

/Document Control

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Revision History

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15/09/2017	V Gravestock	1.5	Final	Addition of reference list and finalisation of document.	SP

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Title	Name	Date sent	Comments received
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Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA)

Marine Conservation Zone Fisheries Assessment (Part B)

Marine Conservation Zone: The Needles MCZ

Feature: Subtidal coarse sediment; Subtidal mixed sediment, Subtidal sand; Subtidal mud

Broad Gear Type: Bottom Towed Fishing Gear

Gear type(s) Assessed: Light otter trawl; Beam trawl; Multi-rig trawl

Technical Summary

As part of the MCZ assessment process for the tranche 2 Needles MCZ, it was identified that trawling (specifically light otter trawl, beam trawl and multi-rig) and its potential impacts required an in-depth assessment. The level of trawling within the site is very low, with light otter trawling occurring one to two times a year by one to two vessels, on the northern and western fringes of the site over designated features; subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediments.

The potential pressures likely to be exerted by the activity upon designated features were identified as abrasion, disturbance and penetration of the seabed below and on the surface of the seabed and the removal of non-target species. Scientific literature shows that whilst trawling has the potential to cause physical and biological disturbance, the extent and severity of impact largely depends on site-specific factors including sediment type and physical regime. As such, the level of impact can largely vary between studies conducted in 'similar' habitat types.

When considering the very low level of trawling within the Needles MCZ, in combination with other evidence (scientific literature, sightings data, feature mapping) and site-specific factors, namely the highly dynamic area of the area fished due to strong tidal streams, it was concluded the activity is unlikely to pose a significant risk to subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediments. The highly dynamic nature of the area fished means the potential for adverse impacts is limited and recoverability is likely to be rapid. As such, it is believed the activity will not hinder the achievement of the designated features general management approaches and that it is compatible with the sites conservation objectives. Existing management measures are therefore considered sufficient and to ensure that trawling remains consistent with the conservative objectives of the site, fishing effort will continue to be monitored.

1. Introduction

1.1 Need for an MCZ assessment

This assessment has been undertaken by Southern IFCA in order to document and determine whether management measures are required to achieve the conservation objectives of The Needles Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). Southern IFCA has duties under section 154 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 which states;

154 Protection of marine conservation zones

(1)The authority for an IFC district must seek to ensure that the conservation objectives of any MCZ in the district are furthered.

(2)Nothing in section 153(2) is to affect the performance of the duty imposed by this section.

(3)In this section—

(a)“MCZ” means a marine conservation zone designated by an order under section 116;

(b)the reference to the conservation objectives of an MCZ is a reference to the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ under section 117(2)(b).

Section 125 of the 2009 Act also requires that public bodies (which includes the IFCA) exercise its functions in a manner to best further (or, if not possible, least hinder) the conservation objectives for MCZs.

This MCZ assessment will complement Southern IFCA's assessment of commercial fishing activities in European Marine Sites (EMS) – designated to protect habitats and species in line with the EU Habitats Directive and Birds Directive. To bring fisheries in line with other activities, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced on the 14th August 2012 a new approach to manage fishing activities within EMSs. This change in approach will promote sustainable fisheries while conserving the marine environment and resources, securing a sustainable future for both.

1.2 Documents reviewed to inform this assessment

- Reference list (Section 7)
- Defra's matrix of fisheries gear types and European Marine Site protected features¹
- Site map(s) – feature location and extent (Annexes 1 & 2)
- Natural England's DRAFT Advice on Operations for The Needles MCZ (Annex 3)
- Natural England's Scoping Advice for The Needles MCZ (received 27/01/2017) (Annex 4)
- Natural England's Advice on Operations for the Chesil Beach and Stennis Ledges MCZ²
- Natural England's Advice on Operations for the Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ³
- Natural England's Advice on Operations for Solent Maritime SAC
- Natural England's Supplementary Advice for the Poole Rocks MCZ⁴
- Fishing activity data (map(s), etc) (Annex 5)
- Fisheries Impact Evidence Database (FIED)

2. Information about the MCZ

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fisheries-in-european-marine-sites-matrix>

²

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/FAPMatrix.aspx?SiteCode=UKMCZ0004&SiteName=&SiteNameDisplay=Chesil+Beach+and+Stennis+Ledges+MCZ&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

³

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/FAPMatrix.aspx?SiteCode=UKMCZ0015&SiteName=skerries&SiteNameDisplay=Skerries+Bank+and+Surrounds+MCZ&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

⁴ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/SupAdvice.aspx?SiteCode=UKMCZ0014&SiteName=poole+rock&SiteNameDisplay=Poole+Rocks+MCZ&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea=>

2.1 Overview and designated features

The Needles MCZ was designated in January 2016 and covers the stretch of Solent adjacent to the northwest side of the Isle of Wight to just south of the Needles, including a series of sheltered bays. The site covers an area of approximately 11 km² and protects a number of rare and fragile habitats including chalk on the seabed, shallow water (infralittoral) rock and soft sediments which support communities of algae, sponges, sea squirts and delicate anemones. The site also protects seagrass beds in both Totland and Colwell Bays, together with rare and threatened species such as the Stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*) and Peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*).

A summary of the site's designated features is provided in Table 1, together with the recommended General Management Approach (GMA) for each feature. The GMA required for a feature in a MCZ will either be for it to be maintained in favourable condition (if it is currently in this state), or for it to be recovered to favourable condition (if it is currently in a damaged state) and then to be maintained in favourable condition.

Table 1. Designated features and General Management Approach

Designated feature	General Management Approach
Moderate energy infralittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
High energy infralittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Moderate energy circalittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal chalk	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal coarse sediment	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal mixed sediments	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal sand	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal mud	Recover to favourable condition
Sheltered muddy gravels	Recover to favourable condition
Seagrass beds	Recover to favourable condition
Stalked jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	Maintain in favourable condition
Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Recover to favourable condition
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Recover to favourable condition

Please refer to Annexes 1 and 2 for site feature maps of broad-scale habitats and features of conservation importance. This feature data comes from a number of sources. The broad-scale habitat data has been taken from the post-survey site report (December 2015). This feature data has not yet been published by Natural England, however Southern IFCA believe this is the most representative feature data based on existing knowledge of the site. Updated feature data is due to be provided to Southern IFCA in August. Features of conservation importance map was taken from the www.gov.uk website, and corresponds with the feature data on MagicMap which represents Natural England's best available evidence.

2.2 Conservation objectives

The site's conservation objectives apply to the Marine Conservation Zone and the individual species and/or habitat for which the site has been designated (the "Designated features" listed below).

The conservation objective of each of the zones is that the protected habitats:

1. are maintained in favourable condition if they are already in favourable condition
2. be brought into favourable condition if they are not already in favourable condition

For each protected feature, favourable condition means that, within a zone:

1. its extent is stable or increasing
2. its structure and functions, its quality, and the composition of its characteristic biological communities (including diversity and abundance of species forming part or inhabiting the habitat) are sufficient to ensure that its condition remains healthy and does not deteriorate

Any temporary deterioration in condition is to be disregarded if the habitat is sufficiently healthy and resilient to enable its recovery.

For each species of marine fauna, favourable condition means that the population within a zone is supported in numbers which enable it to thrive, by maintaining:

1. the quality and quantity of its habitat
2. the number, age and sex ratio of its population. Any temporary reduction of numbers of a species is to be disregarded if the population is sufficiently thriving and resilient to enable its recovery.

Any alteration to a feature brought about entirely by natural processes is to be disregarded when determining whether a protected feature is in favourable condition.

3. MCZ assessment process

3.1 Overview of the assessment process

The assessment of commercial fishing activities within the The Needles MCZ will be undertaken using a staged process, akin to that proposed by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)⁵, for marine license applications (Annex 6). The assessment process comprises of an initial

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/410273/Marine_conservation_zones_and_marine_licensing.pdf

screening stage to establish whether an activity occurs or is anticipated to occur/has the potential to occur within the site. Activities which are not screened out are subject to a simple 'part A' assessment, akin to the Test of Likely Significant Effect required by article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The aim of this assessment is to identify pressures capable of significantly affecting designated features or their related processes. Fishing activities and their associated pressures which are not screened out in the part A assessment and then subject to a more detailed 'part B' assessment, where assessment is undertaken on a gear type basis. A part B assessment is akin to the Appropriate Assessment required by article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. The aim of this assessment is to determine whether there is a significant risk of the activity hindering the conservation objectives of the MCZ. Within this stage of assessment, 'hinder' is defined as any act that could, either alone or in combination:

- in the case of a conservation objective of 'maintain', increase the likelihood that the current status of a feature would go downwards (e.g. from favourable to degraded) either immediately or in the future (i.e. they would be placed on a downward trend); or
- in the case of a conservation objective of 'recover', decrease the likelihood that the current status of a feature could move upwards (e.g. from degraded to favourable) either immediately or in the future (i.e. they would be placed on a flat or downward trend) (MMO, 2013).

If the part B assessment is unable to conclude that there is no significant risk of an activity hindering the conservation objectives of the MCZ, then the activity may be subject to management and consideration will be given to whether or not the public benefit of the activity outweighs the risk of damage to the environment; and if so, whether the activity is able to deliver measures of equivalent environmental benefit to the damage that is likely to occur to the MCZ.

3.2 Screening and part A assessment

The aim of the screening stage and part A assessment is to determine whether, under section 125 and 154 of MCAA, fishing activities occurring or those which have the potential to occur within the site are compatible with the conservation objectives of the MCZ.

The screening of commercial fishing activities in The Needles MCZ was undertaken using broad gear type categories. Sightings data collected by the Southern IFCA, together with officers' knowledge, was used to ascertain whether each activity occurs within the site, or has the potential to occur/is anticipated to occur in the foreseeable future. For these occurring/potentially occurring activities, an assessment of pressures upon MCZ designated features was undertaken using Natural England's DRAFT Advice on Operations.

Activities were screened out for further part B assessment if they satisfied one or more of the following criteria:

1. The activity does not occur within the site, does not have the potential to occur and/or is not anticipated to occur in the foreseeable future.
2. The activity does occur but the pressure(s) does not significantly affect/ interact with the designated feature(s).
3. The activity does occur but the designated feature(s) is not sensitive to the pressure(s) exerted by the activity.

3.2.3 Screening of commercial fishing activities based on occurrence

Initial screening was undertaken to identify the commercial fishing activities which currently occur within the site, together with those which have the potential to occur or/and are reasonably foreseen to occur in the future (Annex 7). To maintain consistency with Southern IFCA's assessment of commercial fishing activities in European Marine Sites, the individual gear types identified in Defra's matrix were assessed and these were grouped into broad gear types.

3.2.4 Screening of commercial fishing activities based on pressure-feature interaction

Fishing activities which were identified as occurring, have the potential to occur and/or are anticipated to occur in the foreseeable future within the site were screened with respect to the potential pressures which they may exert upon designated features (Part A assessment). This screening exercise was undertaken using Natural England's DRAFT Advice on Operations and Scoping Advice for The Needles MCZ (Annex 4). The Advice on Operations provides a broad scale assessment of the sensitivity of designated features to different activity-derived pressures, using nationally available evidence on their resilience (an ability to recover) and resistance (the level of tolerance) to physical, chemical and biological pressures (Annex 3). The assessments of sensitivity to these pressures are measured against a benchmark. It should be noted that these benchmarks are representative of the likely intensity of a pressure caused by typical activities, and do not represent a threshold of an 'acceptable' intensity of a pressure. It is therefore necessary to consider how the level of fishing intensity observed within The Needles MCZ compares with these benchmarks when screening individual activities.

Due to the broad-scale nature of the sensitivity assessments provided in Natural England's Advice on operations, each pressure is assigned a risk profile based upon the likelihood of the pressure occurring and the magnitude of the impact should that pressure occur. These risk profiles have been used, together with site-specific knowledge, to identify those pressures which could significantly affect designated features.

The DRAFT Advice on Operations is based upon published Regulation 35 Conservation Packages for designated (Tranche 1) MCZs and there are a number of features within the Needles MCZ where Advice on Operations has not yet been produced by Natural England. This applies to Sheltered muddy gravels, Stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*) and Peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*). In the absence of Advice on Operations for these three features, Natural England has recommended the following key pressures when undergoing a Part A assessments:

- Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed
- Changed in suspended solids (water clarity)
- Introduction or spread of non-indigenous species
- Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion
- Physical change (to another seabed type)
- Removal of non-target species
- Siltation rate changes (Low), including smothering

In addition to the recommended pressures, Southern IFCA have used similar habitat or species (from the Chesil Beach and Stennis Ledges MCZ Advice on Operations and Skerries Bank and Surrounds MCZ Advice on Operations), combined with best judgement, to determine the potential sensitivity to remaining pressures, where possible. These are justified below (Table 2) using general MCZ feature descriptions⁶, The Needles feature map (Annex 2) and factsheet⁷.

Table 2. Justification for features used to determine sensitivity for features of The Needles MCZ which do not yet have Advice on Operations.

Feature	Feature used to determine sensitivity	Justification
Sheltered muddy gravel	Subtidal muds	Both features occur in areas with low tidal currents such as estuaries. Similar species types can be found in both habitat types including worms, bivalves and burrowing anemones.
Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Moderate energy intertidal rock; Moderate energy infralittoral rock	The Peacock's tail is found in rock pools on the mid to lower rocky shore and up to a depth of 20 metres. Based on this, sensitivities for moderate energy intertidal rock and infralittoral rock were applied to Peacock's tail as these are the habitats in which the species is found and so pressures experienced are likely to be the same. Although there is likely to be a difference in tolerances/vulnerabilities to different pressures such as changes in suspended solids or smothering. Moderate energy environments were chosen (as opposed to low or high) as an intermediate between the two.
Stalked jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	Seagrass	On The Needles feature map, stalked jellyfish occur within the seagrass beds in Alum Bay. Stalked jellyfish typically spend their life attached to seaweed or seagrass. Based on this, the sensitivities for seagrass were applied to the stalked jellyfish as both are likely to experience the same pressures, although are likely to have different tolerances / vulnerabilities to different pressures such as organic enrichment.

The DRAFT Natural England's Advice on Operations for The Needles MCZ is provided in Annex 3. The resultant activity pressure-feature interactions which have been screened in for bottom towed fishing gear for the part B assessment are summarised in Tables 3 to 6 for sensitive designated features. The activity pressure-feature interactions which were screened out in the Part A Assessment are detailed in a standalone document ('Screening and Part A Assessment') for The Needles MCZ.

Table 3. Summary of fishing pressure-feature screening for Subtidal coarse sediment and demersal trawls. Please note only pressures screened in for the part B assessment are presented here.

Potential Pressures	Sensitivity	Considered in Part B	Justification	Relevant Attributes
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⁶ <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4527>

⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492458/mcz-the-needles-factsheet.pdf

		Assessment?		
Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed surface. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure, including the spatial scale/intensity of the activity.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed and could penetrate the substrate below the surface of the seabed. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure, including the spatial scale/intensity of the activity.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Removal of non-target species	S	Y	Impacts on the associated community may occur through the removal of larger epifaunal and potentially infaunal species, whilst smaller organisms are likely to pass through the gear. Abrasion, resulting from contact with the gear, however is likely to disturb smaller species. There is no site specific information on the communities associated with this feature as it is newly designated. General information on the designated features from the MCZ features catalogue provides a general description. The feature tends to be dominated by infaunal animals that are found buried in the seabed, these include bristle worms, sand mason worms, small shrimp-like animals, burrowing anemones, carpet shell clams and venus cockles. The post-survey site report provides a species list from grab and video samples. Further investigation is needed as to the magnitude of disturbance to associated communities/species.	No conservation advice available for this site.

Table 4. Summary of fishing pressure-feature screening for Subtidal mixed sediments and demersal trawls. Please note only pressures screened in for the part B assessment are presented here.

Potential Pressures	Sensitivity	Considered in Part B Assessment?	Justification	Relevant Attributes
Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed surface. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure including spatial scale/intensity of the activity.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Penetration and/or disturbance of the	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed and could penetrate the substrate below the surface of the seabed. Further investigation is	No conservation

substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion			needed on the magnitude of the pressure, including the spatial scale/intensity of the activity.	advice available for this site.
Removal of non-target species	S	Y	Impacts on the associated community may occur through the removal of larger epifaunal and potentially infaunal species, whilst smaller organisms are likely to pass through the gear. Abrasion, resulting from contact with the gear, however is likely to disturb smaller species. There is no site specific information on the communities associated with this feature as it is newly designated. General information on the designated features from the MCZ features catalogue provides a general description. Due to the varied nature of the fixture, mixed seabeds may support a wide range of animals, both epifaunal and infaunals. Animals found in such habitats include worms, bivalves, starfish, urchins, anemones, sea fans and sea mats. The post-survey site report provides a species list from grab and video samples. Further investigation is needed as to the magnitude of disturbance to associated communities/species.	No conservation advice available for this site.

Table 5. Summary of fishing pressure-feature screening for Subtidal sand and demersal trawls. Please note only pressures screened in for the part B assessment are presented here.

Potential Pressures	Sensitivity	Considered in Part B Assessment?	Justification	Relevant Attributes
Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed surface. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure including spatial scale/intensity of the activity and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed and could penetrate the substrate below the surface of the seabed. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure, including the spatial scale/intensity of the activity and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Removal of non-target species	S	Y	Impacts on the associated community may occur through the removal of larger epifaunal and potentially infaunal species, whilst smaller organisms are likely to pass through the gear. Abrasion, resulting from contact with the gear, however is likely to disturb smaller species. There is no site specific information on the	No conservation advice available for

			communities associated with this feature as it is newly designated. General information on the designated features from the MCZ features catalogue provides a general description. The communities associated with subtidal sand depend on the level of silt/clay content. The post site survey reported a relatively low silt/clay content of 7.8% in the one sample of subtidal sand collected. In areas of open coast and close inshore where habitats are disturbed by waves and tide, flatfish and sand eels exist on the surface of the sediment, and worms and bivalves live within it. In more sheltered areas, different animals will be found depending on the sand/mud ratio with heart urchins, razor shells and sea cucumbers found on muddy sands. The post-survey site report provides a species list from grab and video samples. Further investigation is needed as to the magnitude of disturbance to associated communities/species and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	this site.
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Table 6. Summary of fishing pressure-feature screening for Subtidal mud and demersal trawls. Please note only pressures screened in for the part B assessment are presented here.

Potential Pressures	Sensitivity	Considered in Part B Assessment?	Justification	Relevant Attributes
Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed surface. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure including spatial scale/intensity of the activity and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion	S	Y	This gear type is known to cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed and could penetrate the substrate below the surface of the seabed. Further investigation is needed on the magnitude of the pressure, including the spatial scale/intensity of the activity and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	No conservation advice available for this site.
Removal of non-target species	S	Y	Impacts on the associated community may occur through the removal of larger epifaunal and potentially infaunal species, whilst smaller organisms are likely to pass through the gear. Abrasion, resulting from contact with the gear, however is likely to disturb smaller species. There is no site specific information on the communities associated with this feature as it is newly designated. General information on the designated features from the MCZ features catalogue provides a general description. The communities associated with subtidal mud include high numbers of worms, bivalves and other bivalve shells, as well as sea cucumbers, sea	No conservation advice available for this site.

			pens, burrowing anemones and brittlestars. The post-survey site report provides a species list from grab and video samples. Further investigation is needed as to the magnitude of disturbance to associated communities/species and location of the activity in relation to the feature.	
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4. Part B Assessment

The aim of the part B assessment is for the IFCA to ensure that there is no significant risk of a fishing activity hindering the conservation objectives of the MCZ; and to confirm that the authority is able to exercise its functions to further the site's conservation objectives.

