows that the environment is not in a healthy state”.

The review provided 25 recommendations covering what HPMAs are and how they should be identified and managed.

Process – development of a short list and stakeholder engagement

A key component of site selection was 'ecology first', economic and social secondary.

The Benyon review stated “Government should identify sites for HPMA designation using the principles of ecological importance; naturalness, sensitivity and potential to recover; and ecosystem services”.

- An initial list of 30 sites were proposed by Natural England and JNCC based on ecological criteria.
- Activities that are incompatible with a HPMA designation and immovable were excluded (such as aquaculture, licenced dredging, infrastructure ports and harbours, pipelines, existing windfarms,)
- DEFRA then applied series of social and economic criteria to mitigate impacts, based on the Benyon review recommendations
- DEFRA launched its 12 week public consultation on 5 short listed candidate HPMA sites on 6th July 2022

5 candidate sites went
to public consultation
July 2022

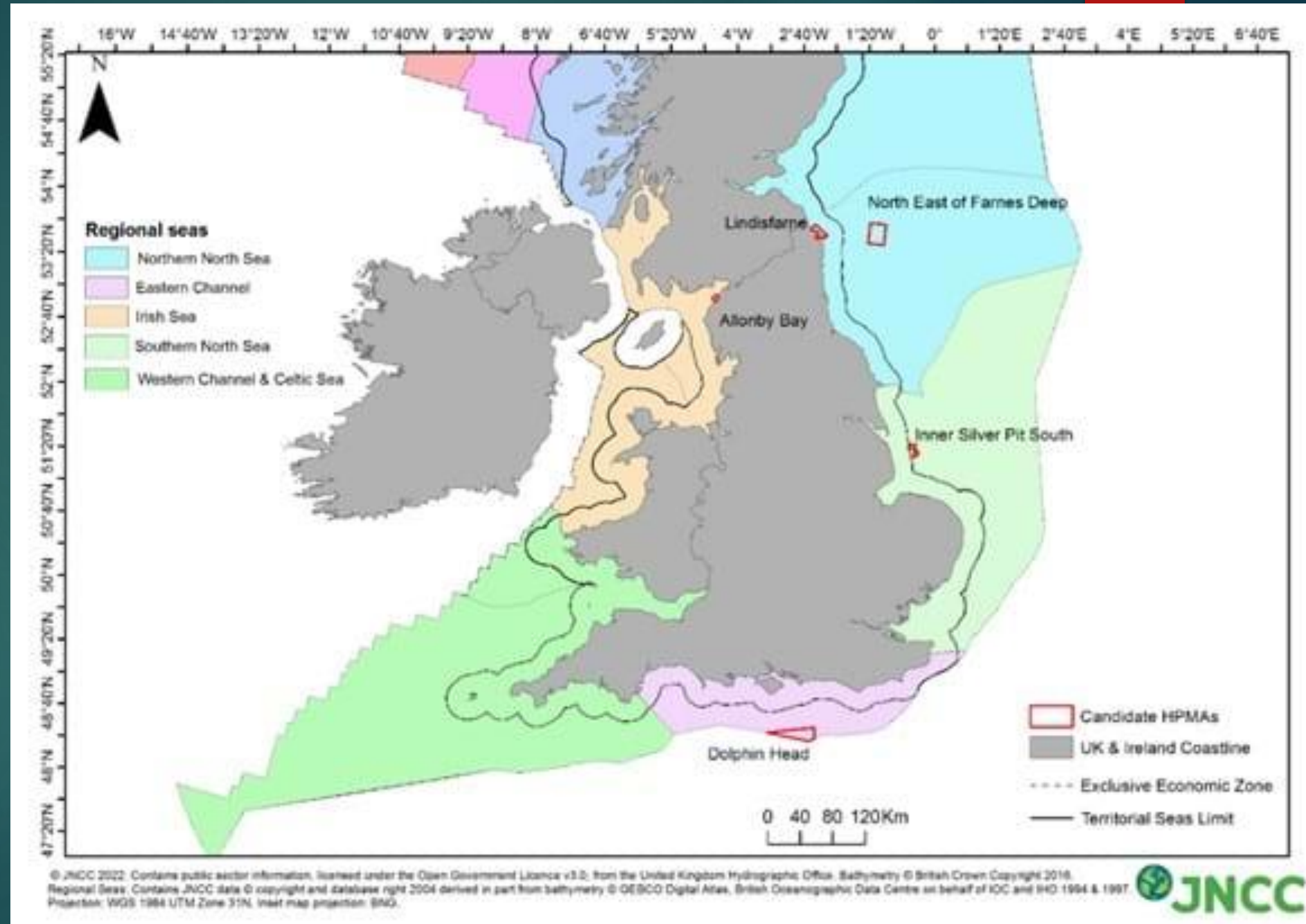
Inshore sites

Lindisfarne (inshore)
Allonby Bay (inshore)

Offshore sites

NE of Farnes Deep
Inner Silver Pit South
Dolphin Head

Accompanied by
online and in person
stakeholder
engagement
workshops led by
DEFRA and Natural
England



Is high protection 'no take' contested?

HPMAs are the epicentre of a long-standing ideological battle within conservation science between the principle of 'sustainable use' and 'protectionism' through no take areas (Agardy 2003)

The HPMA agenda constitutes an upscaling of protectionist conservation across the UK / ambitions to rewild the oceans.

Re-wilding critique - the danger of decoupling humans from nature:

