

By: Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority – 29 November 2016

Subject: **MANAGEMENT MEASURES MARGATE AND LONG SANDS SCI**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with information on the grounds for introducing management measures to protect habitats within the Margate and Long Sands SCI and the possible management options available to them.

Recommendations:

To draft for the Authority an updated version of the KEIFCA bottom-towed fishing gear (prohibited areas) byelaw to include the areas identified in chart 1 as well as the impact assessment for the byelaw. The byelaw wording and impact assessment will be sent to members 14 days before the next meeting, which would allow the members to make the byelaw at the January meeting if members so wish.

Background:

To bring fisheries in line with other activities (offshore renewables, capital dredging, cable laying etc.), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) announced on 14 August 2012 a new approach to manage fishing activities within European Marine Sites (EMS). In an effort to try and deliver this revised approach a risk matrix was developed to identify the level of risk for each European Marine Site. Following this approach an Appropriate Assessment has been undertaken by the MMO (with input from KEIFCA) and it has been confirmed that additional management measures are required to manage bottom-towed gear on this site.

Why is it being protected?

In 2012 the UK committed to the OSPAR international convention, which requires contracting parties to establish an ecologically coherent and well-

Why is management required?

The MMO (with input from KEIFCA) has completed a Habitat Regulations Assessment and concluded that "it cannot be ascertained that current ongoing and potential bottom-towed gear activities within the site will not result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the site". Based on this assessment there is then a need to develop appropriate management measures (See Appendix 1 Margate and Long Sands Site of Community Importance (SCI) MMO Fisheries Assessment).

As this site straddles the 6 nm limit, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will develop management measures for the portion of the site outside of the KEIFCA district. KEIFCA, where possible, will work with local stakeholders as well as the MMO to develop management for the area of Margate and Long Sands SCI, within our district.

Assessment of possible management options

Permit or closed areas?

There are a number of ways that trawling pressure could be reduced on the site, one option could be to limit the number of trawling vessels that are allowed to fish on the site and/or the number of days that trawling could take place. Practically, however this type of management could be burdensome to the fishing industry as vessels would need to apply and pay for a permit, complete additional daily paperwork and purchase and run a vessel tracking device. It could also be challenging and legally complex for the Authority, as decisions would need to be made regarding who should or should not get a permit and/or how many days fishing could be undertaken.

Managing the trawling activity using closed areas is considerably more straightforward for the industry and the Authority as there would be no need for additional permits and paperwork and it would be clear where trawling could or could not take place. Developing a byelaw based on the closed areas is an efficient and transparent way of managing bottom-towed activity on this site and would also mean that there would be a consistent approach by ourselves and the MMO to managing fishing pressure on it. As the areas would be closed to all bottom-towed gear activities, it would be proposed to update the KEIFCA bottom-towed gear byelaw to include closed areas within the Margate and Long Sands SCI.

Developing closed areas

If areas are closed to trawling, the decision then becomes a question of which areas should be closed? A logical approach to this question would be to close the areas regarded as sensitive to bottom-towed fishing activity. In general sandbanks are subject to natural disturbance, with organisms found in them resilient to disturbance events and able to quickly recolonise disturbed areas. More detailed assessment of specific areas within each biotope show differing levels of abundance and diversity of species, which can reflect the particular stability of that part of the biotope and hence can also provide an indication of more sensitive areas. From this analysis Natural England have identified two specific habitat types, a habitat dominated by sand mason worms (*L. conchilega*) but also containing Sabellaria (*S. spinulosa*) in generally low abundance, which

could have the potential for increased Sabellaria abundance, and a more stable muddy habitat with a higher species abundance.