In order to adequately assess the potential impacts of an activity upon a designated feature, it is necessary to consider the relevant attributes of that feature that may be affected. Attributes are provided in Natural England's Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives (SACOs) and represent the ecological characteristics or requirements of the designated species and habitats within a site. These attributes are considered to be those which best describe the site's ecological integrity and which if safeguarded will enable achievement of the Conservation Objectives. Each attribute has an associated target which identifies the desired state to be achieved; and is either quantified or qualified depending on the available evidence. No Supplementary Advice is currently available for The Needles MCZ, therefore after relevant pressures were identified from the pressure-feature interaction screening (part A assessment), suitable attributes were identified from existing Natural England's Supplementary Advice packages for the Poole Rocks MCZ. These are outlined in Table 10.

4.1 Assessment of trawling in the Needles MCZ

4.1.1 Summary of the Fishery

Trawling can take place all year round within the Needles MCZ. The level of activity is however very low with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year on the fringes of the site using light otter trawls. The activity does not target a specific species. The species caught is dependent on the time of year and catches can include common sole (*Solea solea*) and European plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*), with a bycatch of bass.

4.2.2 Technical gear specifications

Light otter trawls are used to fish for a number of fish species on the fringes of the Needles MCZ. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.

4.2.3 Light otter trawl

An otter trawl comprises of following design (see Figure 1). Two shaped panels of netting are laced together at each side to form an elongated funnel shaped bag (Seafish, 2015). The funnel tapers down to a cod-end where fish are collected (Seafish, 2015). The remaining cut edges of

the net and net mouth are strengthened by lacing them to ropes to form 'wings' that are used to drive fish into the net (Seafish, 2015). The upper edge of the rope is referred to as the head line, the lower edge is referred to as the foot rope of fishing line and side ropes are known as wing lines (Seafish, 2015). Floats are attached to the headline to hold the net open and the foot rope is weighted to maintain contact with the seabed and prevent damage to the net (Seafish, 2015). The wings of the net are held open by a pair of trawl doors, also known as otter boards, and are attached to the wings by wires, ropes or chains known as bridles and sweeps (Seafish, 2015). The sweep connects the trawl door to top and bottom bridles which are attached to the headline and footrope of the net, respectively (Seafish, 2015). The choice of material used for the sweeps and bridles depends on the size of gear and nature of the seabed, with smaller inshore boats using thin wire and combination rope (Seafish, 2015). The trawl doors, which are made of wood or steel are towed through the water at an angle which causes them to spread apart and open the net in a horizontal direction (Seafish, 2015). The trawl doors are attached to the fishing vessel using wires referred to as trawl warps (Seafish, 2015). The trawl doors must be heavy enough to keep the net on the seabed as it is towed (Seafish, 2015). As the trawl doors are towed along the seabed they generate a sediment cloud which helps to herd fish towards the mouth of the trawl (Seafish, 2015). The bridles and sweeps continue the herding action of the trawl doors as the trail on the seabed and disturb the sediment, creating a sediment cloud (Seafish, 2015). The length of the sweeps and bridles and distance between the two trawl doors is tuned to the target species (Seafish, 2015). Species such as lemon sole and plaice can be herded into the trawl over long distances and so the length of the sweeps is longer (Seafish, 2015).

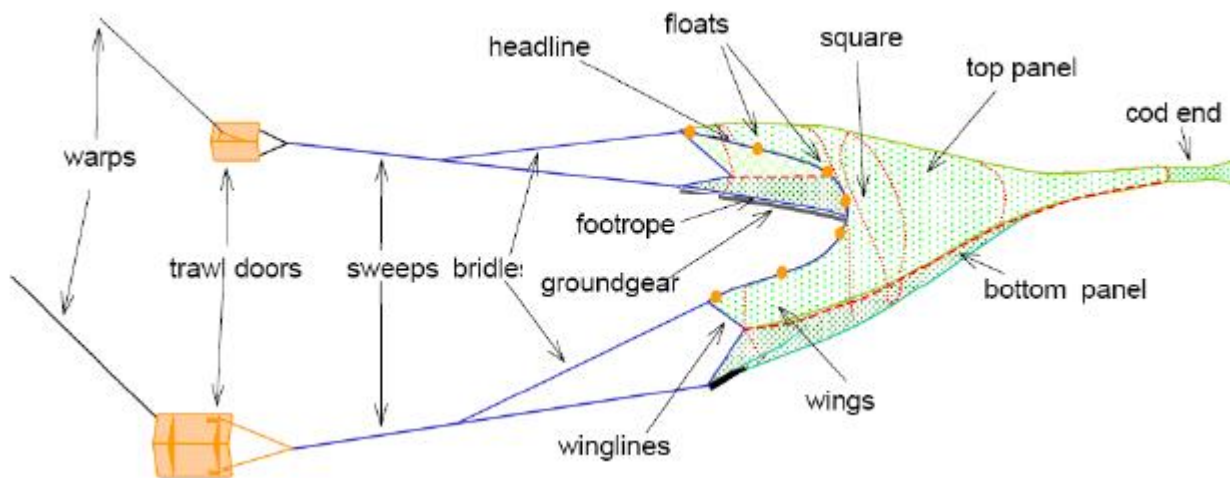


Figure 1. Key components of an otter trawl.

Source: www.seafish.org/upload/b2b/file/r_d/BOTTOM%20TRAWL_5a.pdf

The mesh size of the net used varies depending on the type of trawl (Seafish, 2015). In the UK, there has been a move towards an increase in mesh size, particularly in the top panel and wings, in order to improve gear selectivity (Seafish, 2015).

The ground rope will have some form of ground gear attached to protect the netting from damage on the seabed (Seafish, 2015). The ground gear can largely vary. The most basic is where bare fishing line and the netting is laced directly to the rope of combination rope (Seafish, 2015). Chains may also be used and the style of attachment can vary (Seafish, 2015). Ground gear may also include bobbins and rock hoppers which commonly use small and large rubber discs (up to 600 mm) (Seafish, 2015).

The drag of the gear, combined with the floats on the headline, mean the weight of the trawl on the seabed is in the region of 10 to 20% of what it would be in air (Seafish, 2015).

A light otter trawl is one that uses anything less than the definition given for a heavy otter trawl, which include any of the following (MMO, 2014):

- Sheet netting of greater than 4 mm twine thickness
- Rockhoppers or discs of 200 mm or above in diameter
- A chain for the foot/ground line (instead of wire)

Generally, vessels will shoot and haul their gear over the stern of the boat (Seafish, 2015). Restrictions on vessels over 12 metres in length in the Southern IFCA district limits the size of gear that can be used within the district.

There is no typical gear set up used in the Solent and each individual has a different approach (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm)⁸. The size and weight of trawl doors used in the Solent varies, however the largest doors likely to be used in the Solent are made of steel and measure approximately 52 x 38 inches, weighing 130 kg each (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm). The ground rope used by the vessels ranges between 36 to 60 ft in length and commonly made of 16 mm wire with rubber discs of 4 to 6 inches, spaced 1 inch apart (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm). The rubber discs are designed to maintain consistent contact with the seabed. Additional buoyancy may be attached to the ground rope to minimise contact with the seabed (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm). The length of the sweeps and bridles is approximately 90 ft (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm). Trawls are towed at between 1 and 3.5 knots, depending on the state of the tide. In the Solent, the tow length is dependent on the level of weed and in some areas takes no longer than 10 minutes (Southern IFCA Committee Member Pers. Comm).

4.2.4 Beam trawl

⁸ Information was provided by a Southern IFCA Committee Member who has valuable knowledge and experience of the fishery.

A net is held open by a rigid framework to maintain trawl opening, regardless of towing speed, in addition to supporting the net (Seafish, 2015). The framework consists of a heavy tubular steel beam which is supported by steel beam heads at each end. Each beam head has wide shoes at the base which slide over the seabed (Seafish, 2015). A cone shaped net is towed from the framework, with the head rope attached to the beam and foot rope connected to the base of the shoes (Seafish, 2015). The footrope forms a 'U' shape curve behind the beam as it is towed over the seabed (Seafish, 2015). The beam is towed using a chain bridle which is attached to both shoes and at the centre of the beam; all coming together to form a single trawl warp which leads to the vessel (Seafish, 2015).

There are two types of beam trawl and these are referred to as 'open gear' and 'chain mat gear' (Seafish, 2015). Open gear uses a lighter rig, with a number of chains, known as 'ticklers', which are towed along the seabed across the mouth of the net (Figure 2) (Seafish, 2015). Tickler chains help to disturb fish from a muddy seabed. Open gear is used on clean and soft ground. Chain mat gear on the other hand is used for towing over harder and stonier seabed and is often used by larger vessels (Seafish, 2015). The chain mat gear uses a lattice work of chains which are towed from the back of the beam and attach to the footrope of the net (Figure 3) (Seafish, 2015). Lighter styles of beam, using fewer tickler chains and without a chain mat, are used to target shrimp (Seafish, 2015).

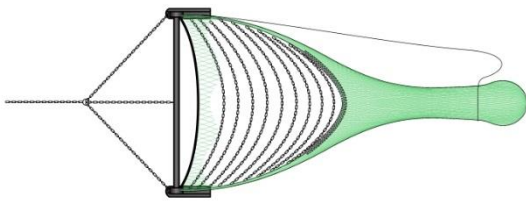


Figure 2. 'Open gear' beam trawl.

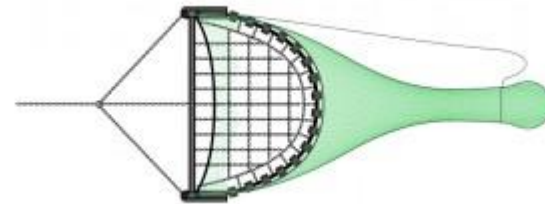


Figure 3. 'Chain mat gear' beam trawl.

Generally vessels below 12 metres, like those used in the Southern IFCA district, tow one trawl from the stern of the vessel (Seafish, 2015). The size of the beam towed, and the horsepower of many vessels, can be restricted by the local fishery regulations (Seafish, 2015). The sizes of trawls typically used in the Solent are approximately 3 m in width and weigh 650 kg with a chain matrix. These are not currently used within or on the fringes of the Needles MCZ.

4.2.5 Multi-rig trawl

A multi-rig demersal trawl uses a similar set up to a light otter trawl but occurs when two or more smaller trawls are towed side by side, as opposed to one. This makes it possible to fish a wider area without any increase in the drag of the gear. Typically a multi-rig will be a twin- or triple- rig using two or three nets, respectively, side by side. A variety of configurations are used worldwide to target bottom-living species and the configuration chosen largely depends on the target species (Seafish, 2015). The configuration can vary based a number of components including the number of warps used, the length of the sweeps and bridles and the type of weight used to keep the inner wings of each net open (i.e. skid,

trawl doors, chain clump weight, roller clump weight, depressor clump weight) (Seafish, 2015). The outer wings of outside nets are kept open using trawl doors (also known as otter boards), like an otter trawl.

4.2.6 Location, Effort and Scale of Fishing Activities

Light otter trawling takes place subtidally and occurs infrequently (1 to 2 times a year) on the outer northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel (known as the Needles Channel) in the western Solent.

The number of vessels engaged in the activity is limited with 1 to 2 vessels. These vessels operate out of Cowes and Lymington. Both have historically used light otter trawls. One vessel has recently switched to a multi-rig trawl set up however it is not known to have been used within the Needles MCZ.

Sightings data displayed in Annex 5 illustrates trawl sighting data from 2005 to 2017. The map of the wider Solent highlights the relatively low fishing effort in the western Solent when compared with Southampton Water and the eastern Solent. Within the western Solent the majority of trawling takes place within the main channel, particularly on the northern fringes. Further to the west, trawling is concentrated in the eastern portion of Christchurch Bay. Over the 12 year period there have been no sightings within the Needles MCZ. Please note that Southern IFCA's sightings data may reflect home ports of patrol vessels, high risk areas and typical patrol routes and therefore are only indicative of fishing activity. Over the ten year period covered by sightings data (2005-2015), it is likely that the geographical extent of the fishery is well reflected, however intensity may be skewed by aforementioned factors.

4.3 Co-location of fishing activity and features under assessment

Maps of the broad-scale habitat types can be found in Annex 1. This map can be used in conjunction with the knowledge of where fishing is known to occur to reveal where fishing activity occurs in relation to the designated features of the site.

The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with patches of subtidal mixed sediments to the west. The post-survey site report identified no areas of subtidal mud and 0.14 km² of subtidal sand, the latter of which is located close inshore in Colwell and Totland Bay (Annex 1) and therefore would not be subject to fishing activity.

4.4 Pressures

4.4.1 Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed/ Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion

Abrasion and disturbance is generally related to the direct and physical effects of bottom towed fishing gear. Such effects include the scraping and ploughing of the substrate, scouring and flattening of the seabed, sediment resuspension and changes in the vertical redistribution of sediment layers (Roberts *et al.* 2010).

There was a lack of scientific literature surrounding the impacts of multi-rig trawl set-ups and as such those reported for otter trawls were used to infer potential impacts due to the similarities surrounding the gear set up.

Otter trawl

Otter trawl fishing gear has contact with the seabed through the ground rope, chains and bobbins, sweeps, doors and any chaffing mats or parts of the net bag (Jones, 1992). Otter boards, or doors, leave distinct tracks on the seafloor ploughing distinct groove or furrows, which can be 0.2-2 metres wide and up to 30 centimetres deep (Jones, 1992; Thrush & Dayton, 2002). The depth of furrows depends on the weight of the board, the angle of attack, towing speed, and the nature of the substrate, being greatest in soft mud (Jones, 1992; Løkkeborg, 2005). The passage of the doors also creates sediment mounds known as berms (Gilkinson *et al.* 1998; Johnson *et al.* 2002). Marks on the seabed caused by other parts of the gear are faint when compared with those caused by trawl doors (Løkkeborg *et al.* 2005). Ground ropes and weights can scour and flatten the seabed, skimming the surface sediment between the grooves left by the trawl doors (Jones, 1992; Roberts *et al.* 2010; Grieve *et al.*, 2014). Spherical footrope bobbins can cause compressed tracks on surficial sediments (Brylinsky *et al.* 1994). In areas of surface roughness i.e. sand waves and ripples, features can be flattened and the habitat smoothed (Kaiser & Spencer, 1996; Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Schwinghamer *et al.*, 1996; 1998). It has been reported that the bridles do not appear to result in any marks on the seabed (Brylinsky *et al.* 1994).

Experimental flounder trawling, using an 18 m trawl with 200 kg doors and footrope with 29 cm rubber rollers, in the Bay of Fundy revealed that trawl doors made furrows that were 30 – 85 cm wide and up to 5 cm deep in an intertidal area characterised by silty sediments (Brylinsky *et al.* 1994). The same study reported an area of approximately 12% between the outer edges of the doors was visually disturbed (Brylinsky *et al.* 1994). A side-scan survey, used to assess the effects of otter trawl over sand and mud sediments in lower Narragansett Bay, revealed 5 to 10 cm deep tracks from otter trawl doors and 10 to 20 cm high berms in mud bottom channels (DeAlteris *et al.*, 1999). No information on the type of gear used was provided in the study. Sediment profile images (SPIs) were used to estimate the physical impacts of experimental trawling using a shrimp otter trawl with a head rope length of 10 m, otter boards measuring 90 x 140 cm and weighing 125 kg each and ground rope of 14 m with 20 kg of lead weight distributed across its length in an area of muddy sediments in the Gullmarfjord (Nilsson & Rosenberg, 2003). Forty three percentage of the images in trawl area had signs of physical disturbance (Nilsson & Rosenberg, 2003). A crude estimate of the scale of disturbance was made from the images, with an estimated depth of the trawl tracks at approximately 10 cm, and width between 30 and 60 cm (Nilsson & Rosenberg, 2003). It was calculated that one-tenth of the area affected by trawling would be directly affected by ploughing from the otter boards themselves (Nilsson & Rosenberg, 2003).

Beam trawl

The gear used by beam trawl is known to penetrate the seabed, leaving tracks and disturbing the surface sediments (Gubbay & Knapman, 1999). Beam trawls flatten seabed features and can also leave trenches in soft sediment (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). It is important to point out however that generally speaking beam trawling does not occur in mud habitats as it cannot be used effectively in such habitat types (Kaiser *et al.* 2002). Studies have revealed that the penetration depth of tickler chains on a beam trawl range from a few centimetres to at least 8 cm (Løkkeborg, 2005). Using a light beam trawl, of 700 kg with 15 tickler chains, disturbance was revealed to be restricted to the upper 1 cm in sandy sediments and 3 cm in muddy silt (Bridger, 1972). An average penetration depth of 40 to 70 mm was reported by de Groot *et al.* (1995). Experimental trawling, using a 3.5 tonne 4 m beam trawl with chain matrix, led to the flattening of sand ripples, suspension of fine materials and a reduction in the consolidation of sediments in areas of stable coarse sand and gravel and mobile sand in the eastern Irish sea (Kaiser & Spencer 1996, Kaiser *et al.* 1996, 1998, 1999). In the North Sea, experimental trawling, using a 7000 kg 12 m beam trawl with tickler chains, resulted in the physical penetration of the year to at least 6 cm in an area of medium hard sandy sediment (Bergman *et al.* 1990; Bergman & Hup, 1992).

Sediment character (general)

Towed demersal fishing gear has been shown to alter sedimentary characteristics and structure, particularly in subtidal muddy sand and mud habitats, as a result of penetration into the sediment (Jones, 1992; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999; Ball *et al.* 2000; Roberts *et al.* 2010). Surface organic material can be mixed into subsurface layers, changing the vertical distribution of sediment layers (Mayer *et al.*, 1991; Jones, 1992). Sediment structure may change through the resuspension of sediment, nutrients and contaminants and relocation of stones and boulders (ICES, 1992; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999). Trawling can increase the fraction of fine sediment on superficial layers of the seabed (Queirós *et al.* 2006). As fine material is suspended, it can be washed away from the surface layers (Gubbay & Knapman, 1999). Trimmer *et al.* (2005) reported significant correlations between fishing intensity and sediment silt content (Queirós *et al.* 2006). It is thought that continual sediment resuspension, as a result of trawling, can lead to the accumulation of fine sediments in the superficial layers of sediment in areas that are trawled if there is an absence of significant advective transport (Jennings & Kaiser, 1998; Trimmer *et al.* 2005). Changes in sediment structure from coarse-grained sand or gravel to fine sand and coarse silt has been reported to occur within beam trawl tracks (Leth & Kuijpers, 1996).

Johnson *et al.* (2002) found a number of studies on the effects of otter trawling in gravel and variable habitats and these revealed trawling physically removed fine sediments and biogenic structures through the removal of structure-forming epifauna, moved or overturned stones and boulders, smoothed the seafloor and exposed sediment/shell fragments (Bridger, 1972; Auster *et al.*, 1996; Collie *et al.*, 1997; Engel & Kvitek, 1998; Freese *et al.*, 1999; Johnson *et al.*, 2002; Sewell and Hiscock, 2005).

In Estero Bay of the Californian coast, grain size analyses were used to detect any changes in sediment grain size as a result of experimental trawling using a small footrope otter trawl (61 ft head rope, 60 ft ground rope, 8 inch and 4 inch discs, 3.5 ft x 4.5 700 lbs ft trawl doors) (Lindholm *et al.*, 2013). The study plots were located at a depth of 160-170 m and sediment analyses revealed the nature of the sediment to be coarse silt/fine sand (Lindholm *et al.* 2013). Post-trawl samples displayed the same grain size distribution as pre-trawl samples, albeit with a slight increase in silt content and 2% decrease in the fine sand fraction (Lindholm *et al.* 2013). Despite these differences, average mean grain size per plot indicated no visible differences between pre- and post- trawl samples and no quantifiable significant sedimentary differences were observed.

between trawled and control pots or between sample periods (Lindholm *et al.* 2013). These results are supported by a number of other studies including Tuck *et al.* (1998) and Schwinghamer *et al.* (1998), both of which reported no significant differences in sediment grain size in relation to trawling disturbance. Tuck *et al.* (1998) investigated the physical effects of trawling disturbance on a sheltered sealoch in Scotland at 35-40 m depth in an area characterised by 95% silt and clay using modified rockhopper ground gear without a net. Unfortunately further details on the gear are not available. Schwinghamer *et al.* (1998) examined physical impacts of experimental otter trawling in the Grand Banks in an area of sandy habitat at 120-146 m depth using an Engel 145 otter trawl with 1250 kg oval otter boards and 46 cm rock hopper gear. Despite reporting no change in sediment grain size, acoustic data did reveal that trawling changed small-scale biogenic sediment structures (such as tubes and burrows) down to 4.5 cm (Schwinghamer *et al.* 1998), indicating a reduction in habitat complexity (Løkkeborg, 2005).

