

# Process Document 1: Delivering Policy Objectives

## Introduction: Black Seabream in Dorset

Black seabream (BSB) (*Spondyliosoma cantharus*) are a member of the Sparidae family (Dunn, 1999; Ruiz, 2008) and are protogynous hermaphrodites, starting out as female and changing to male at a certain age and size (Pajuelo and Lorenzo, 1999; Baldock and Dipper, 2023). The genus *Spondyliosoma* (which includes black seabream) is one of only two genera within the Sparidae family which provides male-only care in the form of nest building and guarding of eggs (Beaulieu, 2020). The evolution of parental care alongside protogyny is a novel evolutionary strategy (Beaulieu, 2020).

In the UK, BSB are most abundant along the south coast and into the southern part of the North Sea (Rogers, 1998). For the past century during the spring months, specifically along the Southern coast of the UK, BSB have been recorded within the following Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs): Poole Rocks, Purbeck Coast, and Southbourne Rough (Baldock & Dipper, 2023; Collins & Mallinson, 2012; Doggett and Baldock, 2022).

BSB were designated as features of the Purbeck Coast MCZ and Southbourne Rough MCZ during the second tranche of MCZ designations in 2019. At the same time, BSB were designated as an 'additional feature' in the Poole Rocks tranche 1 MCZ.

BSB are the only designated feature in Southbourne Rough MCZ, whereas Purbeck Coast and Poole Rocks also protect a range of intertidal and subtidal habitats and species.

## 1.0 Primary Policy Objective – MaCAA 154

### *Managing BSB as a designated feature of Marine Conservation Zones*

#### 1.1 Scope

To **further** the conservation objectives from a baseline position of no management via quantification of existing management measures.

#### 1.2 Protection of Marine Conservation Zones: MaCAA Section 154 Duties

Under Section 154(1) of the Marine & Coastal Access Act (MaCAA), Southern IFCA must '**...seek to ensure that the conservation objectives of any MCZ in the District are furthered...**', with Section 154(2) requiring that '**...nothing in Section 153(2) is to affect the performance of the duty...**'. This includes socio-economic considerations.

Recognising the lack of a legal definition for 'furthered', the Authority agreed that 'further' and synonyms of, will be defined as "**to take to a greater degree or a more advanced stage**" in line with Oxford English Dictionary definition.

### 1.3 Route of Designation

BSB are designated under MaCAA 117(5) to (1) **conserve diversity**, specifically, due to their ecological significance (the reoccurring time and place of reproductive behaviours, considered to be of critical importance to the life cycle of BSB), where if not protected the BSB would be affected at population or sub-population level, & (2) **persistence** - where they occur at high densities in contrast to surrounding areas.

**Black Sea Bream (BSB) are not designated under MaCAA 117(4) as rare or threatened due to limited numbers or limited locations where the BSB are present.**

The designation of BSB across the three Dorset MCZs in 2019 was not based on a Condition Assessment, instead NE undertook a vulnerability assessment as a proxy. NE deemed BSB to be vulnerable to BTFG, netting and recreational angling and therefore considered BSB to be in an **unfavourable condition** and require management. No metrics have been provided by Natural England to quantify 'unfavourable condition' and to date there is no Condition Assessment for any of the three Dorset MCZs.

### 1.4 Conservation Objectives

For all three Dorset MCZs the Conservation Objectives (CO) provided in relation to black seabream are:

<b>Conservation objective</b>
<p>5.—(1) The conservation objective is that, in relation to Black seabream (<i>Spondyliosoma cantharus</i>)—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(a) the habitat used by members of that species for the purposes of spawning (“spawning habitat”)—<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(i) so far as already in favourable condition, remains in such condition, and</li><li>(ii) so far as not already in favourable condition, be brought into such condition, and remain in such condition, and</li></ul></li><li>(b) the population (whether temporary or otherwise) of that species occurring in the Zone be free of disturbance of a kind likely significantly to affect the survival of its members or their ability to aggregate, nest, or lay, fertilise or guard eggs during breeding.</li></ul> <p>(2) In paragraph (1)(a)(i) and (ii), “favourable condition”, with respect to spawning habitat within the Zone, means that the habitat is of sufficient quality and quantity to enable members of the species using the habitat to survive, aggregate, nest, or lay, fertilise or guard eggs during breeding.</p>