"Taken as a whole, rewilding discourse seeks to erase human history and involvement with the land and flora and fauna. Such an attempted split between nature and culture may prove unproductive and even harmful" (Jorgensen 2015)

Example: Prohibition of 'damaging levels of activity' - dependent on fragility of species /habitat and intensity of use (Thurstan et al 2009) creates a broadening of stakeholder impact.

Traditional conservation allies may find their activities stopped – potential harm / lack of public support (e.g. recreational angling).

Contestation nationally....



These contestations are reflected in some of the national responses to HPMAs:

Wildlife Trusts response 7th July 2022

“The Wildlife Trusts have been calling for HPMAs for three years with the support of over 10,000 people who have called for greater protection of marine life.

We need to ensure there's space for nature as a matter of urgency. Banning all damaging activities in a few special areas will help wildlife recover and fishers will benefit from the spill-over of numerous and larger fish into surrounding waters, helping to restock our depleted seas.”

National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) July 2022.

HPMA Selection Process Rigged to Harm Fishing Communities

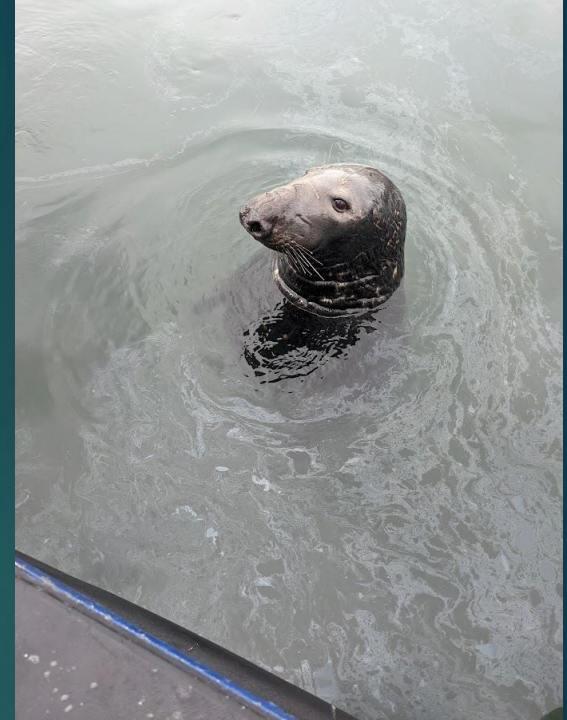
“Marine protected areas have an important role to play in protecting vulnerable habitats and species when they have clear conservation objectives, are well sited and sensitively managed on the basis of evidence. A careful, evidence and dialogue-based approach to establishing and managing a network of marine protected areas has, however, been abandoned and replaced by a rushed and inadequate process that sidesteps the elephant in the room: displacement”.