Chemical disturbance

The vast majority of experimental studies investigate the physical and biological impacts of demersal trawling (Johnson *et al.* 2002). Information on the chemical effects of trawling is therefore very limited (Johnson *et al.* 2002). The chemistry of bottom sediments may be altered when the benthos are disturbed (Mercaldo-Allen & Goldberg, 2011).

Mayer *et al.* (1991) reported the mixing of surface organic material into subsurface layers. This led to the removal of organic matter from the surface metazoan-microbial aerobic chain to an anaerobic system (Jones, 1992). If subsurface layers of sediment are anoxic then further issues may occur and disturbing soft bottom may create anaerobic turbid conditions (Jones, 1992).

The removal or disruption to benthic organisms that are involved in biogeochemical processes within the sediment, may alter the biogeochemistry of the sediment (Mercaldo-Allen & Goldberg, 2011). For example, the removal of large benthic bioturbators may affect sediment nutrient and oxygen fluxes and influence whether the seafloor acts as a source or sink for certain nutrients (Olsfard *et al.*, 2008).

4.4.2 Removal of non-target species

Bottom towed fishing gear can result in the mortality of non-target species through direct physical damage inflicted by the passage of the trawl or indirectly through damage, exposure and subsequent predation (Roberts *et al.* 2010). This can lead to long-term changes in the benthic community structure (Jones, 1992), including decreases in biomass, species richness, production, diversity, evenness (as a result of increased dominance) and alterations to species composition and community structure (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Roberts *et al.* 2010). Disturbance from repeated trawling selects for more tolerant species, with communities becoming dominated by smaller-bodied infaunal species with fast life histories, juvenile stages, mobile species and rapid colonists (Engel & Kvitek, 1998; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999; Kaiser *et al.* 2000; Jennings *et al.* 2001; Kaiser *et al.* 2002). In addition, larger individuals may become depleted more than smaller individuals (Jennings *et al.* 2002).

The impacts of fishing activities on benthic communities varies with gear type, habitat and between taxa (Collie *et al.* 2000; Thrush & Dayton, 2002; Kaiser *et al.* 2006). Reported effects are habitat-specific (Roberts *et al.* 2010). A meta-analysis conducted by Kaiser *et al.* (2006) revealed

that soft-sediment, especially muddy sands were vulnerable to fishing impacts, with otter trawling and beam trawling all producing a significant immediate impact on this habitat. In mud communities, otter trawling was reported to have a significant negative short-term impact, but positive long-term effect with respect to the mean abundance of benthic taxa (Kaiser *et al.* 2006). A number of studies found no detectable impacts, specifically in relation to different forms of trawling in sand habitats (Van Dolah *et al.*, 1991; Kaiser & Spencer, 1996; Kenchington *et al.*, 2001; Roberts *et al.*, 2010), although this is not true in all cases. Such habitats are likely to be pre-adapted to higher levels of natural disturbance and are characterised by relatively resistant fauna (Kaiser *et al.* 2006).

There was a lack of scientific literature surrounding the impacts of multi-rig trawl set-ups and as such those reported for otter trawls were used to infer potential impacts due to the similarities surrounding the gear set up.

Otter trawls

The impact of otter trawls on benthic communities varies between studies, notably between sediment types. In a meta-analysis of experimental fishing impact studies, conducted by Kaiser *et al.* (2006), otter trawling was found to have one the least negative impacts, compared to other gear and substrata combinations. The initial impact on benthic communities from otter trawl disturbance on mud was estimated to be -29%, -15% on sand and +3% on gravel (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006; Hinz *et al.*, 2009).

Direct mortality of different megafaunal taxa groups varied after a single sweep with a commercial otter trawl (dimensions unknown) over shallow (30-40 m) sandy areas and deeper (40-50 m) silty sand areas in the southern North Sea (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). In areas of silty sand, direct mortality ranged from 0-52% for bivalves, 7% for gastropods, 0-26% for echinoderms, and 3-23% for crustaceans. In areas of sand, direct mortality ranged from 0-21% for bivalves, 12-16% for echinoderms and 19-30% for crustaceans. Experimental otter trawling (dimensions unknown) on the continental shelf of northwest Australia, in an area presumed to be sand, led to an exponential decline in the mean density of macrobenthos with increasing tow numbers (Moran & Stephenson, 2000; Johnson *et al.* 2002). Density was reduced by approximately 50% after four tows and 15% after a single tow (Moran & Stephenson, 2000; Johnson *et al.* 2002). A trawl with 20 cm disks, separated by 30 to 60 cm spacers was used (Johnson *et al.* 2002). No further information on the trawl used is known. The impacts of otter trawling on benthic communities on a sandy bottom in Grand Banks, Newfoundland were studied over a three year period (Kenchington *et al.*, 2001). Three experimental corridors with adjacent reference corridors were established and experimental corridors were trawled 12 times within 5 days for three years using an Engel 145 otter trawl with 1250 kg otter doors, 60 m door spread and 46 cm rockhopper foot gear. Changes in the benthic community were sampled using an epibenthic sledge. The sled is largely used to sample epifauna and some infauna as the sled penetrates to a depth of 2 to 3 cm. Samples collected using the benthic sled revealed a 24% reduction in average biomass in trawled corridors compared to reference corridors. This decrease was caused by reductions in biomass of sand dollars, brittle stars, soft corals, sea urchins and snow crabs. No significant effects were observed for mollusc species. The mean total abundance per grab sample was 25% lower immediately post trawling in one of the three years and declines were demonstrated for 13 taxa primarily made up of polychaetes, which also declined in biomass (Løkkeborg *et al.*, 2005).

Valentine and Lough (1991) investigated the impact of scallop dredging and trawling on sand and gravel habitats using side scan sonar and a submersible on eastern Georges Bank. The study documented the most obvious signs of disturbance on gravel pavement habitats. Unfished gravel areas (as a result of the presence of large boulders) had more biologically diverse communities with an abundance of epifaunal organisms. In fished areas, the attached epifaunal community was limited. Similarly, Collie *et al.* (1997) investigated the effects of multiple methods of bottom towing fishing gear (otter trawl and scallop dredging) on benthic megafaunal communities in gravel habitat on Georges Bank at depths between 47 to 90 metres. No information on the types of otter trawls used were given. Numerical abundance of organisms, biomass and species diversity were all significantly greater at undisturbed sites, whilst evenness was greater at disturbed sites (Collie *et al.*, 1997). Disturbed sites are likely to have greater evenness because disturbance of towed gear prevents one species becoming numerically dominant (Collie *et al.*, 1997). Small fragile polychaetes, shrimps and brittle stars were absent or less common at disturbed sites. At undisturbed sites epifauna such as tube-dwelling polychaetes, bushy bryozoans and hydroids provide a complex habitat.

Engel and Kvitek (1998) documented differences between lightly (average of 220 trawl hours per year) and heavily (average of 816 trawl hours per year) otter trawled areas with similar bottom types (gravel, coarse sand, medium-fine sand and silt-clay) off central California. The densities and abundance of all invertebrate epifaunal species were higher in the lightly fished area when compared to the heavily fished area, including significant differences in species of sea pens, sea stars, sea anemones and sea slugs. Opportunistic species including oligochaetes, nematodes, ophiuroids were found in greater densities in the heavily fished area in each year of the study (1994-1996), whilst significantly more polychaete species were reported in lightly fished areas and no significant difference in the number of crustaceans between the two areas. The study concluded that high levels of trawling can lead to a decrease in habitat complexity and biodiversity and lead to subsequent increases in opportunistic species.

Thrush *et al.* (1998) assessed the importance of fishing pressure (by collecting samples along a fishing pressure gradient) in accounting for variation in community composition in an area characterised by varied sediment characteristics (from 1 to 48% mud) in Hauraki Gulf in New Zealand at depths between 17 to 35 metres. In this area, a major fin fishery for snapper (*Chrysophrys auratus*) exists. The typical trawl gear used consists of 480 kg doors, ground rope of 140-150 mm diameter rubber bobbins, steel balls, with a total ground rope mass of 240 kg (not including sweeps and bridles). After accounting for differences in environmental conditions, the study reported 15-20% of the variability in the macrofauna community composition was attributed to fishing. Observations following reduction in fishing pressures included increases in the density of echinoderms, long-lived surface dwelling organisms, total number of species, individuals and species diversity. Decreased fishing pressure led to significant increases large epifaunal densities.

Experimental fishing manipulations investigating the impacts of otter trawling on muddy sediments report relatively modest changes in benthic communities in the short-term (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Tuck *et al.* (1998) investigated the biological effects of trawling disturbance on a sheltered sealoch in Scotland at 35-40 m depth in an area characterised by 95% silt and clay using modified rockhopper ground gear without a net. Unfortunately further details on the gear are not available. Trawling was conducted one day per month for 16 months and biological surveys were completed after 5, 10 and 16 months of disturbance and then for a further 6, 12 and 18 months after trawling disturbance in trawled and untrawled control areas (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Johnson *et al.* 2002). The response of different community parameters (i.e. species diversity, abundance) to trawling disturbance varied. Infaunal community structure became significantly altered after 5 months of fishing and remained so

throughout the duration of the experiment. No significant differences in infaunal species richness however were detected during the first 10 months of trawling. After 16 months of trawling disturbance, and throughout the recovery period, species richness was significantly higher in the trawled site. Infaunal abundance was greater in the trawled site prior to fishing and after 12 months of recovery, although not after 18 months of recovery. The abundance of certain species (predominantly polychaetes), increased within the trawled site and others (i.e. bivalves) declined. Species diversity was lower in the fished site throughout the whole period, including prior to fishing commencing and no effects on total biomass were reported. Experimental trawling, with a commercial otter trawl (dimensions unknown), over a muddy substrate at a depth of 30 to 40 m off the Catalan coast in Spain reported a similar percentage abundance of most major taxa between fished (polychaetes, 51.5%; crustaceans, 10.9%; molluscs, 34.7%; other taxa, 2.9%) and unfished (polychaetes, 48.9%; crustaceans, 11.3%; molluscs, 36.1%; other taxa, 3.7%) sites (Sanchez *et al.*, 2000). Analysis of species richness and diversity indicated that the infaunal community did not alter during the first 102 hours following a single sweep. The number of individuals and taxa were significantly greater after 150 hours in an area subject to a single sweep, although no effect was detected after 72 hours in an area subject to a double sweep. For some taxa, significant differences in abundance were between fished and unfished areas including Chaetopteridae, a family of polychaete worms, and *Amphiura chiajes* whose abundances were greater in fished areas after a single sweep and Cirratulidae, another family of polychaete worms, whose abundance were greater in unfished areas after a double sweep. The authors speculated a decrease in the abundance of certain species in the unfished area may indicate the effects of natural variability at the site exceeds that of fishing disturbance.

The initial impacts of otter-trawl gear on muddy habitats are relatively modest, however cumulative long-term disturbance can lead to significant changes in benthic communities (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Hinz *et al.* (2009) investigated the biological consequences of long-term chronic disturbance caused by the otter trawl *Nephrops norvegicus* (Norway lobster) fishery along a gradient of fishing intensity over a muddy fishing ground in the northeastern Irish Sea. Trawling intensity and its spatial distribution was estimated using overflight data and log book records of hours spent fishing. The study reported reductions in infaunal abundance of 72% from the lowest trawling effort recorded (1.3 times trawled/year) to the highest (18.2 times trawled/year). Over the same range of trawl intensities, infaunal biomass was reduced by 77% and species richness decreased by 40%, whilst epifaunal abundance was reduced by 81% and epifaunal species richness decreased by 18%. It is worth noting that community descriptors were log transformed and therefore the reported reductions in abundance, biomass and species richness are greatest at low trawling intensities and less severe at higher trawling intensities. Hiddink *et al.* (2006a) conducted an assessment of large-scale impacts of a bottom trawl fishery on benthic production, biomass and species richness in the North Sea, using a size-based approach for assessing trawling impacts on benthic communities. Model development allowed for the effects of habitat parameters on the dynamics of benthic communities and to predict the effects of trawling on species richness. Data used to validate the model was collected from 33 sampling stations in four areas of soft sediment in the North Sea subject to different levels of trawling intensity. The model predicted that benthic community biomass was reduced by 56% and production by 21%. Queirós *et al.* (2006), analysed the biomass, production and size structure of two communities from a muddy sand and a sandy habitat with respect to quantified gradients of trawling disturbance on real fishing grounds in the Dogger Bank (sandy) and Irish Sea (muddy sand). The Dogger Bank is mostly fished by beam trawlers targeting plaice and the Irish Sea is fished by otter trawls targeting Norway lobster. In the muddy sand habitat, chronic trawling was found to have a negative impact on biomass and production of benthic communities, whilst no impact was identified on benthic communities within the sandy habitat. The differences in result for each habitat type are caused by differences in size structure between the two communities that occur in response to an increase in trawling disturbance. Lindholm *et*

al. (2013) reported similar results in an area of coarse silt/fine sand at 160-170 m depth with experimental trawling using a small footrope otter trawl (61 ft head rope, 60 ft ground rope, 8 inch and 4 inch discs, 3.5 ft x 4.5 700 lbs ft trawl doors) (Lindholm *et al.*, 2013). The study reported no measurable effects of trawling on densities of invertebrates, including sessile and mobile epifauna and infauna. The study area was characterised by a high level of patchiness in both space and time with regards to invertebrate assemblage, particularly with respect to opportunistic species (polychaete worms and brittlestars). Densities of sessile and mobile invertebrates were low in the study and varied considerably between plots and study periods, suggesting that the effects on trawling should be considered with background environmental variation in mind.

Beam trawls

Repeated experimental trawling (3 times) with a 7000 kg, 12 m beam trawl with tickler chains led to a significant 40-65 % decrease in the density of starfishes, small heart urchins, tube-dwelling polychaete worms and small crustaceans, although other species, namely worm and mollusc species, did not change and a number increased (Bergman *et al.* 1990; Bergman & Hup, 1992). The study was conducted in the North Sea in an area of medium hard sandy sediments at a depth of 30 m. Bergman and van Santbrink (2000) reported similar mortality levels of 5-40% in gastropods, starfish, crustaceans and annelid worms and a 20-65% mortality of bivalves using a 12 m and 4 m beam trawl with ticklers and a 4 m beam with chain matrix over shallow sandy areas and deep silty sand areas in the North Sea. Direct mortality in a number of infaunal species was higher in silty areas than in sandy areas (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). The 12 m beam trawl caused the highest annual fishing mortality (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). In an area of stable coarse sand and gravel, experimental trawling (10 to 12 passes) with a 3.5 tonne 4 m beam trawl with chain matrix led to a 54% reduction in the number of infaunal species and 40% reduction in individuals, a decrease in slow moving epifauna and an increase in mobile species (Kaiser & Spencer, 1996, Kaiser *et al.*, 1996, 1998, 1999). At the scale and intensity of the study, no changes in densities were detected (Kaiser & Spencer, 1996, Kaiser *et al.*, 1996, 1998, 1999). The same experimental treatment was applied to an area characterised by mobile sand ribbons and megaribbons, however no differences in the benthic community were detected (Kaiser & Spencer, 1996b, Kaiser *et al.*, 1996b, 1998, 1999). A study on the impacts of chronic beam trawling in central regions of the North Sea reported significant decreases in infaunal biomass and production in a region of muddy sand sediment and depth of 55 to 75 m (Silver Pit) in response to trawling intensity (Jennings *et al.* 2001). The effects of trawling disturbance were not significant on epifauna and in another region, characterised by sand with a depth of 40-65 m (The Hills) and smaller range of trawling intensity, a relationship between infaunal biomass and production could not be established (Jennings *et al.*, 2001). Another study, also based in the central North Sea, investigated the impacts of experimental beam trawling (using a 4 m beam trawl with a chain matrix) on meiofauna and reported that meiofauna are more resistant to trawling disturbance than macrofauna and have the potential to withstand chronic trawling impacts (Schratzberger *et al.* 2002).

Size of fauna

Many studies have observed a shift in benthic community structure from one dominated by relatively high biomass species to one dominated by a high abundance of small-sized organisms (Collie *et al.*, 2000). The predicted change in shallow water communities, as a result of trawling disturbance, is an increase in r-strategists (i.e. polychaetes) and decrease K-strategist (i.e. molluscs and crustaceans) (Jones, 1992). A shift

towards small-sized species has the potential to alter benthic productivity as body mass is negatively correlated with individual production to biomass ratio (Jennings *et al.*, 2001; Queirós *et al.*, 2006). Overall reductions in benthic productivity have been reported in areas where intense bottom trawling takes place (Jennings *et al.*, 2001). Increases in the biomass or production of smaller infauna have been found to be small in relation to losses in overall community biomass and production that occurred as a result of the depletion of larger individuals (Jennings *et al.*, 2001). Smaller bodied fauna are incapable of utilising resources that become available as larger fauna are removed from the community (Queirós *et al.*, 2006). Under such conditions, resources may be redirected to other parts of the system (Queirós *et al.*, 2006). In areas of natural disturbance, the dominance of smaller bodied fauna may be a general adaptation to such a dynamic environment and therefore the community may seem relatively unaffected by trawling (Queirós *et al.*, 2006).

Populations of larger, longer-lived species are less resilient to fishing impacts than smaller, short-lived species as they are able to compensate for any increases in mortality (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). In addition, lighter animals are often pushed aside by the pressure wave in front of the net (Gilkinson *et al.*, 1998; Jennings *et al.*, 2001). Larger fauna are mainly affected through direct physical contact with the gear and may be removed from the community (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000; Queirós *et al.*, 2006). Bergman and van Santbrink (2000) revealed a size-dependent trend for some species with respect to direct mortality from a 12 and 4 m beam trawl. In areas of silty sediments, individuals of the bivalve species *Chamelea gallina* above 2 cm were more vulnerable with mortalities ranging between 22-26%, compared to smaller specimens (4-7% mortality). The impact caused by contact with the fishing gear is not comparable to natural disturbance, and mortalities in more mobile and dynamic sediments will not necessarily be lower than in stable sediments (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). The impacts on densities of small individuals may however be greater if the larger animals in question live deeper in the sediment, in addition to their potentially more efficient escape possibilities (Bergman & Hup, 1992; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999).

Studies have shown that trawling impacts on meiofauna (animals that pass through a 500 µm mesh sieve but are retained in a 63 µm mesh sieve) are relatively limited (Brylinsky *et al.*, 1994; Scratzberger *et al.*, 2002). Brylinsky *et al.* (1994) reported reductions in the abundance of nematodes after experimental flounder trawling on the intertidal in the Bay of Fundy, although the rate of recovery was rapid following trawling disturbance. Scratzberger *et al.* (2002) reported no short- to medium- term (1-392 days after experimental trawling) impacts on diversity or biomass of meiofauna from experimental fishing with a 4 m beam trawl in muddy sand in the southern North Sea. Mild effects on community structure were reported at one location however these impacts were minor in relation to seasonal change. The authors suggested that meiofauna are more resistant to beam trawling than macrofauna and they have the potential to withstand the effects of chronic trawling. Their resistance to trawling is thought to be related to their small body size as they are resuspended rather than killed, combined with their short generation cycles which allow populations to withstand elevated mortality.