Figure 1: Conservation Objectives relevant to three Dorset MCZs

### **Focus Areas**

In the absence of quantification of 'unfavourable condition', and in accordance with Southern IFCA's Section 154 duties, the following **CO focus areas** (as identified via highlights in Figure 2) were identified to be used as metrics against which the Authority can demonstrate where and how any management interventions are **furthering** the conservation objectives of the MCZs.

At the time of BSB designation across all 3 MCZs, management measures which were already affording BSB protections were not considered in the NE Vulnerability Assessment. As such, the Authority consider that any qualification of 'furthering' of the COs will be taken from a baseline position of no management.

In accordance with the best available evidence, the recognised **spawning/breeding season** is 1<sup>st</sup> April – 31<sup>st</sup> July.

**Conservation objective**

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(i) so far as already in favourable condition, remains in such condition, and

(ii) so far as not already in favourable condition, be brought into such condition, and remain in such condition, and

(b) the population (whether temporary or otherwise) of that species occurring in the Zone be free of disturbance of a kind likely significantly to affect the survival of its members or their ability to aggregate, nest, or lay, fertilise or guard eggs during breeding.

(2) In paragraph (1)(a)(i) and (ii), “favourable condition”, with respect to spawning habitat within the Zone, means that the habitat is of sufficient quality and quantity to enable members of the species using the habitat to survive, aggregate, nest, or lay, fertilise or guard eggs during breeding.



Figure 2: Conservation Objectives relevant to three Dorset MCZs with CO Focus Areas highlighted and identified CO Focus Areas

## 1.5 Management Solutions

### Existing Statutory Measures

Under the **Southern IFCA Bottom Towed Fishing Gear (BTFG) Byelaw 2016** the following protections are afforded to BSB. These spatial protections eliminate, to the following degrees, the highest risk fishing activity (**risk rating from Gear Risk Assessment = HIGH**) relevant to the CO Focus Areas - BTFG across Poole Rocks (100% spatial prohibitions) and Purbeck MCZ (90% spatial protections):

1	<b>Poole Rocks MCZ:</b>	<b>whole site protection for 12 months a year (100% closure to BTFG)</b>
	<b>Purbeck MCZ:</b>	<b>90% closure to BTFG for 12 months a year</b>
	<b>Southbourne Rough:</b>	<b>No protections under this byelaw</b>

2	<b>Poole Rocks MCZ:</b>	<b>whole site protection for 12 months a year (100% closure to BTFG)</b>
	<b>Purbeck MCZ:</b>	<b>90% closure to BTFG for 12 months a year</b>
	<b>Southbourne Rough:</b>	<b>No protections under this byelaw</b>

3	<b>Poole Rocks MCZ:</b>	<b>whole site protection for 12 months a year (100% closure to BTFG)</b>
	<b>Purbeck MCZ:</b>	<b>90% closure to BTFG for 12 months a year</b>
	<b>Southbourne Rough:</b>	<b>No protections under this byelaw</b>

Under the **Southern IFCA Minimum Conservation Reference Size Byelaw**, the following protections are afforded to BSB at a District wide level applicable to all gear types and throughout the supply chain, which supports the furthering of the CO Focus Areas outlined above:

2	<b>Poole Rocks MCZ:</b>	<b>it is prohibited to remove any BSB below 23cm from the fishery</b> (NB: this is a District wide measure)
3	<b>Purbeck MCZ:</b>	
	<b>Southbourne Rough:</b>	