- **We know from the MCZ designation process that getting consensus about where to situate ‘no take’ zones is very difficult.**

Why was Lindisfarne designated?

- ▶ Diverse intertidal and subtidal habitats
- ▶ A variety of threatened and/or important species including seagrass beds, blue mussel beds, fragile sponge communities and intertidal under boulder communities.
- ▶ Rich intertidal muddy sediments, full of worms and sand shrimp feed thousands of wintering birds such as waders and geese
- ▶ British wintering site for light-bellied brent geese
- ▶ Breeding Arctic and little tern, puffins and guillemots
- ▶ Important foraging and haul out areas for grey seals and the Northumberland colony which provides 3% of the British annual pup production.

The area is **relatively degraded** with habitats and species in overlapping MPAs in unfavourable condition along with the presence of pressures associated with commercial fishing and recreational activities.



Local stakeholder perspectives on anticipated impacts

6 week rapid impact assessment (Aug/Sept)

Harbour areas: Holy Island, Seahouses, Berwick and Eyemouth

56 interviews (commercial shellfish fishers and their families, wider community, shellfish traders and processors, retailers, local business owners, tour/dive /recreational fishing boat operators.

Report submitted to the public consultation



Overview of opinion: all interviewees strongly opposed the HPMA proposal at Lindisfarne.

Three key themes dominated:

- i) high livelihood dependency and lack of capacity to accommodate the HPMA impacts through livelihood adaptation,
- ii) wider impacts on the area's economy and culture
- iii) a perceived lack of necessity or justification for the HPMA at this site due to efficacy of existing conservation measures

Theme 1: High livelihood dependency and lack of capacity to accommodate the HPMA impacts through livelihood adaptation,

- ▶ All fishermen (skippers and crews) strongly expressed their high dependency on the candidate HPMA site
- ▶ The most productive fishing ground in the area and an important sheltered site, accessible in rough seas, especially important in winter months.
- ▶ Lack of capacity to relocate fishing elsewhere along the coast, or further offshore.
- ▶ Adjacent potting grounds are utilised by neighbouring villages and risk social /gear conflict between fishers (displacement ripple effect);
- ▶ Health and safety risks of fishing further offshore (beyond the site boundaries) in small boats and higher fuel costs threatening business viability.
- ▶ Particularly acute amongst Holy Island fishermen whose situation is exacerbated by the tidal nature of the island, which makes it impossible to find alternative work off the island without relocating to the mainland.



“All my young crew are starting families and have mortgages – they left school when they were 15, but they thought this was a job for life and that’s why we’ve really invested in it...I’ve built my business through my young crew and they’ll take it on in the future”

““I’ve been fishing this area for 39 years, the HPMA will absolutely ruin me and my family. I’ve got nothing else”.

“ “This is such a worry for me... I’ve invested so much over the 4-5 years.... Storm Arwen hit us hard with huge replacement costs for lost gears, then Covid, and now this”.


“For us to move our pots into another area, it just wouldn’t be viable for them or for us, and that other area would become overfished anyway. We’re all fiercely protective of areas that are good fishing grounds. It would just create so much conflict”.