Faunal groups and species responses

The relative impact of bottom towed fishing gear on benthic organisms is species-specific and largely related to their biological characteristics and physical habitat. The vulnerability of an organism is ultimately related to whether or not it is infaunal or epifaunal, mobile or sessile and soft-bodied or hard-shelled (Mercaldo-Allen & Goldberg, 2011). Fragile fauna (i.e. bivalves and sea cucumbers) have been shown to be particularly

vulnerable to trawling damage and disturbance and sedentary and slowing moving species can be significantly lower (Kaiser & Spencer, 1996; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999). Motile groups and infaunal bivalves have shown mixed responses to trawling disturbance, with life history considerations such as habitats requirements and feeding modes likely to play a key role in determining a species response (McConnaughey *et al.*, 2000; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). In a meta-analysis of experimental fishing impact studies, conducted by Kaiser *et al.* (2006), otter trawling was found to have the greatest impact on suspension feeders in mud habitats, perhaps reflecting the depth of penetration from the otter doors, whilst the response of suspension feeders and deposit feeders to beam trawling was highly variable. The most negative effect on deposit feeders was found in gravel habitats and the most negative effect on suspension feeders was found in sand habitats (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Suspension feeding bivalves, such as *Corbula gibba*, are largely unable to escape burial of more than 5 cm (Maurer *et al.*, 1982) and are also sensitive to high sedimentation rates that may occur following intensive trawling (Howell & Shelton, 1970; Tuck *et al.*, 1998). Having said this, larger-sized individuals have been shown to be more resistant to trawling disturbance as they are relatively robust (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000).

Studies have revealed mixed effects on epifauna (organisms that inhabit the seabed surface). Jennings *et al.*, (2001) found that chronic trawling disturbance had no significant effect on epifauna in the North Sea. Similarly, no long term effects on the number of epifaunal species or individuals were detected by Tuck *et al.* (1998), although a number of species-specific changes in density did occur (increase in *Ophiura* sp. and decreases in *Hippoglossoides platessoides*, *Metridium senile* and *Buccinum undatum*). The lack of long term effects detected by Tuck *et al.* (1998) is likely to be compounded by the fact that beam trawl gear used was not equipped with a net, as greater effects on epifauna may be expected. The removal of 7 tonnes of epifaunal was reported by Pitcher *et al.* (2000) during experimental trawling, however no significant changes in the density of epifauna were reported (Thrush & Dayton, 2002). Kenchington *et al.* (2001) investigated the impacts of otter trawling on benthic communities on a sandy bottom in Grand Banks, Newfoundland over a three year period. Changes in the benthic community were sampled using an epibenthic sledge. The sled is largely used to sample epifauna and some infauna as the sled penetrates to a depth of 2 to 3 cm. Samples collected using the benthic sled revealed a 24% reduction in average biomass in trawled corridors compared to reference corridors. Hinz *et al.* (2009) investigated the biological consequences of long-term chronic disturbance caused by the otter trawl *Nephrops norvegicus* (Norway lobster) fishery along a gradient of fishing intensity over a muddy fishing ground in the northeastern Irish Sea. The study reported reductions in epifaunal abundance of 81% from the lowest trawling effort recorded (1.3 times trawled/year) to the highest (18.2 times trawled/year). Over the same range of trawl intensities, epifaunal species richness decreased by 18%, while no effect was evident for epibenthic biomass.

Epifaunal biomass at high trawling intensity sites was reported to be dominated by *Asterias rubens*, a possible response to elevated food availability in the form of biota killed or damaged by trawling (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Starfish species can respond rapidly to prey availability (Freeman *et al.*, 2001) and are known to be resilient from the damaging impacts of trawls (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, despite lower diversity, a greater dominance of the sea star, *Asterias amurensis*, was reported in heavily fished areas of the eastern Bering Sea (McConnaughey *et al.*, 2000). The overall mean abundance of *A. amurensis* was 58.5 kg/ha in the heavily fished, compared with 53.1 kg/ha in the unfished area. In contrast, Bergman and Hup (1992) reported a 43% reduction in the mean density of *A. rubens* after a single beam trawling. Generally speaking, a number of studies have shown to have adverse impacts on echinoderms, including a 0-26% mortality in silty sand and 12-16% mortality in sand as a result of otter trawling in the North Sea (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000) and a 24% reduction in total biomass of mega-epibenthic species as a

result of otter trawling on a sandy bottom in Grand Banks, owing primarily to reductions in sand dollars, brittle stars, soft corals, sea urchins and snow crabs (Kenchington *et al.*, 2001). Trawling caused significant damage only to echinoderms, with the highest probability of damage occurring on the sea urchin (10 percent damage) (Kenchington *et al.*, 2001). Large and fragile echinoderms particularly susceptible to trawling, include the sea urchins *Brissopsis lyrifera* and *Echinocardium cordatum* (Ball *et al.*, 2000), the latter of which has been reported to have a mortality of 10-40% after the single passage of a 4 m and 12 m beam trawl (higher in silty areas than in sandy areas) (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). Jennings *et al.* (2001) reported highly significant reductions in the biomass of burrowing sea urchins in response to a chronic beam trawling in the North Sea.

A meta-analysis by Kaiser *et al.* (2006) showed beam trawling in sand to have a greater individual impact on crustaceans, echinoderms and molluscs when compared with annelids, whilst otter trawling in muddy sand appeared to have a greater impact on crustaceans than annelids and molluscs. The single passage of a 4m and 12 m beam trawl in sand and silty sand led to direct mortalities of up to 22% in small-sized bivalves and crustaceans and in megafaunal species up to 68% for bivalves and 49% for crustaceans (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). Bivalves such as *Mya truncata*, *Lutraria lutraria* and *Nucula nitidosa* showed greater densities in samples taken after trawling compared to those taken prior to trawling. By contrast, Tuck *et al.* (1998) reported a decline in *Nucula nitidosa* and *Corbula gibba* in abundance in the trawled area relative to reference area, with the former species being identified as sensitive. Other mollusc species reported to be sensitive to trawling disturbance includes the tellin shells, *Tellina fabula* (Bergman & Hup, 1992). Jennings *et al.* (2001) reported highly significant reductions in the biomass of bivalves in response to a chronic beam trawling in the North Sea. The physical interaction with trawl doors with the sea bed was simulated in a test tank in order to examine physical disturbance and biological damage (Gilkinson *et al.*, 1998). During the simulation, bivalves which were buried in the scour path were displaced to the berm and 58-70% of displaced individuals were completely or partially exposed on the surface. Despite this, of the 42 specimens in the scour path, only two showed major damage, despite being displaced. A number of studies have reported limited impacts of molluscs in general as a result of trawling disturbance (Bergman & Hup, 1992; Prena *et al.*, 1999).

Experimental fishing manipulations have shown that the impacts of trawling disturbance on annelids are limited, and in some instance may be positive, particularly with respect to polychaetes. Experimental flounder trawling on an intertidal silty habitat in the Bay of Fundy revealed no impact on either the composition or abundance of polychaetes, the majority of which are tube dwelling (Brylinsky *et al.*, 1994). Whilst the single passage of a 4 m and 12 m beam trawl on sandy and silty sediment led to direct mortalities of 31% for annelids, principally the tubedwelling polychaete *Pectinaria koreni*, the mortality of many other small annelids observed was negligible (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). Ball *et al.* (2000) reported a decrease in abundance in most species following experimental trawling with a Nephrops otter trawl, except for most polychaete species which increased in abundance following trawling. These species included small opportunistic species such as *Chaetozone setosa* (52%), *Prionospio fallax* (149%) and *Scolecopsis tridentata* (457%) or large scavengers such as *Nephtys incisa* (16%). Tuck *et al.* (1998) reported a consistently higher proportion of polychaetes in the treatment areas, with an increase in the abundance of opportunistic polychaete species belonging to the cirratulid family, *Chaetozone setosa* and *Caulleryella zelandica*, in response to trawling disturbance. The polychaete, *Pseudopolydora paucibranchiata*, also increased in density, immediately following trawling disturbance (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). Other polychaete species however did decline in response to fishing disturbance, including *Scoloplos armiger*, *Nephtys cirrosa* and *Terebellides stroemi* (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). *Scoloplos armiger* is thought to be sensitive to burial, whilst *N. cirrosa* and *T. stroemi* are larger bodied and therefore more likely to

be adversely affected by trawling disturbance (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). Bergman and Hup (1992) found that three-fold trawling had minimal effect on the densities of worm species, except for *Magelona*, *Lanice* and *Spiophanes*, although densities of the former species significantly increased after experimental trawling for larger individuals. Jennings *et al.* (2001; 2002) reported no significant changes in polychaetes in response to a chronic beam trawling in the North Sea. In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Kaiser *et al.*, (1998) studied the effect of beam trawling of megafauna in an area of stable sediments in the north eastern and found a reduction the abundance in the polychaetes *Aphrodita aculeata* and *Nephtys* spp., although these differences were no longer apparent 6 months after trawling.

A number of studies have identified common trends for certain species in response to trawling disturbance. The gastropod *Buccinum undatum* is shown to decline in areas of trawling disturbance (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Kaiser *et al.*, 2000), with one study stating the effects of trawling persisted for 6 months into the recovery period (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). Similarly, *Echinocardium cordatum* has been identified as a fragile and highly vulnerable to trawling disturbance (Bergman & Hup, 1992; Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000), showing declines of 40 to 60% in density in one study (Bergman & Hup, 1992). Similar reductions were shown by the polychaete *Lanice conchilega* (Bergman & Hup, 1992), a species of polychaete which is highly incapable of movement in response to disturbance and therefore take a significant period of time to recolonise disturbed habitats (Goss-Custard, 1977). Other species that have been reported to exhibit adverse effects of trawling include the polychaete species *Nephtys* (Kaiser *et al.*, 1998; Tuck *et al.*, 1998) and *Magelona* (Bergman & Hup, 1992; Kaiser *et al.*, 2000) and the emergent soft coral *Alcyonium digitatum* (Kaiser *et al.*, 1998; 2000; Depestele *et al.*, 2012). By contrast, the brittle star, *Ophiura* sp., has been reported to increase or remain constant in response to trawling disturbance (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Gubbay & Knapman, 1999; Kaiser *et al.*, 2000; Callaway *et al.*, 2007).

4.4.3 Sampling constraints

Experimental trawling studies provide a valuable tool for investigating the mechanisms by which bottom-trawl disturbance physically and biologically impacts on benthic habitats (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). These experimental fishing manipulations are however often small-scale at spatial scales of km² to ha (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Some contain the caveat that the study area chosen may have been markedly affected by previous fishing activities (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). If there are substantial changes in the benthic community in the initial period of trawling development, it may be difficult to detect subsequent trends or impacts from fishing because the community is resistant to such effects or because effects are relatively insignificant compared to those caused previously (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). The benefits of using pristine, unfished sites which are then subject to experimental trawling gives a good idea of a benthic community's response and allows recovery to be quantified following fishing disturbance (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). These findings provide helpful indications of instantaneous effects and relative severity of impacts for different gear types (Collie *et al.*, 2000; Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Comparisons of high, low or no fishing intensity involves the classification of such areas in these fishing intensity levels (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). These are often relative measures that are specific to each study, limiting generality and comparability (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Study sites chosen as unfished sites are often inaccessible to fisheries due to an obstruction and these can generate confounding effects (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Likewise, areas used as control sites may be subject to different environmental conditions, leading to further confounding effects (Hinz *et al.*, 2009).

Experimental studies do however have a number of significant limitations (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Quantifying the effects of fishing impacts under realistic fishing conditions is difficult and the spatial and temporal scale of disturbance generated by a trawling fleet is unfeasible in an experimental context (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). The occurrence of chronic fishing disturbance over large spatial scales can be expected to lead to greater effects and slower recovery rates than those reported in experimental studies (Hinz *et al.*, 2009).

Measures used to detect changes in the benthic community (i.e. abundance, biomass) can be subject to considerable temporal variability and make it difficult to detect any changes caused by trawling disturbance (Løkkeborg, 2005). A number of studies have shown that control areas experience considerable change throughout the duration of a study and such temporal changes occur irrespective of trawling disturbance (Kenchington *et al.*, 2001; Løkkeborg, 2005). It can be difficult to attribute long-term changes to benthos to trawling alone, since other forces are likely to be acting on the community, including natural fluctuations, chemical dumping and eutrophication (Pearson & Barnett 1987; Rees & Eleftheriou 1989; Jones 1992). Sanchez *et al.* (2000) concluded the decrease in certain species in unfished areas was likely to indicate natural variability at the site exceeds the effects of fishing disturbance. Similarly, Kaiser *et al.* (1998) concluded that only subtle changes in community structure were caused by trawling and effects caused by seasonal fluctuations and natural disturbance were more pronounced (Løkkeborg, 2005).

4.4.4 Natural disturbance

Communities that exist in areas of high natural disturbance rates are likely to have characteristics that provide resilience to additional disturbance (Hiddink *et al.*, 2006a). Any vulnerable species would be unable to exist within conditions of frequent disturbance (Hiddink *et al.*, 2006a). The impact of trawling is therefore expected to be higher in areas that experience low levels of natural disturbance and lower at locations of high levels of natural disturbance (Hiddink *et al.*, 2006a). Despite the significance between benthic community responses to trawling disturbance and levels of natural disturbance, the relationship remains unquantified (Hiddink *et al.*, 2006a). There can often be a failure to detect the effect of experimental fishing disturbance in areas exposed to high levels of natural disturbance (Thrush & Dayton, 2002). Whilst it may be appropriate to equate effects of natural disturbance to some effects of trawling disturbance, it is not always the case. Fishing can involve a higher intensity of disturbance, although this is dependent on frequency and extent (Thrush & Dayton, 2002). A trawl effects small-sized organisms through sediment perturbations, which is comparable to that of natural disturbance, whereas its impacts on larger-bodied organisms will be through physical contact with fishing gear (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000). The relatively low impact on benthic communities inhabiting mobile sediments might therefore only apply to small-bodied animals (Bergman & van Santbrink, 2000).

The Solent, including the Needles, is a dynamic area with strong tidal flows in the Needles mid-Channel reaching up to 4.5 knots on a spring tide⁹. Bolam *et al.* (2014) modelled natural seabed disturbance as part of a study looking at the sensitivity of microbenthic second production to trawling in the English sector of the greater North Sea. Natural seabed disturbance was represented by tidal bed stress and kinetic energy at the seabed. Maps showing the probability of natural forces disturbing the seabed to 1 and 4 cm for a range of frequencies (once, 10 times, and 17

⁹ Information and diagrams on the tidal streams experienced in the western Solent can be found at <http://www.visitmyharbour.com/articles/3188/hourly-tidal-streams-west-solent-area-np337>

times were also created. These maps cover the Solent (Figures 4 and 5), although the resolution is low as the area covered includes the North Sea and western English Channel. These maps however do demonstrate that the Solent, particularly the western Solent, including the Needles MCZ, is subject to relatively high levels of natural disturbance. Annual tidal bed stress ranges from 1.0-2.5 NM^2 in the western part of the Needles MCZ and 2.5-7.5 NM^2 in eastern part of the site. Kinetic energy at the seabed ranges from moderate to high within the site. The probability of natural forces disturbing the seabed to 1 cm reach the highest probability(0.81-1.00) at all frequencies.

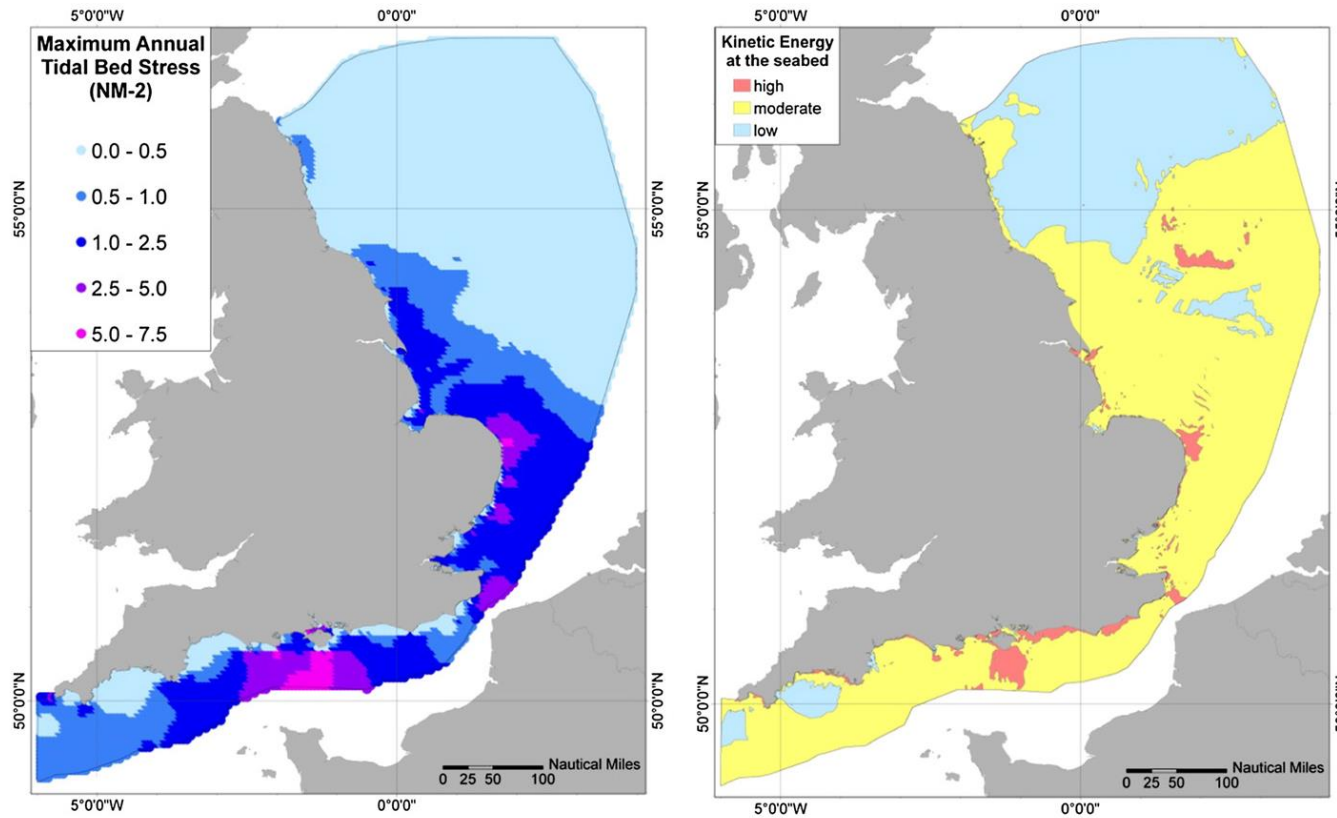


Figure 4. Maps of modelled natural disturbance of the seabed, represented by tidal bed stress (left) and kinetic energy (right). Source: Bolam *et al.*, 2014