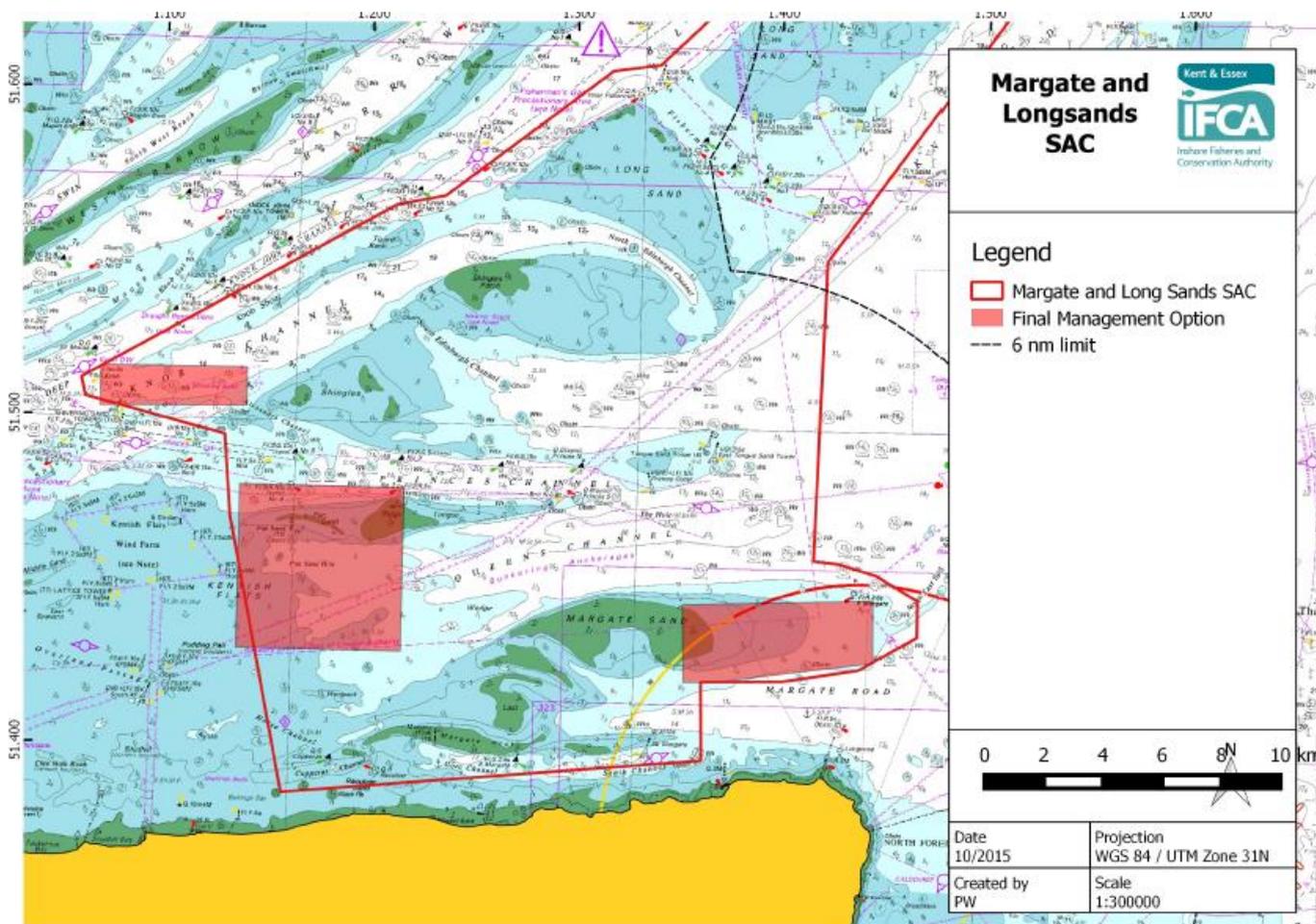


Chart 1. Proposed areas (red boxes) closed to bottom-towed fishing activity with KEIFCA district.

Based on discussions with our enforcement team and informal discussions with the industry, three large, simple four point/straight-line boxes encompassing the relatively more sensitive habitats in the SCI have been developed. The proposed boxes (Chart 1) would be closed to all bottom-towed fishing gear protecting the area within the box, and help ensure that there are healthy populations which can re-colonise areas disturbed either by natural or anthropogenic actions. The boxes are of a significant size and allow for a degree of sandbank/biotope movement. The straight lines and simple shape also aid enforcement and management.

As the management proposed would be to exclude all forms of bottom-towed fishing gear from the hatched areas, the most sensible approach would be to update the KEIFCA bottom-towed fishing gear (prohibited areas) byelaw to include these areas. Taking this approach means that all the districts bottom-towed gear management measures, with the exception of management for the complicated Essex Estuaries sites, are in one place, making it more straightforward for the industry. Advice from Natural England (NE) supports this approach and the proposed management option: *"It ensures full protection to areas of the site which have been identified to be the most stable and sensitive areas of the SCI (inside the 6nm, within the Kent and Essex IFCAs district)"*. (Appendix 2 – full NE letter).

Management of Margate and Long Sands SCI outside our district

The MMO have followed similar principles, and have proposed closures of the sensitive biotopes in their district, surrounded by a buffer and smoothed boundaries to make enforcement easier (Chart 2). KEIFCA see a significant advantage in both organisations (MMO & KEIFCA) adopting the same approach to management on this complex site and feel a constant approach will help the fishing industry (Chart 3).

