

Date: 08 January 2016
Our ref: Informal Advice on Options for Trawling Mitigation
Your ref:



Will Wright

Kent and Essex IFCA
Paragon House
Albert St
Ramsgate, Kent
CT11 9HD

International House,
Dover Place,
Ashford TN23 1HU

T 077 88574 908

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Will

Essex Estuaries European Marine Sites – INFORMAL ADVICE on Draft Management Options to manage trawling in Essex Estuaries SAC

Thank you for sending through the range of draft management options for addressing the impacts of trawling on the Essex Estuaries European Marine Site (EMS).

As requested, please find below Natural England's *informal* advice on the options. Please note, this advice is based on our current understanding of the 3 options which have been outlined in the KEIFCA's document "Draft Management options to manage trawling activities in Essex Estuaries SAC". We understand that there may be further refinement of the preferred options and we would welcome the opportunity to continue to provide advice on this as they develop both informally and at the formal stage of the completion of the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) for this site.

Option 1

"No additional management measures introduced"

Natural England advise that this option would not achieve the conservation objectives for the site. Based on the information provided in the draft HRA, we have advised that there should be a reduction of bottom towed gear activity within the site, particularly over sensitive features. This option would not fulfil these recommendations.

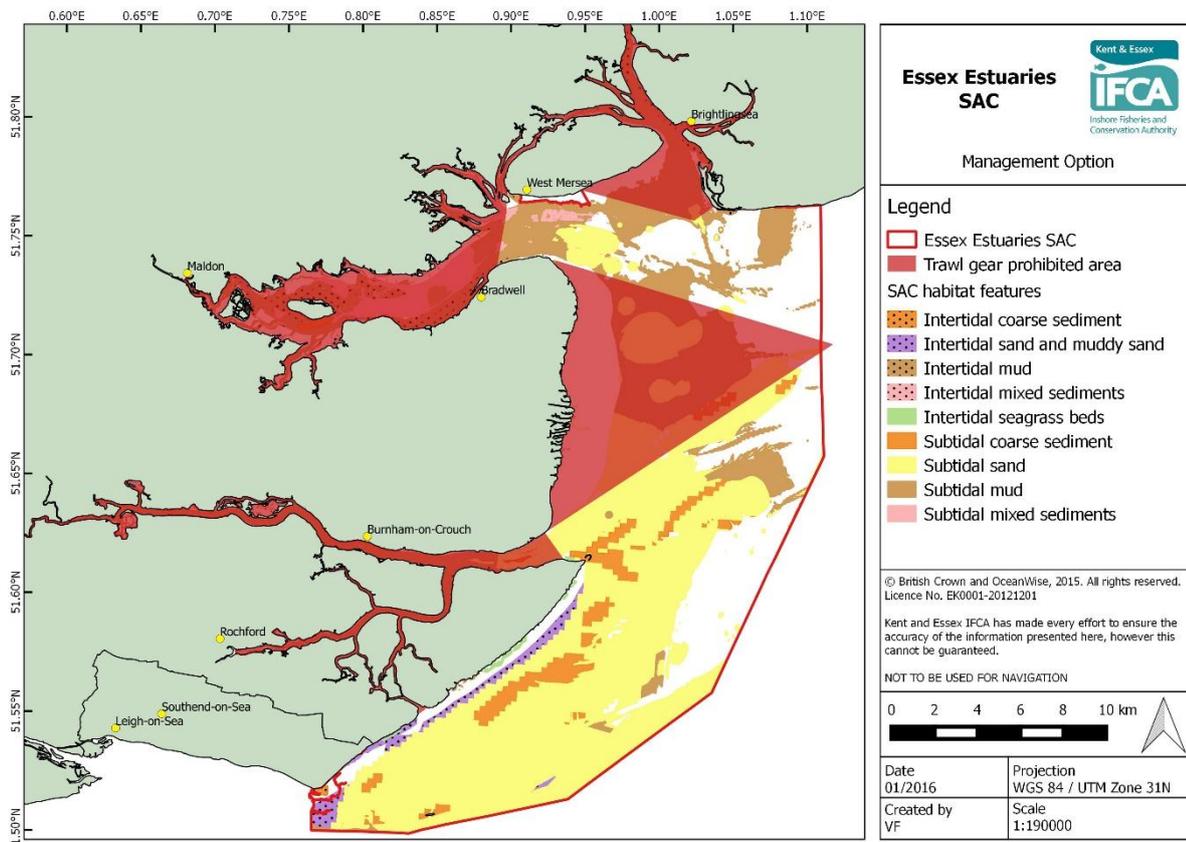
Option 2

"The whole site closed to trawling activity"

Natural England advise that this option would deliver the conservation objectives for the site. We do note though, that this could be deemed to be overly precautionary as such an approach would be covering features which we have advised as being not sensitive to current levels of trawling activity.

Option 3

“Areas closed to trawling (the Rivers and the Ray Sand Channel)”



Natural England advise that this option would deliver the conservation objectives for the site. Taking into account conflicting priorities and difficulties and risks for KEIFCA associated with all presented options, Natural England advise that Option 3 seems the most pragmatic and appropriate option with the highest level of protection for features/ subfeatures of the SAC. Specifically, we note:

- This option affords full protection to the component rivers of this site, which are believed to be the most stable and possibly sensitive areas of the SAC;
- The majority of the most sensitive feature to trawling (subtidal mixed sediments, as identified in the draft HRA) will be protected in the rivers (in particular the Blackwater); and
- It provides significant protection to the range of habitats, including those identified as sensitive to trawling, in the outer estuary.

During the discussions around management options, there has been dialogue around the overlap of trawling activity with the biogenic reef biotope layer shown on the Envision 2014 Biotope Map. Through interrogation of the associated GI for the SAC, it was confirmed that the 2014 biogenic reef biotope layer is based around modelled data with no associated ground-truthing and as such, has a very low confidence associated with it. Because of this, biogenic reef has not been included as a feature or subfeature of the Essex Estuaries SAC in the new conservation advice package and therefore, Natural England have confirmed that it does not need to be considered under the HRA process. However, we advise that KEIFCA may wish to consider this habitat under their wider biodiversity duties. In particular, we note that the current boundaries of the proposed closed area do include an area of the modelled biogenic reef. This area could present an opportunity through monitoring and survey to further the understanding of this habitat within the site, and its sensitivities to fishing activity.

Reviewing the proposed management measure

Although Natural England views Option 3 as a proportionate approach in terms of the level of *known*

trawling activity occurring within the site and the protection of the range of sensitive subfeatures which this option would afford, we would like to highlight the potential risk that this option presents in terms of some wider stakeholder expectation. It is likely that some of these stakeholders may push for further protection of subfeatures, in particular in the outer estuary where higher levels of trawling appear to currently occur. In response to this risk, we would suggest some ongoing monitoring to sit alongside any management to help further the understanding of the levels of trawling activity within the site. Additionally, there is an ongoing requirement for some targeted survey effort to help fill some of the gaps in the habitat mapping of the outer estuary, of which Natural England will continue to work with the KEIFCA on over the coming years.

Based on our comments above, Natural England welcomes the approach suggested for the review of the adopted management measure and we would like to work with the KEIFCA with the aim of ensuring that such a review does correspond with any of Natural England's MPA review processes. Additionally, for any new feature or sub-feature information which comes to light, we will ensure that this is fed into the review process.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely



Ingrid Chudleigh
Senior Adviser, Sussex and Kent Team
E-mail: ingrid.chudleigh@naturalengland.org.uk
Telephone: 077 88574 908