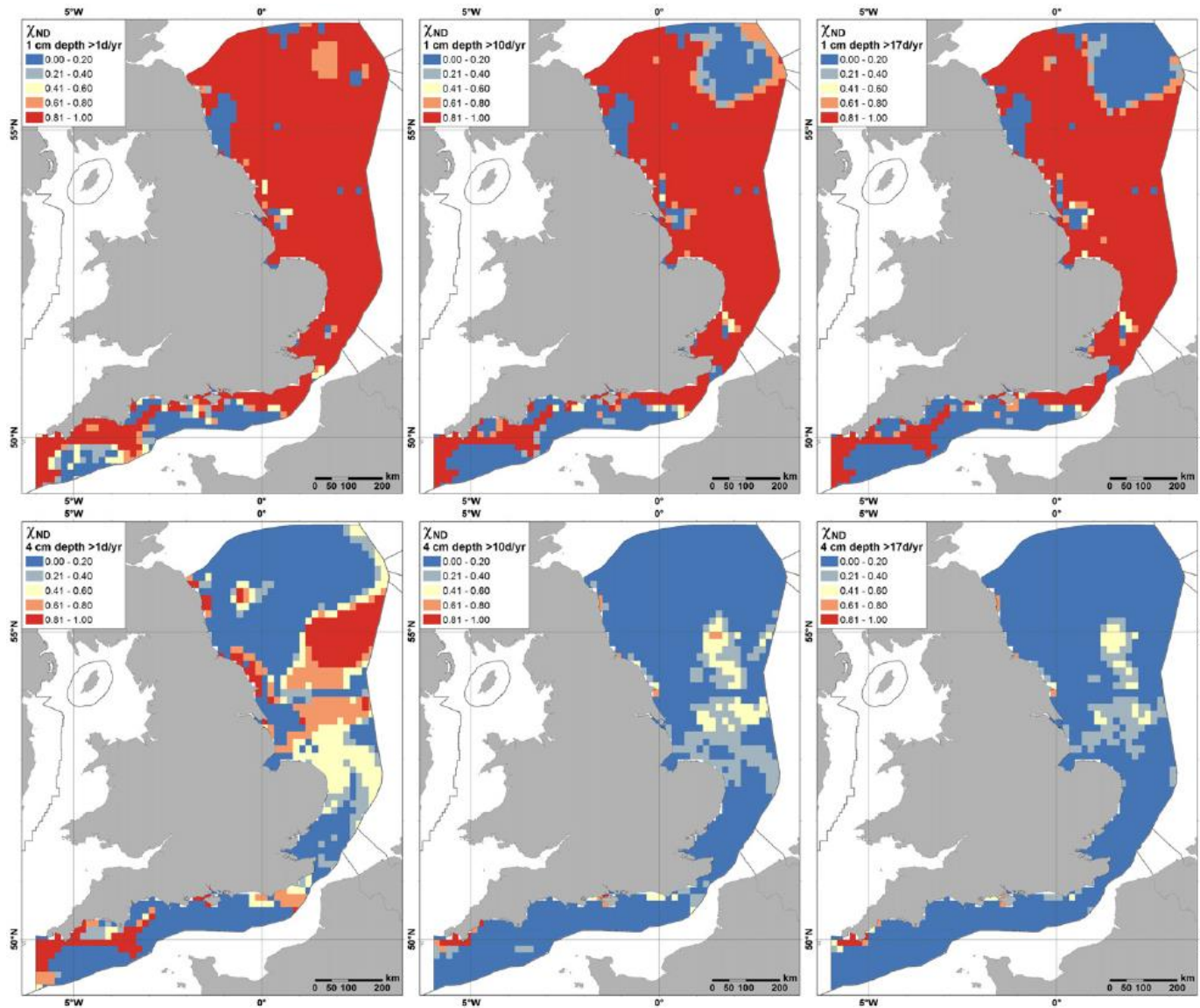


Figure 5. Maps of the modelled probability that natural forces disturb the seabed to different depths of 1 and 4 cm for a range of frequencies per year (once, 10 and 17 times). Source: Bolam *et al.*, 2014

In the context of MPA management, it is important to qualify which changes occur to naturally dynamic communities as a result of natural variability within the environment, as opposed to that resulting from anthropogenic pressures (Goodchild *et al.*, 2015). The reason being that the conservation objectives of a site are 'subject to natural change (Goodchild *et al.*, 2015). It can therefore prove difficult in ascertaining if the conservation objective of a site is being compromised by anthropogenic pressures if the MPA feature is also subject to natural variability (Goodchild *et al.*, 2015). Potential changes caused by towed fishing gear could be masked by the impacts of natural sediment movements which maintain the benthic community in a state of successional flux (Løkkeborg, 2005; Goodchild *et al.*, 2015). A recent study attempted to analyse existing data to study effects of towed fishing gears on mobile sediments against a background of natural variability, however, it concluded the results of the study were of little direct value in terms of MPA management (Goodchild *et al.*, 2015)

4.4.5 Sensitivity

Habitat type

In a meta-analysis of 39 studies, which were conducted on varying sediment types, the most negative impacts occurred in muddy sand and gravel habitats (Collie *et al.*, 2000). Surprisingly, the meta-analysis revealed the least impact was observed on mud habitats and not sand, which was not consistent for the results obtained for abundance and species richness (Collie *et al.*, 2000). It was however noted that this may have been explained by the fact most studies conducted on mud habitats were looking at the impacts of otter trawls and that if data were available for the effect of dredgers a more negative response for this habitat may have been observed (Collie *et al.*, 2000). In a separate meta-analysis of 101 different fishing impact manipulations, the initial and long term impacts of different fishing types were shown to be strongly habitat-specific (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Kaiser *et al.* (2006) reported that soft sediments, particularly muddy sands, were vulnerable to fishing impacts. Beam trawling had significant negative short-term impacts in sand and muddy sand habitats, although the relative effect was less and recovery times shorter than for intertidal dredging (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Otter trawling had a significant initial effect on muddy sand and mud habitats, although long-term impacts, post trawling, on mud habitats were positive (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). The initial impact on benthic communities from otter trawl disturbance on mud was estimated to be -29%, -15% on sand and +3% on gravel (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006; Hinz *et al.*, 2009).

A number of studies have found limited detectable impacts of trawling in sand habitats (Van Dolah *et al.*, 1991; Kaiser & Spencer, 1996; Kenchington *et al.*, 2001; Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Queirós *et al.* (2006) investigated the impact of chronic trawling on two communities from a muddy sand and a sandy habitat in the Irish Sea and Dogger Bank respectively. Chronic trawling was found to have an adverse effect on the biomass and production of benthic communities in muddy sand, whilst no impact was identified on benthic communities within the sandy habitat. It is important to note the two areas are fished with different gear types; the Dogger Bank is mostly fished by beam trawlers targeting plaice and the Irish Sea is fished by otter trawls targeting Norway lobster. Another study by Lindholm *et al.* (2013) reported no measurable effects of otter trawling using a small footrope otter trawl on the density of benthic invertebrates in areas of coarse silt/fine sand.

Bolam *et al.* (2014) investigated the relative sensitivity of benthic macrofauna to trawling, both short- and long-term and used this information to describe the spatial variation in sensitivity of secondary production. In general, it was found that the more sensitive and productive regions

(northern North Sea and western English Channel) are associated with poorly-sorted, gravelly or muddy sediments, whilst less sensitive and less productive regions (southern North Sea) are associated with well-sorted sandy sediments (Bolam *et al.*, 2014). Faunal assemblages, whose total production has a low overall sensitivity to trawling, occur in sandy sediment sediments containing low silt/clay and/or gravel fractions and such sensitivity inversely correlates with levels of natural disturbance. Thus, total production is more sensitive to trawling in deep regions with little or no natural sediment disturbance (Bolam *et al.*, 2014). This is largely driven by long-term sensitivity of taxa and less so by instantaneous sensitivity (Bolam *et al.*, 2014).

The reason for the sensitivity of different sediment types to the impacts of bottom towed fishing gear is related to the physical stability of the seabed (Collie *et al.*, 2000). Fauna living within unconsolidated sediments such as those in shallow and sandy environments, are more adapted to dynamic environments, periodic resuspension and smothering and therefore able to recover more quickly (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Collie *et al.*, 2000). Experimental studies investigating disturbance in shallow sandy environments indicate changes in community response are generally short-term (Kaiser *et al.*, 1998) or non-existent (Queirós *et al.*, 2006; Lindholm *et al.*, 2013). Impacts of bottom towed gear are therefore greatest in areas with low levels of natural disturbance (Hiddink *et al.*, 2003).

Sensitivity analyses

A number of recent studies have endeavoured to map the sensitivity of habitats to different pressures (Tillin *et al.*, 2010) and fishing activities (Hall *et al.*, 2008).

Tillin *et al.* (2010) developed a pressure-feature sensitivity matrix, which in effect is a risk assessment of the compatibility of specific pressure levels and different features of marine protected areas. The approach used considered the resistance (tolerance) and resilience (recovery) of a feature in order to assess its sensitivity to relevant pressures (Tillin *et al.*, 2010). Where features have been identified as moderately or highly sensitive to benchmark pressure levels, management measures may be needed to support achievement of conservation objectives in situations where activities are likely to exert comparable levels of pressure (Tillin *et al.*, 2010). In the context of this assessment, the relevant pressures likely to be exerted are penetration and abrasion of the seabed and removal of non-target species. Sensitivity of subtidal sediment types to these pressures vary from not sensitive to high, generally with low confidence in these assessments (Table 7). Subtidal mixed sediments appear to be sensitive overall, followed by subtidal mud, whilst subtidal coarse sediment and sand appears to have relatively low sensitivity overall.

Hall *et al.* 2008 aimed to assess the sensitivity of benthic habitats to fishing activities. A matrix approach was used, composed of fishing activities and marine habitat types and for each fishing activity sensitivity was scored for four levels of activity (Hall *et al.*, 2008). The matrix was completed using a mixture of scientific literature and expert judgement (Hall *et al.*, 2008). The type of fishing activities chosen were 'beam trawl & scallop dredges' and 'demersal trawls' as these encompassed the fishing activities under consideration. Generally, stable habitat types exhibit high sensitivity to heavy gear intensities for beam trawls and scallop dredges and demersal trawls (Table 8). A large number of habitat types exhibit medium sensitivity to moderate gear intensities, except for beam trawls and scallop dredges in subtidal muddy sand and stable rich mixed sediments. All habitat types, except stable rich mixed sediments, exhibit low sensitivity to light fishing intensity and all habitat types exhibit low

sensitivity to a single pass (Table 8). Generally, sensitivity across all habitat types is lower for light demersal trawls and seines, as would be expected (Table 8).

Table 7. Sensitivity of SAC features to pressures identified by Tillin *et al.* (2010). Confidence of sensitivity assessment is included in brackets.

Feature	Pressure			
	Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed – structural damage to seabed >25mm	Shallow abrasion/penetration – damage to seabed surface and penetration <25mm	Surface abrasion: damage to seabed surface features	Removal of non-target species
Subtidal coarse sediment	Low – Medium (Low)	Low – Medium (Low)	Not Sensitive – High (Low)	Not Sensitive – Medium (Low)
Subtidal sand	Low – Medium (Low to Medium)	Not Sensitive - Medium (Low)	Not Sensitive – Medium (Low)	Not Sensitive – Medium (High)
Subtidal mixed sediment	High (Low)	High (Low)	Medium (Low)	Low (Medium)
Subtidal mud	Medium (Low)	Medium (Low)	Low – Medium (Low)	Medium (Low to High)

Table 8. Sensitivity of SAC features to different intensities (high, medium, low, single pass) of oyster/mussel dredging as identified by Hall *et al.* (2008).

Gear Type	Habitat Type	Gear Intensity*			
		Heavy	Moderate	Light	Single pass
Beam trawls & scallop dredges	Subtidal stable muddy sands, sandy muds and muds	High	High	Low	Low
	Stable subtidal fine sands	High	Medium	Low	Low
	Dynamic, shallow water fine sands	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Stable spp. rich mixed sediments	High	High	Medium	Low
	Unstable coarse sediments – robust fauna	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Demersal trawls	Subtidal stable muddy sands, sandy muds and muds	High	Medium	Low	Low
	Stable subtidal fine sands	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Dynamic, shallow water fine sands	Medium	Low	Low	Low
	Stable spp. rich mixed sediments	High	Medium	Medium	Low
	Unstable coarse sediments – robust fauna	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Light demersal trawls and seines	Subtidal stable muddy sands, sandy muds and muds	Medium	Low	Low	Low
	Stable subtidal fine sands	Medium	Medium	Low	Low
	Dynamic, shallow water fine sands	Medium	Low	Low	Low
	Stable spp. rich mixed sediments	High	Medium	Low	Low
	Unstable coarse sediments – robust fauna	Low	Low	Low	Low

*Gear activity levels are defined as follows; Heavy – Daily in 2.5 nm x 2.5 nm, Moderate – 1 to 2 times a week in 2.5 nm x 2.5 nm Light – 1 to 2 times a month during a season in 2.5 nm x 2.5 nm, Single pass – Single

Biotope-level sensitivity analysis

A biotope-level sensitivity analysis was undertaken by Natural England as part of their formal advice received on 18th August 2017. As there is currently no information available on the biotopes which are present within the Needles MCZ, the biotopes present within the neighbouring Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation¹⁰ and their likely presence within the Needles MCZ were used to undertake a biotope-level sensitivity analyses to the potential pressures exerted by demersal trawling (as identified in the part A assessment). This analysis is displayed in Table 9 and only biotopes with a possible or likely presence within the Needles MCZ have been presented. Sensitivities of each biotope to potential pressures were taken from www.marlin.ac.uk.

Biotopes identified as being possible or likely within the Needles MCZ were based on expert judgement due to the lack of site-specific evidence on the range of biotopes present within the site. It is worth noting the possible drawbacks in using such an approach, namely differences in site-specific variables (i.e. energy regime) which makes a like-for-like comparison between neighbouring MPAs very difficult. It could lead to the mid-identification of possibly occurring biotopes within the Needles MCZ, as well as missing biotopes which may also be present. The broad-scale habitat types, subtidal mixed sediments and subtidal coarse sediment, occur throughout the extensive Solent Maritime SAC site and as such are likely to be subject to a wide range of physical regimes (i.e. exposure, energy regime). This leads to a large number of different biotopes occurring within one broad-scale habitat type, especially considering the potential for significant variation within the habitat type itself i.e. the PSA range of subtidal mixed sediment.

The analysis revealed 5 subtidal mixed sediment biotopes and 5 subtidal coarse sediment biotopes as possible or likely to occur within the Needles MCZ. Of these 10 biotopes, one is considered to have high sensitivity to one or more pressures, four are considered to have medium sensitivity to one or more pressures and the remaining biotopes have low sensitivity or are not considered sensitive. '*Ostrea edulis* beds on shallow sublittoral muddy mixed sediment' is the only biotope to be considered to have high sensitivity. This biotope is however unlikely to occur within the area subject to trawling activity as *O. edulis* has been recorded close inshore. '*Sabella pavonina* with sponges and anemones on infralittoral mixed sediment' is one of the four biotopes considered to have medium sensitivity to one more of the pressures, however the prevalence of this biotope is likely to be limited with only occasional records of *Sabella* within the site. Two of three remaining biotopes to exhibit medium sensitivity (*Flustra foliacea* and *Hydrallmania falcata* on tide-swept circalittoral mixed sediment; *Pomatoceros triqueter* with barnacles and bryozoan crusts on unstable circalittoral cobbles and pebbles) are considered likely to occur in more exposed parts of the site and as such may occur within the area subject to trawling activity.

¹⁰ Natural England's Solent Maritime SAC Conservation Advice – Advice on Operations

<https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/Marine/FAPMatrix.aspx?SiteCode=UK0030059&SiteName=solent+maritime&SiteNameDisplay=Solent+Maritime+SAC&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAArea>

Table 9. Biotope-level sensitivity analysis of biotopes within the neighbouring Solent Maritime SAC and likely to be present within the Needles MCZ. Sensitivities of each biotope to potential pressures were taken from www.marlin.ac.uk.

	Eunis Code	Biotope	Sensitivity to Pressure			Presence of Biotope
			Abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion	Removal of non-target species	
Subtidal mixed sediments	A5.435	<i>Ostrea edulis</i> beds on shallow sublittoral muddy mixed sediment	High	High	Medium	<i>O. edulis</i> has been recorded on the inside (eastern) edge of the site.
	A5.444	<i>Flustra foliacea</i> and <i>Hydrallmania falcata</i> on tide-swept circalittoral mixed sediment	Medium	Medium	Medium	Likely in more exposed parts of the site, possible in the north.
	A5.445	<i>Ophiothrix fragilis</i> and/or <i>Ophiocomina nigra</i> brittlestar beds on sublittoral mixed sediment	Medium	Medium	Medium	No information on potential location.
	A5.432	<i>Sabella pavonina</i> with sponges and anemones on infralittoral mixed sediment	Medium	Medium	Medium	Records of <i>Sabella</i> exist in the site but are occasional/ rare.
	A5.431	<i>Crepidula fornicata</i> with ascidians and anemones on infralittoral coarse mixed sediment	Low	Low	Low	No information on potential location.
Subtidal coarse sediment	A5.141	<i>Pomatoceros triqueter</i> with barnacles and bryozoan crusts on unstable circalittoral cobbles and pebbles	Low	Medium	Medium	Likely in more exposed parts of the site
	A5.143	<i>Protodorvillea kefersteini</i> and other polychaetes in impoverished circalittoral mixed gravelly sand	Low	Low	Low	No information on potential location.
	A5.144	<i>Neopentadactyla mixta</i> in circalittoral shell gravel or coarse sand	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Low	No information on potential location.
	A5.131	Sparse fauna on highly mobile sublittoral shingle (cobbles and pebbles)	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not relevant	Likely in more exposed parts of the site
	A5.137	Dense <i>Lanice conchilega</i> and other polychaetes in tide-swept infralittoral sand and mixed gravelly sand	Not sensitive	Not sensitive	Not relevant	Likely in more exposed parts of the site

4.4.6 Recovery

Recovery ultimately depends on the level of impact which is related to the weight of gear on the seabed, towing speed, the nature of bottom sediments and strength of tides and currents (Jones, 1992).

Habitat type and biological recovery

The timescale for recovery largely depends on sediment type, associated fauna and rate of natural disturbance (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Experimental studies have reported a variety of responses to trawling disturbance (Dernie *et al.*, 2003). Such variation arises from characteristics specific to the site, i.e. location, gear fishing, season and habitat (Dernie *et al.*, 2003). This hinders the formation of general conclusions and recovery rates of communities that would of use for ecosystem management (Dernie *et al.*, 2003).

Generally speaking, in locations where natural disturbance levels are high, the associated fauna are characterised by species adapted to withstand and recover from disturbance (Collie *et al.*, 2000; Dernie *et al.*, 2003; Roberts *et al.*, 2010). More stable habitats, which are often distinguished by high diversity and epifauna, are likely to take a greater time to recover (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). In a relatively recent meta-analysis on the biological impacts of different fishing activities, recovery of muddy sands was predicted to take months to years and sand was predicted to take days to months (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, Dernie *et al.* (2003) reported clean sand communities to have the most rapid rate of recovery following disturbance, with muds having an 'intermediate' recovery rate and muddy sand habitats having the longest recovery rates. More specifically, Kaiser *et al.* (2006) reported recovery times in the abundance of biota of less than 50 days from beam trawling in highly energetic, shallow, soft-sediment habitats of sand and muddy sand. In more stable gravel sediments, biota were still reduced by 40% after 50 days (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006). Collie *et al.* (2000) reported recovery times of 100 days in sandy sediment communities from trawling disturbance. Kaiser *et al.* (1998) investigated the impacts of beam trawling on megafaunal communities in two areas characterised by mobile megaripple structures and stable uniform sediments. Effects of trawling in mobile sediments were not detectable and in uniform sediments were no longer evident after 6 months (Kaiser *et al.*, 1998). The impacts of otter trawling on benthic communities on a sandy bottom in Grand Banks, Newfoundland a 120-146 m depth was studied over a three-year period (Kenchington *et al.*, 2001). The sampling programme was not designed to determine the long-term effects and recovery, although available data indicated a recovery of the habitat and biological community within a year or less (Løkkeborg, 2005). Tuck *et al.* (1998) studied the biological effects of otter trawling in a sheltered sealoch in Scotland at 35-40 m depth in an area characterised by 95% silt and clay. A similar condition to the reference site was reached after 18 months, with the abundance of individuals shown to return to similar levels recorded prior to trawling (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). Partial recovery of infaunal species occurred after 12 months and effects on epifauna were largely indistinguishable from the reference site 6 months after fishing ceased (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Johnson *et al.*, 2002). Brylinsky *et al.* (1994) reported a rapid recovery of nematode abundance within 4 to 6 weeks following experimental flounder trawling on intertidal silty sediments in the Bay of Fundy.