Theme 2: Wider contribution of fishing to local economy, tourism, business and services, and culture,

- ▶ **“The fishery is the heart of the island”.** Fishing has been central to Holy Island’s economy and culture for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.
- ▶ It is a thriving, highly valued career and way of life on the island, with new generations actively taking up positions as crew and inheriting boats from their families.
- ▶ Fishing and tourism are the two core economic activities of the island and closely inter-dependent, with many fishing family members providing essential on-island work in hotels, bed and breakfasts, pubs and restaurants.
- ▶ Fisher families populate the island’s school and coastguard; at least 3 fishermen on the island are award-winning fully trained first responders in emergencies.
- ▶ Year round shore-based processing jobs at risk in Berwick and Eyemouth if reduced supply means a return to seasonal employment



Queen Elizabeth being presented with a box of Holy Island lobster by Island fishermen in 1958



“My staff on the island are families of the fishermen. If the fishery closes, my business will suffer because I cannot get the staff from the mainland due to the tides...also eating fresh Holy Island crab is a major part of the tourist experience here”...

“The tourists love the fishing too....the amount of people we have stopping us to take our pictures, wanting to buy the odd crab or lobster, they absolutely love it....”

“The Holy Island Development Trust has been developing its 2050 plan to ensure we’re a thriving island, the harbour and fishing community is a core part of that vision”

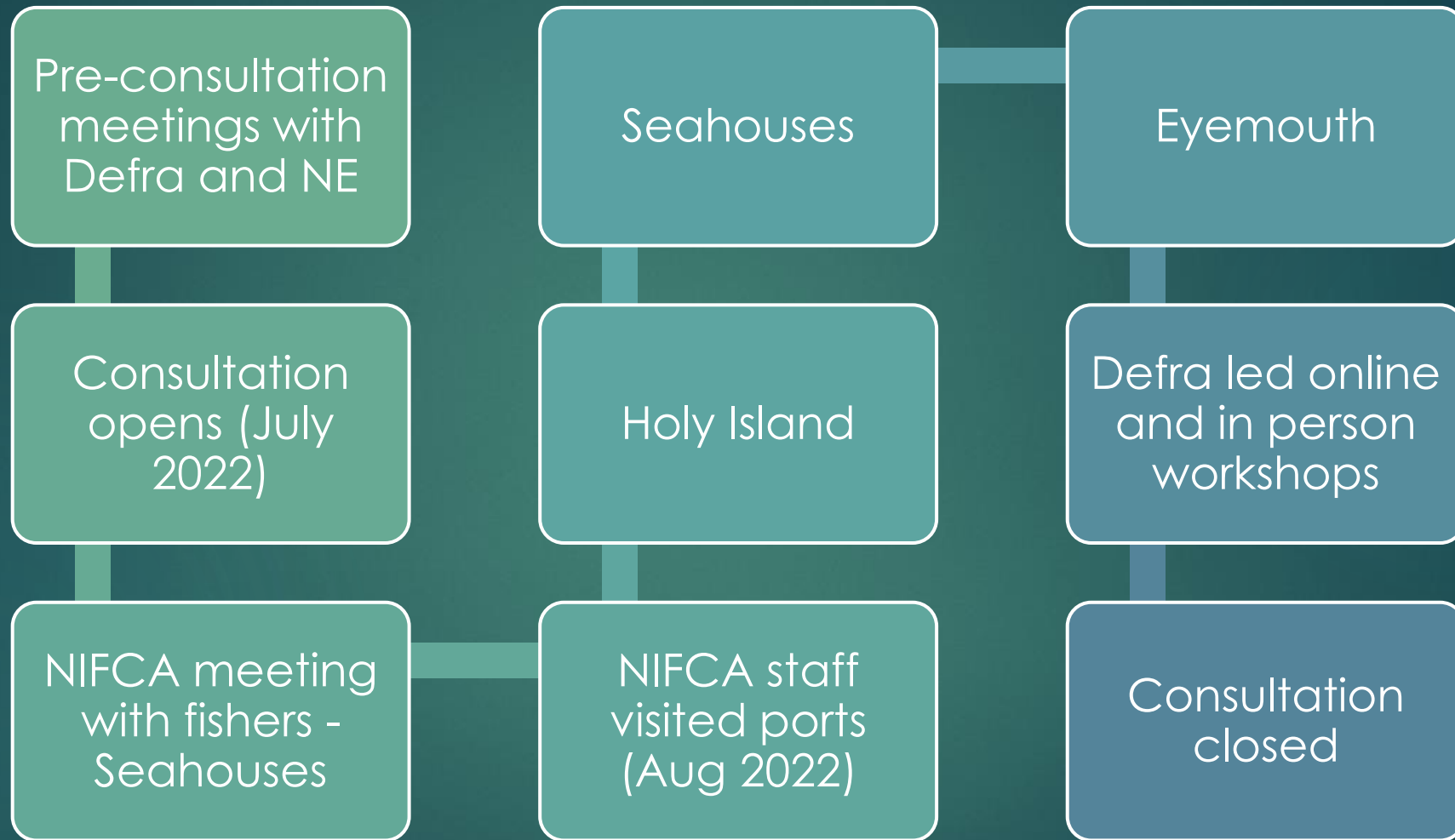
Theme 3: Lack of perceived necessity for the HPMA at Holy Island / efficacy of existing conservation byelaws and sustainable fishing practice.