## Existing External Measures

The spatial closures created by the Lulworth Ranges which, based on best available data, is known to be closed to all activity in the Inner Ranges area for c.32% of the breeding season between 1st April and 31st July each year, overlaps with c.33% of the Purbeck Coast MCZ and 57% of the BSB nest areas within the site. This provides additional protection for BSB populations from all fishing gear types during the breeding season. The Outer Ranges will also be closed periodically, whilst no information is available to quantify this, the closure of the Outer Ranges would provide additional protections to BSB over (in combination with the Inner Ranges) c.54% of the site. Additionally, the Lulworth ranges continue to operate outside of the breeding season, providing extended protections to BSB outside of the breeding season. The spatial protections provided by the Lulworth Ranges, applicable to all gear types, support the furthering of the CO Focus Areas:

1	<b>Purbeck MCZ:</b>	<b>it is prohibited to operate a vessel</b> (including all fishing activity, commercial and recreational) <b>within the area of the Lulworth Firing Ranges when the ranges are closed (c.32% time closure to all gear types between 1<sup>st</sup> Apr – 31<sup>st</sup> Jul across c.33% of the site, potential to be increased to c.54% with outer ranges), closures cover 57% of BSB nests within the site.</b>
2		
3		

## Development of New Statutory Measures

Between 2020 and 2023, the **Southern IFCA BTFG Byelaw 2023** was developed, and made by the Authority in order to satisfy multiple aims. Of relevance to the BSB Review, increased spatial

protections for BSB have been developed relevant to the Purbeck MCZ (an **increase** of protections to 93%), in addition to the introduction of **whole site** BTFG protection across the entirety of the Southbourne Rough MCZ. The area of Purbeck Coast which remains open to BTFG poses no risk to BSB due to the absence of nest areas and suitable habitat, as agreed by Natural England through the outcome of the Part A Assessment for Purbeck Coast MCZ under the BTFG Review Phase I<sup>1</sup>.

The development and subsequent ratification of the Byelaw by the Secretary of State on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025 has further increased the spatial protections afforded to BSB, via removal of the highest risk activity BTFG:

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Purbeck MCZ:</b></p> <p><b>Southbourne Rough:</b></p>	<p><b>Increase to 93% closure to BTFG for 12 months a year</b> (100% not achievable due to unreliable NE data)</p> <p><b>Introduction of whole site protection for 12 months a year (100% closure to BTFG)</b></p>
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## Satisfying Policy Objective 1

The Authority, via spatial and technical statutory mechanisms, are furthering the Conservation Objectives relevant to BSB across the three Dorset MCZs, primarily via the **elimination of BTFG activity** across the entirety of Poole Rocks MCZ and Southbourne Rough MCZ and via a BTFG spatial closure across 93% of the Purbeck MCZ, thus removing the highest risk fishing activity almost in its entirety across the three Dorset MCZs.

Additionally, the furthering of the COs is being achieved **via enforcement of a MCRS** for BSB at a District wide level, applicable to all commercial and recreational users, which is also applicable to the wider supply chain. Furthermore, **spatial restrictions via an exclusion zone** in the Purbeck Coast MCZ, which equate to quantifiable closures for c.32% of the breeding season across c.33% of the site (increased to c.54% with the outer ranges) as enforced by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) are further enhancing protections to BSB in the Purbeck Coast MCZ across the **entirety of gear types** (commercial and recreational) via closures applicable to all users.

Collectively, the Southern IFCA statutory measures (as well as those enforced by the MOD) are providing protections to BSB above and beyond the three MCZ's collective footprint, at a temporal scale beyond that of the breeding season, which provides additional protections to BSB populations outside of the MCZs and outside of the breeding season. As such, collectively, these statutory measures are providing protections to BSB nesting sites and populations at a level

<sup>1</sup> The remainder of the Purbeck Coast MCZ is subject to feature data which has been deemed unreliable in terms of location and/or extent by Natural England and is therefore not suitable as a basis for making management determinations. The feature data does not relate directly to BSB and it has been confirmed by NE through the Part A Assessment process for the BTFG Review Phase I that the area of the MCZ which remains open to BSB poses no risk to BSB as a designated feature.

which exceeds the scope of the COs. In combination, these measures are furthering the COs for BSB across the Purbeck Coast MCZ, Poole Rocks MCZ and Southbourne Rough MCZ and are thus satisfying the Primary Policy Objective to further the COs from a baseline position of no management.