Foden *et al.* (2010) investigated recovery of different sediment types based on the spatial and temporal distribution of benthic fishing. Vessel monitoring system data (2006 to 2007) was used to estimate the distribution and intensity of scallop dredging, beam trawling and otter trawling in UK marine waters. This data was then linked to habitat in a geographic information system. Recovery periods for different habitats were estimated based on existing scientific literature for gear types and fishing intensity (Table 10), with recovery rates generally increasing with sediment hardness. It was estimated that based on mean annual trawl frequencies that 80% of bottom-fished areas were able to recover completely before repeat trawling. In 19% percentage bottom-fished areas however, the frequency of scallop dredging in sand and gravel and

otter trawling in muddy sand and reef habitats occurred at frequencies that prevented full habitat recovery. At average fishing intensities (for each gear type), sand and mud habitats were able to recover fully, whilst gravel, muddy sand and reef habitats were fished at frequencies in excess of the estimated recovery period (shown in Figure 6 where the mean index of recovery exceeds 1).

Table 10. Recovery rates (days) of different habitats for different fishing gear types. ND: No Data. Source: Foden *et al.*, 2010.

Gear Type	Habitat Type				
	Sand	Gravel	Muddy sand	Reef	Mud
Beam trawl	182 ^a	ND	236 ^b	ND	ND
Otter trawl	0 ^b	365 ^d	213 ^c	2922 ^b	8 ^b
Scallop dredge	2922 ^{b,e}	2922 ^b	589 ^b	1175 ^b	ND

^a Kaiser *et al.* (1998); ^b Kaiser *et al.* (2006); ^c Ragnarsson & Lindegarth (2009); ^d Kenchington *et al.* (2006); ^e Gilkinson *et al.* (2005)

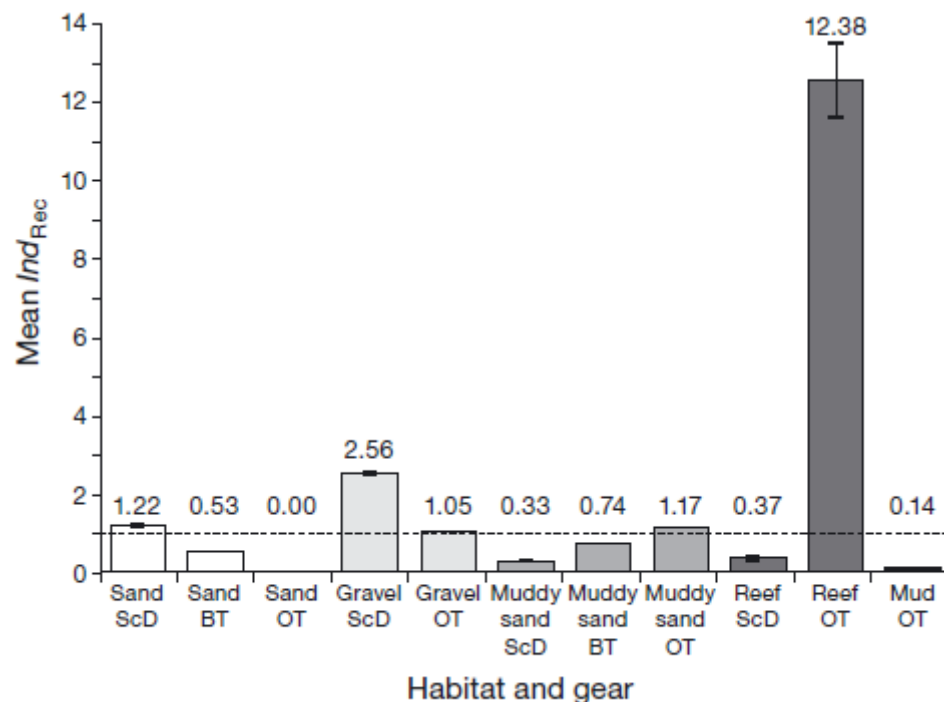


Figure 6. Mean index of recovery (Ind_{Rec}) for gear-habitat combinations using fishing intensity data derived from Vessel Monitoring Systems in 2007. At $Ind_{Rec} = 1$, the recovery period is equal to fishing frequency (horizontal dashed line), at $Ind_{Rec} < 1$ fishing frequency is less than the predicted recovery period and at $Ind_{Rec} > 1$ fishing frequency exceeds the recovery period. BT: Beam Trawl, OT: Otter Trawl and ScD: Scallop Dredge. Source: Foden *et al.*, 2010.

Physical disturbance from chronic trawling occurs over large spatial scales and it may be expected that recovery rates will be slower than those assumed from experimental studies (Hinz *et al.*, 2009). Recovery at small experimental scales is likely to simply be immigration, which is a form of recovery that is unlikely in large and repeatedly trawled areas (Jennings *et al.*, 2001). The recovery of chronically disturbed benthic communities on fishing grounds will be largely dependent on recruitment and population growth, rather than on immigration from adjacent untrawled areas (Hiddink *et al.*, 2006b). The importance of larval recruitment for the recolonization of a disturbed area increases with the size of the disturbed area (Smith & Brumsickle, 1989; Foden *et al.*, 2010). The time of year when disturbance takes place may also influence the mode of recovery and recovery rate of the affected community (Foden *et al.*, 2010). The recruitment supply of larvae and adult infauna will vary at different times of year and in relation to the physical characteristics at a specific location (Foden *et al.*, 2010). The hydrodynamic regime will influence the rate of recolonization by influencing the deposition of infaunal adults and larval stages (Foden *et al.*, 2010).

Population recovery rates are known to be species specific (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Long-lived bivalves will undoubtedly take longer to recovery from disturbance than other species (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Megafaunal species such as molluscs and shrimp over 10 mm in size, especially sessile species, are more vulnerable to impacts of fishing gear than macrofaunal species as a result of their slower growth and therefore are likely to have long recovery periods (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Short-lived and small benthic organisms on the other hand have rapid generation times, high fecundities and therefore excellent recolonization capacities (Coen, 1995). For example, slow-growing large biomass biota such as sponges and soft corals are estimated to take up to 8 years, whilst biota with short life-spans such as polychaetes are estimated to take less than a year (Kaiser *et al.*, 2006).

Habitat type and physical recovery

The persistence of marks produced as a result of trawling depend on a number of factors including their depth, sediment type, current, wave action and biological activity (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Fonteyne, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2000; Humborstad *et al.*, 2004 in Løkkeborg *et al.*, 2005). In high energy environments physical recovery can take days, whereas recovery in low energy areas can take months (Northeast Region EFHSC, 2002; Wallace & Hoff, 2005). Trawl marks persist for longer periods of time when there is less energy to erode these marks (Mercaldo-Allen & Goldberg, 2011). Marks are likely to persist longer in deep water and in sheltered areas with fine sediments (Tuck *et al.*, 1998; Løkkeborg *et al.*, 2005). Trawl marks in areas of faster water movement are likely to be filled in within a shorter period (Jones, 1992).

Marks from towed gear have been showed to be relatively short lived in coarse sediments, lasting from a few days to no more than a year (De Groot and Lindeboom, 1994; Lindeboom & de Groot 1998). In a sandy habitat on the Grand Banks at 120-146 m depth, marks left by trawl doors (1250 kg oval otter boards) were visible for at least 10 weeks, although were not visible or faintly visible after a year (Schwinghamer *et al.* 1998). Tracks from a 4 metre beam trawl with tickler chain matrix remained visible for 52 hours in coarse sand and 37 in fine sand at a depth of 20 to 30 metres on the Goote Bank off Belgium and the Netherlands (Fonteyne, 2000). Trawl door scars (10 cm deep and 20 cm wide) from 2300 kg trawl doors on a sandy/gravel bottom were shown to disappear within less than five months in an area of strong currents in the Barents Sea (Humborstad *et al.* 2004). Hand-dug trenches (15 cm deep and 1.2 m long) at a 7 m deep sandy site lasted for 1 to 4 days in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island (DeAlteris *et al.*, 1999). In the same study, but in the areas of mud at a depth of 14 m, trawl scars (5-10 cm deep with berms 10-20 cm high) persisted for more than 60 days (DeAlteris *et al.* 1999).

In areas characterised by silt or mud, tracks and scars appear to remain visible for longer periods of time compared to sandy and coarser sediments as expected. In a sheltered sealoch in Scotland characterised by sediment with 95% silt and clay, side-scan results revealed that disturbance tracks could still be seen after 18 months after experimental trawling had ceased (Tuck *et al.*, 1998). An alternative measure of seabed properties were altered by fishing was also obtained from RoxAnn measurements (Tuck *et al.* 1998), an acoustic bottom classification system based on the seabeds hardness and roughness (Løkkeborg, 2005). RoxAnn data however indicated recovery after 6 month for physical effects (Tuck *et al.* 1998). Smith *et al.* (2007) also used side scan sonar, as well as underwater video technology, to record the impact of trawling on silty clay sediment at depths of 200 m in Herkalion Bay (Roberts *et al.*, 2010). Trawl marks were evident throughout the year in the study area, including throughout a closed season of four months, by the end of which trawl marks were less visible indicating biogenical weathering (Smith *et*

al. 2007; Roberts *et al.*, 2010). No information on the gear type was given. Furrows (5 cm deep, 30-85 cm wide) made by experimental flounder trawl doors (200 kg) in the Bay of Fundy were visible for at least 2 to 7 months in an area of coarse sediment overlain by up to 10 cm of silty sediment (Brylinsky *et al.* 1994).

The persistence of trawl scars does not necessarily indicate a lack of biological recovery. Trawl scars are likely to persist in areas characterised by low energy, during which time biological recovery may have taken place. It is therefore important to consider the type of environment in which the scars are present as biological recovery may take place over shorter timescales.

Depth

There is an inverse relationship between wave action and depth and so the natural mobility of bottom sediments tends to decrease with depth (Wheeler *et al.*, 2014). The impact of trawling might therefore be more substantial in deeper subtidal habitats due a lack of water movement (Jones, 1992).

In a literature review by Johnson *et al.* (2002), studies which took place at greater depths (>120 m) revealed trawling tracks were evident up to a year after trawling, whilst those at shallow sites (<7m) were no longer visible after a few days.

Benthic communities in dynamic shallow water are likely to be more capable of overcoming disturbance than those in inhabiting deeper and less dynamic environments and as such are likely to have longer recovery times (Jones, 1992).

4.5 Existing management measures

- **Bottom Towed Fishing Gear** byelaw – prohibits bottom towed fishing gear over sensitive features including reef features and seagrass within large areas of the Solent (mainly south of the Isle of Wight) closing most of the site to these activities.
- **Vessel Used in Fishing** byelaw – prohibits commercial fishing vessels over 12 metres from the Southern IFCA district. The reduction in vessel size also restricts the type of gear that can be used, with vessels often using lighter towed gear and restricted to carry less static gear.
- Southern IFCA has a **Minimum Fish Sizes** byelaw, which states that no person shall take from the fishery any fish of the following species (black seabream, brill, dab, conger eel, flounder, lemon sole, red mullet, shad, turbot, witch flounder) that measures less than the size listed when measured from the tip of the snout to the end of the tail. The minimum size for flounder is 27 cm. The minimum sizes contained within this byelaw differ from that in EU legislation.
- A separate Minimum Size Southern IFCA byelaw exists for Skates and Rays and this states that no person shall take any ray that measures less than 40 cm between the extreme tips of the wings or any wing which measures less than 20 cm in its maximum dimension and which is detached from the body of a skate or ray.

- Other regulations include minimum sizes, mesh sizes and catch composition as dictated by European legislation. European minimum sizes, listed under Council Regulation (EEC) 850/98 specify the minimum size for plaice is 27 cm and for bass is 42 cm.

4.6 Table 11. Assessment of trawling on subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal mixed sediments, subtidal sand and subtidal mud.

Feature	Attribute	Target	Potential pressure(s) and Associated Impacts	Likelihood of Impacts Occurring/Level of Exposure to Pressure	Mitigation measures
Subtidal coarse sediment	Distribution: presence and spatial distribution of biological communities	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal coarse sediment communities	<p>Removal of non-target species, abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Bottom towed gear can lead to the removal, damage or mortality of non-target species particularly epifaunal species, reduction in structural complexity and reduction in biodiversity and composition of benthic assemblages.</p> <p>Studies on the impacts of trawling in gravel habitats reported a reduction in abundance, biomass and species diversity, with</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>There is a lack of information surrounding the biotope and species present within the Needles MCZ. A species list is provided within the post-survey site report, however no information on the substrate type certain species are found is provided, making it hard</p>	Vessel Used in Fishing byelaw prohibits commercial fishing vessels over 12 metres from the Southern IFCA district. The reduction in vessel size also restricts the type of gear that can be used, with vessels often using lighter towed gear.

			<p>undisturbed and lightly fished sites showing a greater abundance of epifauna. Benthic macrofauna in poorly sorted, gravelly or muddy sediments are reported to be more sensitive to trawling disturbance than well-sorted sandy sediments.</p> <p>The timescale for recovery after trawling disturbance largely depends on sediment type, associated fauna and rate of natural disturbance, and variation in recovery arises from characteristics specific to the site. Generally speaking, locations subject to high levels of natural disturbance, the associated fauna are likely to be adapted to withstand and recover from disturbance.</p>	<p>to ascertain site-specific impacts of trawling on associated communities.</p> <p>The generic description of subtidal coarse sediment identifies the majority of species that live within this habitat type are infaunal including bristleworms, sand mason worms, small shrimp-like animals, burrowing anemones, carpet shell clams and venus cockles. From this, sensitivity to trawling disturbance may be inferred. Motile groups and infaunal bivalves have shown mixed responses to trawling disturbance, with habitat requirements and feeding modes influencing a species response. Experimental fishing manipulations have shown trawling impacts on annelids are limited, and in some instances may be positive, particularly with respect to polychaetes. The sand mason worm, <i>Lanice conchilega</i>, on the other hand has showed a mixed response to beam trawling on hard medium hardy-sand with large declines in the density of small individuals but increases in larger individuals.</p> <p>Scientific literature generally highlights that benthic communities associated with coarse sediments (typically characterised by epifaunal species) can be vulnerable to trawling disturbance and subsequent negative changes can be observed across a number of community measures (abundance, biodiversity etc.). Fauna living within unconsolidated sediments, such as those in shallow and sandy environments, are however more adapted to dynamic environments and as such species are adapted to withstand recover from disturbance.</p> <p>Hall <i>et al.</i> (2008) assessed unstable coarse sediments with robust fauna to have low sensitivity to a single pass (per year) and light fishing intensity (1</p>	
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				<p>to 2 times a month during a season) with respect to all types of bottom towed gear (table 8).</p> <p>The outcome of the biotope-level sensitivity analysis only highlighted one potential biotope with medium sensitivity (<i>Pomatoceros triqueter</i> with barnacles and bryozoan crusts on unstable circalittoral cobbles and pebbles) likely to occur within the area subject to trawling activity. The others either exhibited low sensitivity or were not sensitive to potential pressures. The application of the biotope-level sensitivity analysis is however limited due to the difficulties associated with a like-for-like comparison between biotopes in neighbouring MPAs. What it does highlight however is the low sensitivity of subtidal coarse sediment biotopes within the Solent Maritime SAC. If the biotope exhibiting medium sensitivity were to occur within the Needles MCZ, it is believed the very low level of fishing effort would not lead to a level of impact that would hinder the 'recover' general management approach of subtidal coarse sediment.</p> <p>The lack of site-specific information on biotope and associated communities makes assessing the impacts of trawling disturbance difficult. It is however known that the area subject to fishing activity is highly dynamic and from this it can be inferred that associated communities found within the Needles MCZ are likely to be well adapted to- and able to recover from disturbance. Based on this, in addition to the very low levels of fishing effort and thus infrequent trawling disturbance, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the</p>	
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				absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.	
	Structure and function: presence and abundance of key structural and influential species	[Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species*, to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
	Structure: sediment composition and distribution	Maintain the distribution of sediment composition types across the feature.	<p>Abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Physical impacts on the seabed from trawling include scraping and ploughing, creation of depressions, trenches, scouring and flattening of the seabed,</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment,</p>	Addressed above.

		<p>sediment resuspension and changes in the vertical distribution of sediment layers.</p> <p>Studies on the effects of otter trawling in gravel and variable habitats have revealed trawling can lead to the removal of fine sediments and biogenic structures, moved or overturn stones and boulders, smooth the seafloor and exposed sediment/shell fragments.</p> <p>Otter boards can leave distinct grooves or furrows, up to 10 centimetres deep and 0.2 to 2 metres wide. The penetration depth of tickler chains on a beam trawl can be up to 6 cm. The depth of such marks on the seafloor depend on the nature of the substrate, and are less in areas of coarser sediments.</p> <p>Physical recovery of sediments largely depends on sediment type and energy regime. In high energy environments physical recovery can take days, whereas recovery in low energy environments can take</p>	<p>interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>Based on the very low fishing effort, concentrated on the fringes of the site, combined with the dynamic nature of the site and coarse nature of the sediment, known to have relatively quick physical recovery periods, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.</p>	
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			months.		
	Structure: species composition of component communities	Maintain the species composition of component communities.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
Subtidal sediments mixed	Distribution: presence and spatial distribution of biological communities	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal mixed sediment communities	<p>Removal of non-target species, abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Bottom towed gear can lead to the removal, damage or mortality of non-target species particularly epifaunal species, reduction in structural complexity and reduction in biodiversity and composition of benthic assemblages.</p> <p>Studies on the impacts of trawling in mixed sediment habitats reported a reduction in abundance, biomass and species diversity, with undisturbed and lightly fished sites showing a greater</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>There is a lack of information surrounding the biotope and species present within the Needles MCZ. A species list is provided within the post-survey site report, however no information on the substrate type certain species are found is provided, making it hard to ascertain site-specific impacts of trawling on</p>	Addressed above.