- ▶ Many fishers express a clear sense of environmental stewardship and pride in the way they fish and have accommodated, and reaped the benefits of, multiple conservation byelaws implemented over the years.
- ▶ Perceived low impact/ sustainability of current fishing techniques - potting is the only commercial fishing to occur in the candidate site,
- ▶ Good compliance with current bylaws and conservation measures
- ▶ Catches have 'never been better' and seal population is booming
- ▶ Many fishers are supportive of the ambitions of HPMA's in general and suggest additional conservation efforts. Fishers in the area will v-notch berried lobster and voluntarily attach escape gaps to pots.



Threats to the legitimacy of the HPMA and likely low compliance
(*Nielson and Mathieson 2003*)

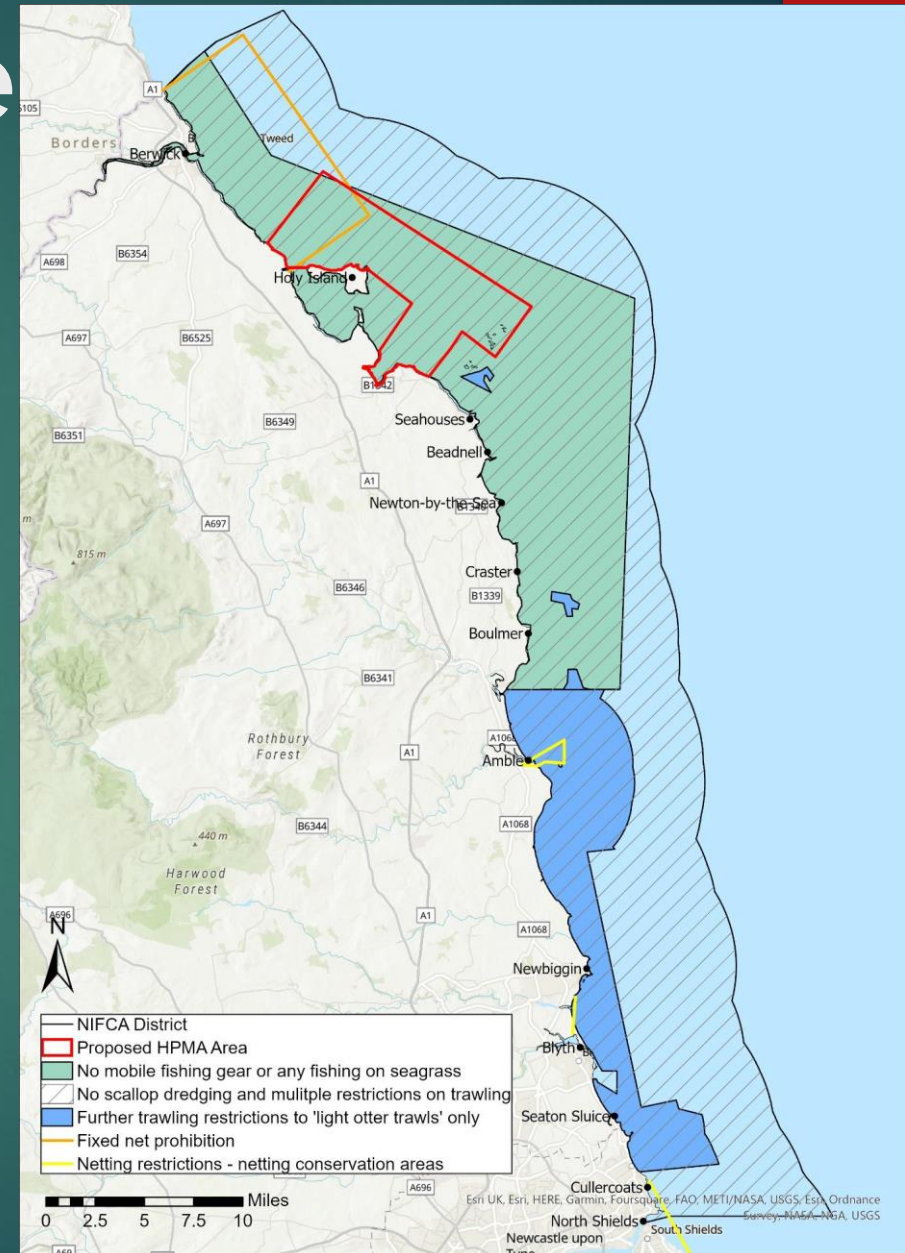
The Northumberland IFCA response



Management in place

NIFCA Byelaws

- ▶ Trawling
- ▶ Dredging
- ▶ Crustacea Conservation
- ▶ Minimum sizes
- ▶ Crustacea and Molluscs Permitting and Pot Limitation
- ▶ Marking of Fishing Gear and Keep Boxes
- ▶ Prohibition of the use of Mobile Fishing Gear in the BNNC SAC
- ▶ Seagrass Protection Byelaw



Impacts of potting

- ▶ NIFCA HRA – BNNC SAC Rocky Reef features
 - ▶ Informed by PhD study – Newcastle University
- ▶ Potting density study - Plymouth University
- ▶ More research required:
 - ▶ Threshold of impact?
 - ▶ Pressure on stocks



NIFCA Fisher Forums

The importance of procedural justice – enabling fishers to have a meaningful say over things that affect their lives.