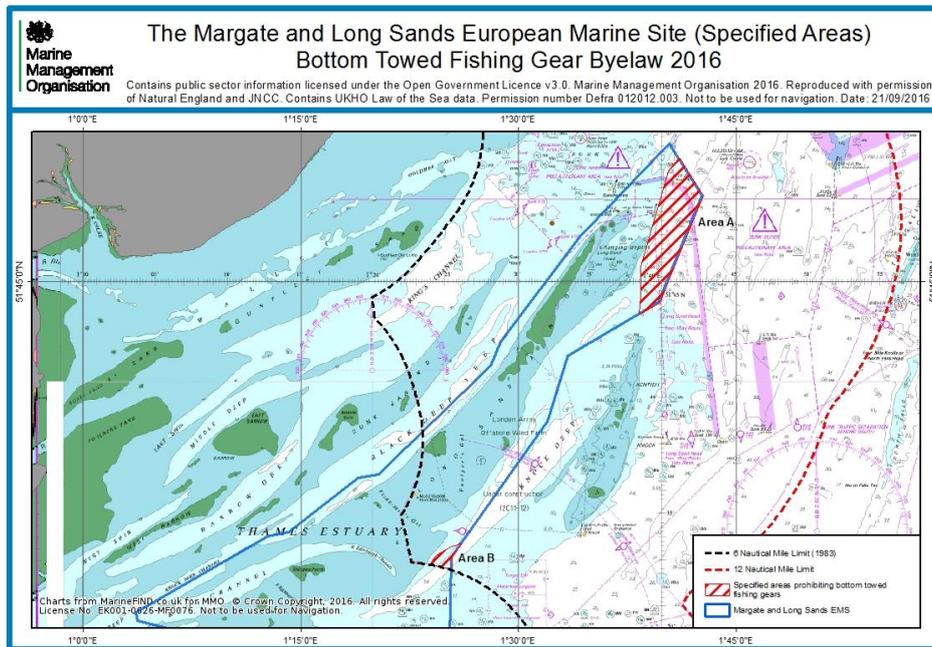


Chart 2. Proposed areas (red hatched) closed to bottom-towed fishing activity with MMO district.

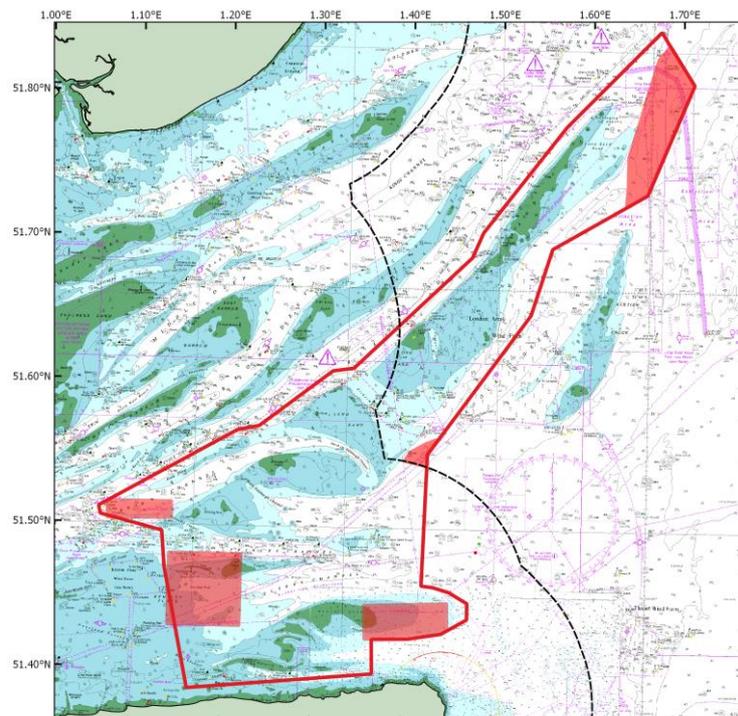


Chart 3. Proposed areas (red boxes) closed to bottom-towed fishing activity on the whole Margate and Long Sands SCI site (KEIFCA and MMO combined).

Reviewing the Management

Over time it is likely that our knowledge of the site would increase as well as our understanding of the activity and impact of different types of fishing gear, and given this, it would make sense to review the management of this site with NE every year. We will also work closely with the MMO Monitoring and Control Plan for the site and share information regarding fishing intensity and management.

Discussing Margate and Long Sands SCI management

In an effort to best inform the Authority of the issues and rationale behind the site and the management option an extended Authority meeting/ agenda item has been arranged and experts have been invited to attend and to brief the Authority.

Recommendation: To draft for the Authority an updated version of the KEIFCA bottom-towed fishing gear (prohibited areas) byelaw to include the areas identified in chart 1 as well as the impact assessment for the byelaw. The byelaw wording and impact assessment will be sent to members 14 days before the next meeting, which would allow the members to make the byelaw at the January meeting if members so wish.