			<p>abundance of epifauna. Benthic macrofauna in poorly sorted, gravelly or muddy sediments are reported to be more sensitive to trawling disturbance than well-sorted sandy sediments.</p> <p>The timescale for recovery after trawling disturbance largely depends on sediment type, associated fauna and rate of natural disturbance, and variation in recovery arises from characteristics specific to the site. Generally speaking, locations subject to high levels of natural disturbance, the associated fauna are likely to be adapted to withstand and recover from disturbance.</p>	<p>associated communities.</p> <p>The generic description of subtidal mixed sediments identifies that species associated with this habitat type live both on and in the sediment including worms, bivalves, starfish and urchins, anemones, sea firs and sea mats. From this, sensitivity to trawling disturbance may be inferred. Motile groups and infaunal bivalves have shown mixed responses to trawling disturbance, with habitat requirements and feeding modes influencing a species response. Experimental fishing manipulations have shown trawling impacts on annelids are limited, and in some instances may be positive, particularly with respect to polychaetes. A number of studies have shown mixed impacts on echinoderms. Some studies have reported reductions in the sea star, <i>Asterias rubens</i> as well as species of sea urchin. In contrast, epifaunal biomass at heavily trawled sites is often dominated by <i>A. rubens</i>, as they are able to respond rapidly to changes in prey availability and are known to be relatively resilient from the damaging impacts of trawls.</p> <p>Scientific literature generally highlights that benthic communities associated with mixed sediments (typically characterised by epifaunal species) can be vulnerable to trawling disturbance and subsequent negative changes can be observed across a number of community measures (abundance, biodiversity etc.). Fauna living within unconsolidated sediments, such as those in shallow and sandy environments, are however more adapted to dynamic environments and as such species are adapted to withstand recover from disturbance.</p> <p>Hall <i>et al.</i> (2008) assessed the most relevant habitat</p>	
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				<p>type (stable spp. rich mixed sediments) to have low sensitivity to a single pass (per year) and light fishing intensity (1 to 2 times a month during a season) with respect to light demersal trawls and seines (table 8).</p> <p>The outcome of the biotope-level sensitivity analysis for subtidal mixed sediments only highlighted one potential biotope with medium sensitivity (<i>Flustra foliacea</i> and <i>Hydrallmania falcata</i> on tide-swept circalittoral mixed sediment) likely to occur within the area subject to trawling activity. The others either exhibit low sensitivity or were unlikely to occur within the area fished. The application of the biotope-level sensitivity analysis is however limited due to the difficulties associated with a like-for-like comparison between biotopes in neighbouring MPAs. If the biotope exhibiting medium sensitivity were to occur within the Needles MCZ however, it is believed the very low level of fishing effort would not lead to a level of impact that would hinder the 'recover' general management approach of subtidal mixed sediments.</p> <p>The lack of site-specific information on biotope and associated communities makes assessing the impacts of trawling disturbance difficult. It is however known that the area subject to fishing activity is highly dynamic and from this it can be inferred that associated communities found within the Needles MCZ are likely to be well adapted to- and able to recover from disturbance. Based on this, in addition to the very low levels of fishing effort and thus infrequent trawling disturbance, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site,</p>	
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				<p>Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.</p>	
	<p>Structure and function: presence and abundance of key structural and influential species</p>	<p>[Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species*, to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat.</p>	<p>Addressed above.</p>	<p>Addressed above.</p>	<p>Addressed above.</p>
	<p>Structure: sediment composition and distribution</p>	<p>Maintain the distribution of sediment composition types across the feature.</p>	<p>Abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Physical impacts on the seabed from trawling include scraping and ploughing, creation of depressions, trenches, scouring and flattening of the seabed, sediment resuspension and</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment,</p>	<p>Addressed above.</p>

		<p>changes in the vertical distribution of sediment layers.</p> <p>Studies on the effects of otter trawling in gravel and variable habitats have revealed trawling can lead to the removal of fine sediments and biogenic structures, moved or overturn stones and boulders, smooth the seafloor and exposed sediment/shell fragments.</p> <p>Otter boards can leave distinct grooves or furrows, up to 10 centimetres deep and 0.2 to 2 metres wide. The penetration depth of tickler chains on a beam trawl can be up to 6 cm. The depth of such marks on the seafloor depend on the nature of the substrate, and are less in areas of coarser sediments.</p> <p>Physical recovery of sediments largely depends on sediment type and energy regime. In high energy environments physical recovery can take days, whereas recovery in low energy environments can take months.</p>	<p>particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>Based on the very low fishing effort, concentrated on the fringes of the site, combined with the dynamic nature of area fished site and coarse nature of the sediment, known to have relatively quick physical recovery periods, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.</p>	
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	Structure: species composition of component communities	Maintain the species composition of component communities.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
Subtidal sand	Distribution: presence and spatial distribution of biological communities	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal sand communities	<p>Removal of non-target species, abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Bottom towed gear can lead to the removal, damage or mortality of non-target species particularly epifaunal species, reduction in structural complexity and reduction in biodiversity and composition of benthic assemblages.</p> <p>Studies on the impacts of trawling in sandy habitats have reported reductions in abundance, biomass and species diversity, with undisturbed and lightly fished sites showing a greater abundance of epifauna. Other studies conducted in sandy</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>There is a lack of information surrounding the biotope and species present within the Needles MCZ. A species list is provided within the post-survey site report, however no information on the substrate type certain species are found is provided, making it hard to ascertain site-specific impacts of trawling on associated communities.</p> <p>Scientific literature reveals a mixed response of</p>	Addressed above.

			<p>habitats however have reported negligible impacts as a result of trawling disturbance. Benthic macrofauna in poorly sorted, gravelly or muddy sediments are reported to be more sensitive to trawling disturbance than well-sorted sandy sediments.</p> <p>The timescale for recovery after trawling disturbance largely depends on sediment type, associated fauna and rate of natural disturbance, and variation in recovery arises from characteristics specific to the site. Generally speaking, locations subject to high levels of natural disturbance, the associated fauna are likely to be adapted to withstand and recover from disturbance.</p>	<p>benthic communities associated with sandy habitats to trawling disturbance. Fauna living within unconsolidated sediments, such as those in shallow and sandy environments, are generally more adapted to dynamic environments and as such species are adapted to withstand recover from disturbance.</p> <p>Hall <i>et al.</i> (2008) assessed the most relevant habitat types (stable subtidal fine sands & dynamic, shallow water fine sands) to have low sensitivity to a single pass (per year) and light fishing intensity (1 to 2 times a month during a season) with respect to all types of bottom towed fishing gear (table 8).</p> <p>The lack of site-specific information on biotope and associated communities makes assessing the impacts of trawling disturbance difficult. The post-survey site report reveals that subtidal sand is found close inshore in Colwell and Totland Bay and therefore does not overlap with the area subject to trawling. The fished area is known to be highly dynamic and from this it can be inferred that associated communities found within the Needles MCZ are likely to be well adapted to- and able to recover from disturbance. Based on the lack of overlap between the habitat type and fished area, in addition to the dynamic nature of the fished area and associated communities, very low levels of fishing effort and thus infrequent trawling disturbance, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition.</p>	
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				This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.	
	Structure and function: presence and abundance of key structural and influential species	[Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species*, to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
	Structure: sediment composition and distribution	Maintain the distribution of sediment composition types across the feature.	<p>Abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Physical impacts on the seabed from trawling include scraping and ploughing, creation of depressions, trenches, scouring and flattening of the seabed, sediment resuspension and changes in the vertical distribution of sediment</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams</p>	Addressed above.

			<p>layers.</p> <p>Studies on the effects of otter trawling in gravel and variable habitats have revealed trawling can lead to the removal of fine sediments and biogenic structures, moved or overturn stones and boulders, smooth the seafloor and exposed sediment/shell fragments.</p> <p>Otter boards can leave distinct grooves or furrows, up to 10 centimetres deep and 0.2 to 2 metres wide. The penetration depth of tickler chains on a beam trawl can be up to 6 cm. The depth of such marks on the seafloor depend on the nature of the substrate, and are less in areas of coarser sediments.</p> <p>Physical recovery of sediments largely depends on sediment type and energy regime. In high energy environments physical recovery can take days, whereas recovery in low energy environments can take months.</p>	<p>and wave action.</p> <p>The post-survey site report reveals subtidal sand is found close inshore in Colwell and Totland Bay and therefore does not overlap with the area known to be subject to trawling. Based on this, in addition to the very low fishing effort on the fringes of the site, combined with the dynamic nature of the fished area, and quick physical recovery of sand sediments, trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.</p>	
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	Structure: species composition of component communities	Maintain the species composition of component communities.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
Subtidal mud	Distribution: presence and spatial distribution of biological communities	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of subtidal mud communities	<p>Removal of non-target species, abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Bottom towed gear can lead to the removal, damage or mortality of non-target species, reduction in structural complexity and reduction in biodiversity and composition of benthic assemblages.</p> <p>Studies on the impacts of trawling in mud habitats report relatively modest changes in associated benthic communities in the short-term, with more significant changes in communities after cumulative long-term disturbance. Benthic</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment, particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>There is a lack of information surrounding the biotope and species present within the Needles MCZ. A species list is provided within the post-survey site report, however no information on the substrate type certain species are found is provided, making it hard to ascertain site-specific impacts of trawling on associated communities.</p> <p>Scientific literature generally highlights that benthic</p>	Addressed above.

			<p>macrofauna in poorly sorted, gravelly or muddy sediments are reported to be more sensitive to trawling disturbance than well-sorted sandy sediments.</p> <p>The timescale for recovery after trawling disturbance largely depends on sediment type, associated fauna and rate of natural disturbance, and variation in recovery arises from characteristics specific to the site. Generally speaking, locations subject to high levels of natural disturbance, the associated fauna are likely to be adapted to withstand and recover from disturbance. Mud communities are reported to have an 'intermediate' recovery rate.</p>	<p>communities associated with mud habitats can be vulnerable to the cumulative long-term trawling disturbance and subsequent negative changes can be observed across a number of community measures (abundance, biodiversity etc.).</p> <p>Hall <i>et al.</i> (2008) assessed the most relevant habitat type (subtidal stable muddy sands, sandy muds and muds) to have low sensitivity to a single pass (per year) and light fishing intensity (1 to 2 times a month during a season) with respect to all types of bottom towed gear. (table 8).</p> <p>The lack of site-specific information on biotope and associated communities makes assessing the impacts of trawling disturbance difficult. The post-survey report identified by areas of subtidal mud and as such cannot overlap within the area known to be subject to trawling. The fished area is known to be highly dynamic and from this it can be inferred that associated communities found within the Needles MCZ are likely to be well adapted to- and able to recover from disturbance. Based on the apparent absence of the feature, which means there can be no overlap between the habitat type and fished area, in addition to the dynamic nature of the fished area and associated communities, very low levels of fishing effort and thus infrequent trawling disturbance, it is believed that trawling will not pose a significant risk to the feature and will therefore not hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach (GMA). It is worth noting that in the absence of a condition assessment for the site, Natural England undertook a vulnerability assessment for each feature as a proxy for condition. This assessment considers the activities which take place in the site and determines the GMA for each</p>	
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				feature. However, such an assessment is relatively generic and does not take into a number of site-specific factors.	
	Structure and function: presence and abundance of key structural and influential species	[Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species*, to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
	Structure: sediment composition and distribution	Maintain the distribution of sediment composition types across the feature.	<p>Abrasion/ disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed and penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion were identified as potential pressures.</p> <p>Physical impacts on the seabed from trawling include scraping and ploughing, creation of depressions, trenches, scouring and flattening of the seabed, sediment resuspension and</p>	<p>The level of trawling within the Needles MCZ is very low, with one to two vessels fishing one to two times a year using a light otter trawl. There is also the potential for a beam trawl and multi-rig trawl to be used within the site, although it is not currently known to occur.</p> <p>There are no trawl sightings within the Needles MCZ from 2005-2017 and trawl sightings within the western Solent are limited, especially in comparison to the eastern Solent. Trawling is known to occur infrequently on the northern and western fringes of the site on the edges of the main channel in the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment, interspersed with areas of subtidal mixed sediment,</p>	Vessel Used in Fishing byelaw prohibits commercial fishing vessels over 12 metres from the Southern IFCA district. The reduction in vessel size also restricts the type of gear that can be used, with vessels often using lighter towed gear.

		<p>changes in the vertical distribution of sediment layers.</p> <p>In mud environments, towed demersal gear has been shown to alter sedimentary characteristics and structure including through the mixing of surface organic material into subsurface layers, resuspension of sediment and relocation of stones and boulders.</p> <p>Otter boards can leave distinct grooves or furrows, up to 10 centimetres deep and 0.2 to 2 metres wide. The penetration depth of tickler chains on a beam trawl can be up to 6 cm. The depth of such marks on the seafloor depend on the nature of the substrate, being greatest in soft mud.</p> <p>Physical recovery of sediments largely depends on sediment type and energy regime. In high energy environments physical recovery can take days, whereas recovery in low energy environments can take months.</p>	<p>particularly to the west. The area subject to fishing is a highly dynamic area, subject to strong tidal streams and wave action.</p> <p>The post-survey report identified no areas of subtidal mud and as such cannot overlap within the area known to be subject to trawling. Based on this, in addition to the very low fishing effort, concentrated on the fringes of the site, combined with the dynamic nature of the fished area, it is not believed that trawling will hinder the ability of the feature to achieve its 'recover' general management approach.</p>	
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	Structure: species composition of component communities	Maintain the species composition of component communities.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.	Addressed above.
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4.7 Site condition

Natural England provides information on the condition of designated sites and describes the status of interest features.

Under the Habitats Directive, relevant for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCIs), the United Kingdom is obliged to report on the Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I and Annex II features every 6 years. There are similar reporting requirements under the Birds Directive, relevant for Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act there is also a need to assess the achievement of conservation objectives for MCZs. Alongside national reporting requirements, the ability to provide a current view of feature condition within protected sites is crucial to underpin advice on site management and casework.

During 2015-16 Natural England has reviewed, refined and tested the condition assessment methodology to provide more robust results. Natural England will employ this methodology to start a rolling programme of marine feature condition assessments in 2017-18, which will be conducted by their Area Teams. Condition assessments for the designated features of the Needles MCZ have not yet been undertaken. In the absence of this information, a vulnerability assessment was undertaken as a proxy for condition

5. Conclusion

Research into the impacts of trawling reveals that the activity has the potential to cause both physical and biological disturbance. The extent and severity of the impact however largely depends on factors specific to the area being considered namely, sediment type and physical regime. As such, the level of impact can largely vary between studies conducted in 'similar' habitat types. Whilst scientific literature is imperative in highlighting the impacts of different trawl types within a range of sediment types, the applicability of studies must be taken into account and careful consideration to site-specific factors (sediment type, energy regime, level of fishing effort) must be given when undertaking the assessment.

Trawling, using a light otter trawl, occurs on an infrequent basis (one to two times a year by one to two vessels) on the northern and western fringes of the Needles MCZ. Sightings data from 2005 to 2017 show no trawling activity within the Needles MCZ and illustrate the generally low prevalence of trawling within the western Solent. The northern and western fringes of the site are dominated by subtidal coarse sediment interspersed with subtidal mixed sediments, particularly to the west. These subtidal sediment types are both designated broad-scale habitats of the Needles MCZ. The other designated broad-scale habitats considered within this assessment do either not overlap with the activity (subtidal sand) or are not reported to occur within the site (subtidal mud), according to the post-survey site report.

Having reviewed a wide range of evidence, including scientific literature, sightings data and feature mapping and having also given consideration to site-specific factors, it has been concluded that light otter trawling is unlikely to pose a significant risk to the subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediment features. Southern IFCA believe that the activity will not hinder the ability of both features to achieve their 'recover' general management approach. This is based on the very low level of fishing effort which takes place within the site and highly dynamic nature of

the area fished, meaning that associated communities will already be highly disturbed and thus any trawling disturbance is likely to be minimal and any recovery rapid. This is further supported by the biotope-level sensitivity analysis which shows the vast majority of subtidal coarse sediment biotopes occurring within the neighbouring Solent Maritime SAC and likely to be present within the Needles MCZ as having low sensitivity or not sensitive to potential pressures associated with trawling activity. The applicability of this biotope-level sensitivity analysis is however limited due to the difficulties associated with a like-for-like comparison between biotopes of neighbouring MPAs.

It is important to note that there is currently no condition assessment data for the Needles MCZ. In absence of this, a vulnerability assessment for each feature was undertaken as a proxy for condition and the outcome of this assessment was used to determine the 'recover' general management approach assigned to both designated broad-scale habitat types. The vulnerability assessment considers the sensitivity of each feature to a comprehensive list of pressures arising from human activities including fishing. With regards to fishing activities, the type and location of the activity were only taken into account, with no consideration to the level of exposure (i.e. no exposure, low, medium, high). Whilst the assessment tries to incorporate a number of site-specific factors, namely location, the assessment is relatively generic based on the presence or absence of the activity and is unable to consider specific information with respect to the site (i.e. energy regime) and fishing activity (i.e. gear configuration, exposure, fishing effort).

It is Southern IFCA's duty as the competent and relevant authority to manage damaging activities that may impact the achievement of a designated features general management approach, lead to deterioration of the site or hinder the conservation objectives of the site. The very low levels of fishing effort and dynamic nature of the area fished (meaning the potential for adverse impacts is limited and recoverability is likely to be rapid), trawling is unlikely to pose a significant risk to subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediments. As such, it is believed the activity will not hinder the achievement of the designated features general management approaches and that it is compatible with the sites objectives.

In order to ensure that the management of trawling remains consistent with the conservation objectives of the site, Southern IFCA will continue to monitor fishing effort through sightings data and information from IFCOs. In the short term a change in the status of the fishery is unforeseen, however it is recognised that the status of a fishery may change. On this basis, the management of trawling will be reviewed as appropriate should new evidence on activity levels and/or gear-habitat interaction become available.

These conclusions are consistent with the policy objectives 10 and 12 of the draft South Marine Plan to 'To support the objectives of marine protected areas and the delivery of a well-managed ecologically coherent network by ensuring enhanced resilience and the capability to adapt to change' and 'To safeguard space for, and improve the quality of, the natural marine environment, including to enable continued provision of ecosystem goods and services, particularly in relation to coastal and seabed habitats, fisheries, estuarine and coastal water quality and cumulative impacts on highly mobile species.'

6. In-combination assessment

Southern IFCA is not aware of any developments within- or in the vicinity of the Needles MCZ which would lead to in-combination effects.

It has been concluded that, alone, trawling within the Needles MCZ will not lead to the deterioration of the site or hinder the conservation objectives of the site. There may be potential for trawling to pose a significant risk in-combination with other fishing activities that occur within the site. These are outlined section 6.1. Only fishing activities that were screened in for a part A assessment are considered here. Within the Needles MCZ, and wider Solent, commercially licensed fishing vessels are known to utilise a number of different gear types and can be engaged within multiple fishing activities. Whilst this divides effort between gear types (typically static gear), multiple fishing activities may lead to cumulative impacts which differ to those of a single fishing activity.

6.1 Other fishing activities

Fishing activity	Potential for in-combination effect
Static – pots/traps (Pots/creels – crustacean/gastropod & cuttle pots)	Potting for crab and lobster takes place closer inshore due to rocky substrate and will therefore not overlap with trawling activity which takes on the fringes of the site over subtidal sediments. There is potential for whelk potting to occur on the fringes of the site over subtidal sediments. The level at which the activity takes place however is unknown but the area is unfavourable due to the rushing tide. There is potential for cuttle pots to be used within the site but it is not currently known to take place. Potting in general is also considered to be low impact and unlikely to lead to any in-combination effects. In addition, static gear types such as potting and mobile gear types such as trawling are not compatible and so often occur in different areas, thus largely eliminating any spatial overlap between the two.
Static – fixed nets (Gill nets, trammels, entangling)	It is anticipated that static fixed nets are used within the site in areas of shallow water and will therefore not overlap with trawling activity. The activity is unlikely to occur in deeper water due to the rushing tide on the outer reaches of the site. Netting is also a low impact activity and unlikely to lead to any in-combination effects. In addition, static gear types such as netting and mobile gear types such as trawling are not compatible and so often occur in different areas, thus largely eliminating any spatial overlap between the two.
Lines (Longlines – demersal)	It is anticipated that demersal longlines are used within the site. The area where the activity may take place however is unknown. It is unlikely the activity would occur in deeper water due to the rushing tide on the outer reaches of the site. Demersal longlining is a low impact activity and unlikely to lead to any in-combination effects. In addition, static gear types such as longlining and mobile gear types such as trawling are not compatible and so often occur in different areas, thus largely eliminating any spatial overlap between the two.

7. Integrity test

It can be concluded that the activities in this part B assessment (light otter trawl; beam trawl and multi-rig trawl), alone or in-combination, are unlikely to pose a significant risk to subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediments of the Needles MCZ; and that future activity, if it

remains similar to current levels, will not foreseeably pose a significant risk to subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal mixed sediments of the MCZ, and as such it is believed that the activity will not hinder the designated features general management approaches and that is compatible with the sites conservation objectives. The mitigation measures detailed in table 8 are therefore considered sufficient.