Fishing communities are often hard to reach, lack time and sometimes confidence to engage, poorly represented in public platforms, distrusting, disengaged.

Following on from the HPMa engagement, NIFCA and Newcastle University are exploring new ways of enabling more meaningful engagement in decision-making, especially around Fisheries Management Plans.



Take away thought

Are small-scale fishers part of the problem or part of the solution in the pursuit of ocean sustainability and health?

Questions.....



Useful readings

Thurstan RH et al (2009). Highly protected marine conservation zones: defining damaging and disturbing activities. Countryside council for Wales, policy research report no. 09/01, Wales: Bangor; 2009

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Ertör, I., 2021. 'We are the oceans, we are the people!': fisher people's struggles for blue justice. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, pp.1-30.

Jentoft, S. and Chuenpagdee, R., 2022. Blue justice in three governance orders. In *Blue Justice* (pp. 17-32). Springer, Cham.

Cohen, P.J., Allison, E.H., Andrew, N.L., Cinner, J., Evans, L.S., Fabinyi, M., Garces, L.R., Hall, S.J., Hicks, C.C., Hughes, T.P. and Jentoft, S., 2019. Securing a just space for small-scale fisheries in the blue economy. *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 6, p.171.

[4th World Small-Scale Fisheries Congress | 4WSFC \(4wsfcongress.com\)](https://4wsfcongress.com/)

[Webinar on 'Language is Power: How to talk about and act on "Blue Justice" for small-scale fisheries' | Too Big To Ignore](#)