## 2.0 Secondary Policy Objective – MaCAA 153

### *Improving Understandings of BSB across the Dorset MCZs*

#### 2.1 Scope

In satisfying the furthering of BSB CO across the three Dorset MCZs, Members determined that there was a **need to consider additional management opportunities** relevant to the BSB fishery within the MCZs; which could both complement the protections already afforded, as well as advance understandings of the health of the BSB fishery overtime.

Recognising the absence of a Natural England Condition Assessment for the three MCZs at the point of designation and up to present day; coupled with recognition of the concurrent development of a national Seabreams Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), Members committed to exploring the development of a Shared Principles Model of management with the Dorset community.

#### 2.2 Legislative Underpinning

Under Section 153 (2) of the MaCAA, when managing the exploitation of inshore fisheries, Southern IFCA must:

- a. seek to ensure that the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way,
- b. seek to balance the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources of the district with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of such exploitation,
- c. take any other steps which in the authority’s opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development, and
- d. seek to balance the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the district

#### 2.3 Policy Drivers

Members agreed the following policy drivers to underpin the exploration of a **Shared Principles Model**:

- (1) To improve understandings of BSB behaviours, fisheries and ecosystem management, recognising that these are currently data poor.
- (2) To be proportionate in the application of precaution, complementing existing statutory measures for lower impact fisheries (adaptive management approach).
- (3) To be precautionary, as despite evidence suggesting that current effort is not having an impact, this remains data poor. Additionally, potential future impact also remains unknown.

## 2.4 Headline Objectives

Subsequently, Members drafted the following headline objectives which provide the rationale for the exploration of additional management solutions:

- (1) To ensure current and future sustainability of BSB populations for the benefit of the marine environment and all sectors.
- (2) To improve understandings via data collection.
- (3) to monitor and review measures (adaptive management).
- (4) include users in policy development and ongoing management interventions.

## 2.5 Management Solutions

### Co-Developed Management Principles

Following a four-stage approach to Co-Development (CoD) and subsequent period of public consultation, the following CoD Principles were finalised:

Application of CoD Principles:	
Voluntary, applying within the 3 Dorset MCZs, and in force during the period 1 <sup>st</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> July.	
Proposed CoD Principles:	
Minimum Conservation Reference Size	28cm
Maximum Conservation Reference Size	38cm
Recreational Bag Limit	6 fish per person per day
Guidance	Good practice fishing & handling
Data Collection	Year-round, all sectors

### Satisfying Policy Objective 2

The introduction of the CoD Principles across the entire footprint of the 3 Dorset MCZs during the recognised BSB breeding period (1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> July), provides a suitable management mechanism by which Southern IFCA can both **satisfy** and **facilitate** progress towards the overarching goal, which is to **advance understandings of the BSB fisheries over time**. This approach provides a mechanism which satisfies both the Policy Drivers and Headline Objectives which frame the Secondary Policy Objective, as set by the Authority.

#### Policy Drivers

- (1) To **improve understandings** of BSB behaviours, fisheries and ecosystem management, recognising that these are currently data poor.
- (2) To be **proportionate** in the application of precaution, complementing existing statutory measures for **lower impact fisheries** (adaptive management approach).
- (3) To be **precautionary**, as despite evidence suggesting that current effort is not having an impact, this remains data poor. Additionally, potential future impact also remains unknown.

### Headline Objectives

- (1) To ensure **current and future sustainability** of BSB populations for the benefit of the marine environment and all sectors.
- (2) To improve understandings via **data collection**.
- (3) to **monitor and review measures** (adaptive management).
- (4) **include users** in policy development and ongoing management interventions.