

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
– 29 January 2021

Subject: **Marine Protected Area – Tranche 3 Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) Update**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This paper will provide Members with an overview of the next phase of Marine Protected Area management in the KEIFCA district and the approach KEIFCA will take in engaging local stakeholders developing management options for Tranche 3 MCZ sites.

Recommendations:

1. Members are asked to **DISCUSS** the assessment and management process of Tranche 3 MCZ sites and **AGREE** to the stakeholder engagement process laid out in the paper.
2. Members are asked to **APPROVE** the application to Natural England to help fund a small drop-down camera survey to help assess Ross worm reefs (*Sabellaria*) on the Goodwin Sands MCZ site.

Background

Three tranches of MCZ designation have been conducted since 2013 and KEIFCA now has nine Marine Conservation Zones within the district. In early summer 2019 the third and final round of Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) designations occurred. This meant the creation of two new MCZs: Goodwin Sands MCZ and Swanscombe MCZ; along with the addition of new features in two current MCZs: blue mussel beds, high energy circalittoral rock, moderate energy circalittoral rock and Ross worm reefs in the Dover to Deal MCZ; and stalked jellyfish to the Thanet Coast MCZ.

Goodwin Sands MCZ is located off Sandwich Bay on the Kent coast and covers an area of 277 km². It lies across the 6 nm offshore district boundary line, with

KEIFCA being responsible for management inside this line, and the MMO being responsible for management outside. The designated features of the MCZ are subtidal sand and coarse sediment, circalittoral rock, blue mussel beds and Ross worm reefs (*Sabellaria*).

Swanscombe MCZ is located upstream in the Thames, just to the east of the Dartford bridge. It covers an area of only 3 km². Designated features of the MCZ are intertidal mud and the tentacled lagoon worm.

KEIFCA approach to developing management options

A key priority for 2021 will be to progress work on new Tranche 3 (T3) MCZ assessments and start to develop new management measures. Although the COVID 19 pandemic has made developing T3 MCZ management more challenging we have been working hard behind the scenes with NE and the MMO to review the feature data for these sites, assess the fishing activity impacts and are starting the initial steps of local community engagement.

Initial assessments for the sites are underway and it is likely that new management measures would be required which could mean updating our current MPA bottom-towed gear byelaw or making new byelaw.

As arranging in-person stakeholder meetings will be difficult with COVID 19 restrictions, we will try and engage stakeholders using Zoom/ Teams meetings but will review how successful engagement is as we progress through the assessment and management process. The first step in this process would be to contact the key stakeholders to outline the site, features and conservation advice, and add new stakeholder information or data to our understanding of the site. We would then look to finalise assessments and start developing a range of potential management options with stakeholders.

Developing options for Goodwin Sands MCZ

Developing management options for Goodwin Sands MCZ is likely to be by-far the biggest challenge of the T3 sites. The MMO has issued a significant dredging licence covering an area in the south of the site and management of fishing activity on the site outside the 6 nm could be affected by the new deal that outlines 6-12 nm access arrangements for EU fishing vessels. The location and extent of Ross worm reefs (*Sabellaria*) on such a dynamic site is also going to pose challenges in developing management. To try and address this we have developed a proposal to do a small drop-down camera survey part-funded by Natural England.

The project will develop the evidence base by collecting and analysing ROV underwater video data to provide a better understanding of the extent and nature of Ross worm reefs in the MCZ. The project will deliver a digital video data set of the seabed at 50 to 100 sites in the Goodwin Sands MCZ. Video data will be analysed and quantified into a reef index, geo-referenced and stored in a database. Statistical analysis will be undertaken to characterise and assess the variation and spatial distribution of Ross worm reefs in the MCZ. A short report presenting the analysis of the results will be prepared and presented to the Authority. The results will contribute to the evidence base required to inform

KEIFCA management decisions which will contribute to the recovery of the feature of the MCZ.

The project will deliver the following benefits:

- A better understanding of the three-dimensional structure and status of Ross reefs in Goodwin Sands would in turn help to inform future management considerations and measures and contribute to the recovery of the feature to a favourable condition.
- A video record and ecological reference point for the site which can be used in future to assess the recovery and change in the MCZ.
- Collaborative partnership working between Natural England and Kent and Essex IFCA.
- Furthermore, the team will gain experience at sea, skills development in scientific equipment and develop data analysis methods.

Recommendations:

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2. Members are asked to **APPROVE** the application to Natural England to help fund a small drop-down camera survey to help assess Ross worm reefs (*Sabellaria*) on the Goodwin Sands MCZ site.