8. Reference list

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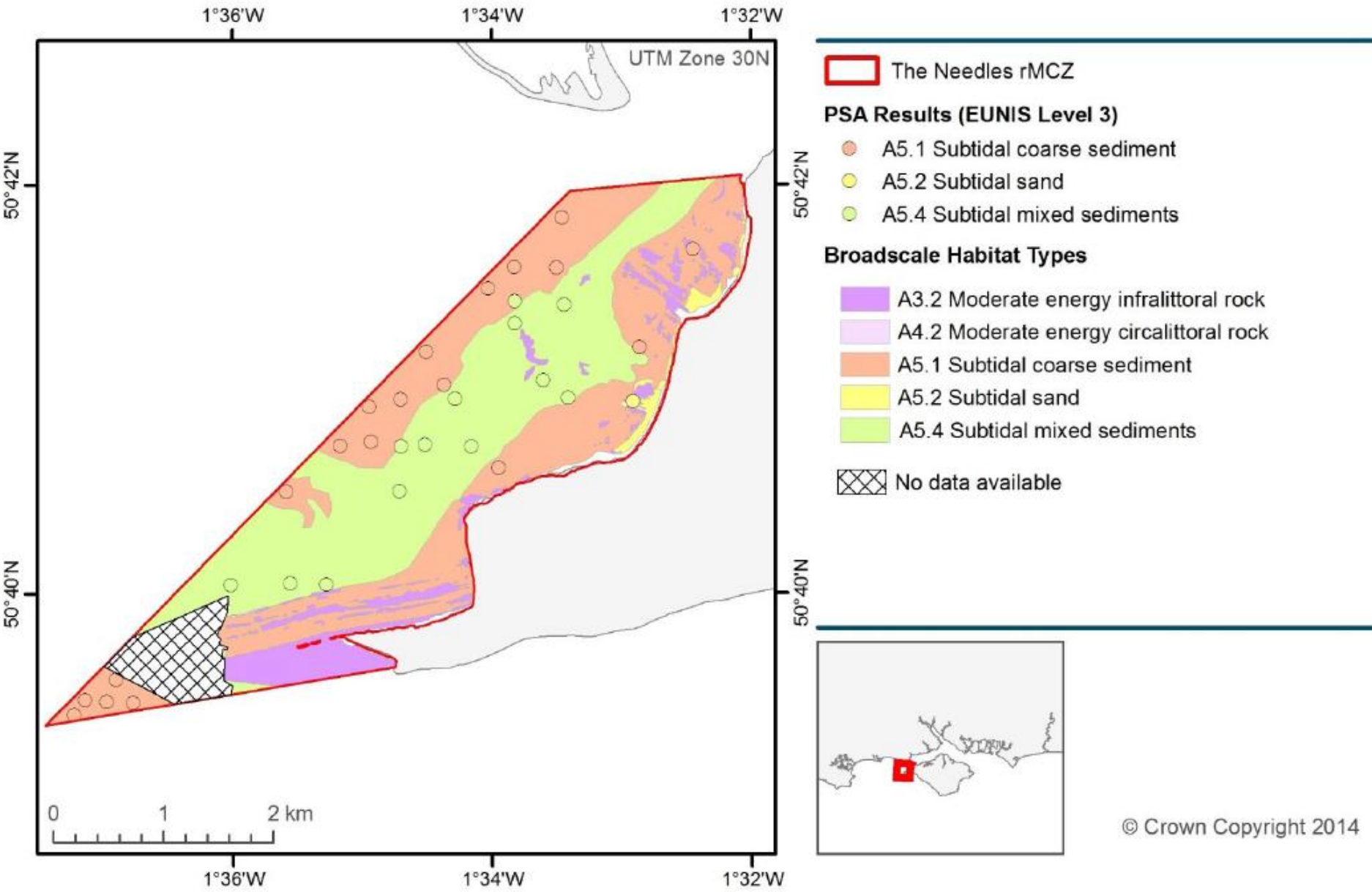
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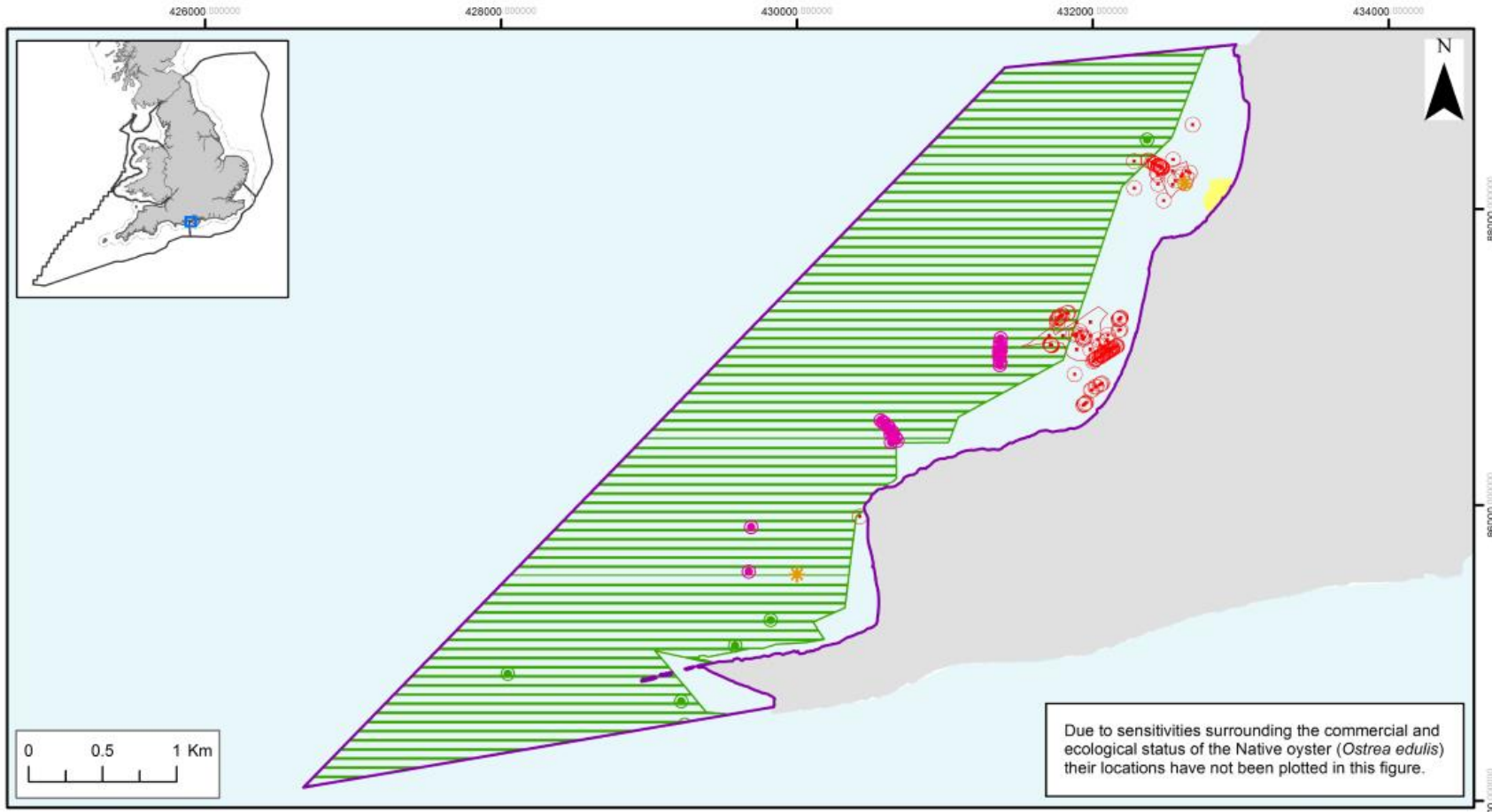
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Annex 1. Broad-scale habitat map for the Needles MCZ. Source: The Needles MCZ post-survey site Report 2015.



**Annex 2. Features of Conservation Importance (FOCI) map. Source: The Needles MCZ feature maps
17th February 2016 (www.gov.uk)**



The Needles MCZ
Features of Conservation Importance

- Marine Conservation Zone
- Regional MCZ Project Area
- 12nM Territorial Seas Limit
- Sea
- Land

Features designated in 2016

- Seagrass beds
- Subtidal chalk
- Stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*)
- Peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*)
- Seagrass beds
- Sheltered muddy gravels
- Subtidal chalk

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Stationery Office and UK Hydrographic Office
(www.ukho.gov.uk). Map produced by
Natural England 2015.
Reference: Theme ID: 1477571
Map Projection: British National Grid

Annex 3. DRAFT Advice on Operations for commercial fishing activities in The Needles MCZ (Demersal trawl only)

	Habitats										Species		
	Moderate energy infralittoral rock	High energy infralittoral rock	Moderate energy circalittoral rock	Subtidal chalk	Subtidal coarse sediment	Subtidal mixed sediments	Subtidal sand	Subtidal mud	Sheltered muddy gravels	Seagrass beds	Stalked jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)
Pressure													
Above water noise									*		*	*	
Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Changes in suspended solids (water clarity)	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	NS

Collision ABOVE water with static or moving objects not naturally found in the marine environment (e.g., boats, machinery, and structures)									*		*	*	
Collision BELOW water with static or moving objects not naturally found in the marine environment (e.g., boats, machinery, and structures)									*		*	*	
Deoxygenation	NS	IE	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	*	NS	*	*	NS
Hydrocarbon & PAH contamination. Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	IE	*	NS	*	*	NS
Introduction of light									*		*	*	
Introduction or spread of non-indigenous species	S	S	S	S	IE	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Litter	IE	IE	IE	IE	IE	IE	IE	IE	*	IE	*	*	IE
Nutrient enrichment	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	*	S	*	*	NS
Organic enrichment	S	S	S	S	S	IE	S	S	*	S	*	*	NS
Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Physical change (to another seabed type)	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Removal of non-target species	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Removal of target species									*		*	*	

Siltation rate changes (Low), including smothering (depth of vertical sediment overburden)	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	*	S	*	*	S
Synthetic compound contamination (incl. pesticides, antifoulants, pharmaceuticals). Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	IE	*	NS	*	*	NS
Transition elements & organo-metal (e.g. TBT) contamination. Includes those priority substances listed in Annex II of Directive 2008/105/EC.	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	IE	*	NS	*	*	NS
Underwater noise changes									*		*	*	
Visual disturbance									*		*	*	

Legend:

S	Sensitive
NS	Not sensitive at this benchmark
IE	Insufficient evidence to assess
NA	Not applicable
	Not relevant
*	Sensitivity for this feature has not yet been assessed by Natural England. In this instance, Southern IFCA have used similar habitat or species, combined with best judgement and Natural England's Scoping Advice, to determine the potential sensitivity to each pressure.

Annex 4. Natural England's scoping advice for the Needles MCZ

Date: 27 January 2017
Our ref: 204559
Your ref: Needles MCZ scoping advice

Vicki Gravestock
Southern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority
64 Ashley Road
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BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Vicki

Natural England's advice on the potential impacts of commercial fishing within the Needles Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

Thank you for your request for the above which was received on 14 December 2016. The following constitutes Natural England's formal response.

In 2012, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announced a revised approach to the management of commercial fisheries in European Marine Sites (EMSs). The objective of the revised approach is to ensure that all existing and potential commercial fishing activities in EMSs are managed in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. In addition to this requirement, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) are responsible for assessing the impacts of commercial fishing within Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) designated under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Southern IFCA (SIFCA) has requested scoping advice from Natural England as the Conservation Advice package for the Needles MCZ has not yet been published. This advice will inform SIFCA's assessment of commercial fishing impacts within the site, thereby fulfilling their duties under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

1. Legal Requirements

SIFCA has duties concerning the protection of Marine Conservation Zones under section 154 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 which states that:

- (1) The authority for an IFC district must seek to ensure that the conservation objectives of any MCZ in the district are furthered.
- (2) Nothing in section 153(2) is to affect the performance of the duty imposed by this section.
- (3) In this section—
 - (a) "MCZ" means a marine conservation zone designated by an order under section 116;
 - (b) the reference to the conservation objectives of an MCZ is a reference to the conservation objectives stated for the MCZ under section 117(2)(b).

Section 125 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 also requires public authorities (including IFCAs) to exercise their functions in a manner to best further (or, if not possible, least hinder) the conservation objectives of MCZs.



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2. The Needles MCZ

2.1 Overview and designated features

The Needles MCZ was designated in January 2016 and covers the stretch of Solent adjacent to the northwest side of the Isle of Wight to just south of the Needles, including a series of sheltered bays. The site covers an area of approximately 11 km² and protects a number of rare and fragile habitats including chalk on the seabed, shallow water (infralittoral) rock and soft sediments which support communities of algae, sponges, sea squirts and delicate anemones. The site also protects seagrass beds in both Totland and Colwell Bays, together with rare and threatened species such as the Stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*) and Peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*).

A summary of the site's designated features is provided in Table 1. For each designated feature, a General Management Approach (GMA) has been identified in order to achieve the conservation objective for that feature. The GMA required for a feature will either be for it to be maintained in favourable condition (if it is currently in this state), or for it to be recovered to favourable condition (if it is currently in a damaged state) and then to be maintained in favourable condition. Generally for a habitat, favourable condition is defined as:

1. its extent is stable or increasing; and
2. its structures and functions, its quality, and the composition of its characteristic biological communities are such as to ensure that it remains in a condition which is healthy and not deteriorating.¹

Table 1: Designated features and General Management Approach

Designated feature	General Management Approach
Moderate energy infralittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
High energy infralittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Moderate energy circalittoral rock	Maintain in favourable condition
Subtidal chalk	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal coarse sediment	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal mixed sediments	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal sand	Recover to favourable condition
Subtidal mud	Recover to favourable condition
Sheltered muddy gravels	Recover to favourable condition
Seagrass Beds	Recover to favourable condition
Stalked jellyfish (<i>Lucernariopsis campanulata</i>)	Maintain in favourable condition
Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Recover to favourable condition
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Recover to favourable condition

Data on the presence and extent these features has been provided to SIFCA through Natural England's Evidence Mapping Project. Alternatively, this data is available to view online using Defra's Magic Map application: <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>.

2.2 Conservation Objectives

The site's high level conservation objectives apply to the Marine Conservation Zone and the individual species and/or habitat for which the site has been designated (the "Designated features" listed below).

The conservation objective of each of the zones is that the protected habitats:

1. are maintained in favourable condition if they are already in favourable condition;

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/259972/pb14078-mcz-explanatory-note.pdf

2. be brought into favourable condition if they are not already in favourable condition.

For each protected feature, favourable condition means that, within a zone:

1. its extent is stable or increasing;
2. its structure and functions, its quality, and the composition of its characteristic biological communities (including diversity and abundance of species forming part or inhabiting the habitat) are sufficient to ensure that its condition remains healthy and does not deteriorate.

Any temporary deterioration in condition is to be disregarded if the habitat is sufficiently healthy and resilient to enable its recovery.

For each species of marine fauna, favourable condition means that the population within a zone is supported in numbers which enable it to thrive, by maintaining:

1. the quality and quantity of its habitat;
2. the number, age and sex ratio of its population. Any temporary reduction of numbers of a species is to be disregarded if the population is sufficiently thriving and resilient to enable its recovery.

Any alteration to a feature brought about entirely by natural processes is to be disregarded when determining whether a protected feature is in favourable condition.

2.3 Condition assessments

Under the Habitats Directive, relevant for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Sites of Community Importance (SCIs), the United Kingdom is obliged to report on the Favourable Conservation Status of Annex I and Annex II features every 6 years. There are similar reporting requirements under the Birds Directive, relevant for Special Protection Areas (SPAs). Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act there is also a need to assess the achievement of conservation objectives for MCZs. Alongside national reporting requirements, the ability to provide a current view of feature condition within protected sites is crucial to underpin advice on site management and casework.

During 2015-16 Natural England has reviewed, refined and tested the condition assessment methodology to provide more robust results. We will employ this methodology to start a rolling programme of marine feature condition assessments in 2017-18, which will be conducted by our Area Teams. At the time of writing, condition assessments for the designated features of the Needles MCZ have not yet been undertaken. In the absence of this information, a vulnerability assessment was undertaken as a proxy for condition. The vulnerability assessment for specific fishing activities is discussed further in section 3.1.

3. Potential impacts that could prevent the achievement of conservation objectives

3.1 Screening of pressure-feature interactions

Consistent with SIFCA's previous assessments of fishing in MCZs, Natural England recommends that an initial screening exercise is undertaken to identify fishing activities which have been identified as occurring, have the potential to occur and/or are anticipated to occur in the foreseeable future within the site. Activities which are not screened out at this stage should proceed to Part A assessment, in order to identify any pressures capable of significantly affecting designated features or their related processes.

Prior to the designation of the Needles MCZ in January 2016, Natural England conducted a vulnerability assessment to consider the exposure and sensitivity of each feature to a comprehensive range of pressures arising from human activities. Natural England liaised with SIFCA during this process in order to identify the type, location and intensity of commercial fishing

activities occurring within the site. The vulnerability assessment conducted by Natural England identified a number of features as being vulnerable (i.e. exposed and sensitive to pressures) to anchored nets/lines, demersal trawling, dredging and shore-based based activities (Table 2). We would therefore expect these feature-activity interactions to be included within a more-detailed Part B assessment. However, we recommend that SIFCA review the type, location and intensity of all fishing activities in the site to ensure that no significant changes have occurred since the vulnerability assessment was conducted.

Table 2: Summary of feature-fishing activity vulnerability assessment for Needles MCZ

Designated feature	Vulnerability to fishing activity type/s
Subtidal chalk	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Subtidal coarse sediment	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Subtidal mixed sediments	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Subtidal sand	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Subtidal mud	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Sheltered muddy gravels	Demersal trawling; Dredging
Seagrass beds	Anchored nets/lines; Shore-based activities
Peacock's tail (<i>Padina pavonica</i>)	Demersal trawling
Native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>)	Demersal trawling; Dredging

3.2 Assessment of impacts

For the purposes of both the Part A and Part B assessment, we recommend that the analysis of fishing-related pressures is informed by Natural England's Advice on Operations. This advice is designed to provide an initial assessment of whether an activity may have an impact on a designated feature, using information on its resilience (an ability to recover) and resistance (the level of tolerance) to physical, chemical and biological pressures².

In the absence of published Advice on Operations for the Needles MCZ, we have provided generic draft advice on fishing activity-pressure interactions for each designated feature where available. This advice is provided in Annex 1 but can also be made available electronically if required. However, please note that this advice does not constitute Natural England's statutory advice and may therefore be subject to change. Natural England will provide SIFCA with a copy of the finalised Advice on Operations for this site upon completion.

Additionally, because the draft advice provided in Annex 1 is based upon published Regulation 35 Conservation Packages for designated (Tranche 1) MCZs, there are a number of features where Advice on Operations has not yet been produced by Natural England. This applies to the following features of the Needles MCZ:

- Sheltered muddy gravels
- Stalked jellyfish (*Lucernariopsis campanulata*)
- Peacock's tail (*Padina pavonica*)

In the absence of Advice on Operations for these three features, we recommend that SIFCA consider the following key pressures when undertaking their assessment:

- Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed
- Changes in suspended solids (water clarity)
- Introduction or spread of non-indigenous species
- Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion
- Physical change (to another seabed type)

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/520313/advice-on-operations-guidance.pdf

- Removal of non-target species
- Siltation rate changes (Low), including smothering

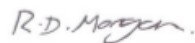
It should also be noted that the assessments of sensitivity to fishing-related pressures are measured against a benchmark. These benchmarks are representative of the likely intensity of a pressure caused by typical activities, and do not represent a threshold of an 'acceptable' intensity of a pressure. It is therefore necessary to consider how the level of fishing intensity observed within the Needles MCZ compares with these benchmarks when screening individual activities. Furthermore, Natural England's Advice on Operations does not provide information on the vulnerability of the features (determined by a feature's sensitivity to an activity and its exposure to that activity) because the location and intensity of fishing activities are subject to change.

4. Summary

Natural England welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively with SIFCA in assessing the impacts of commercial fishing within MCZs. We trust that this scoping advice will assist with the fisheries assessment for the Needles MCZ, but would like to reiterate that in the absence of a published Conservation Advice package this advice may be subject to change. As a final note, we would also be happy to work with SIFCA in the development of any management measures that may result from this assessment.

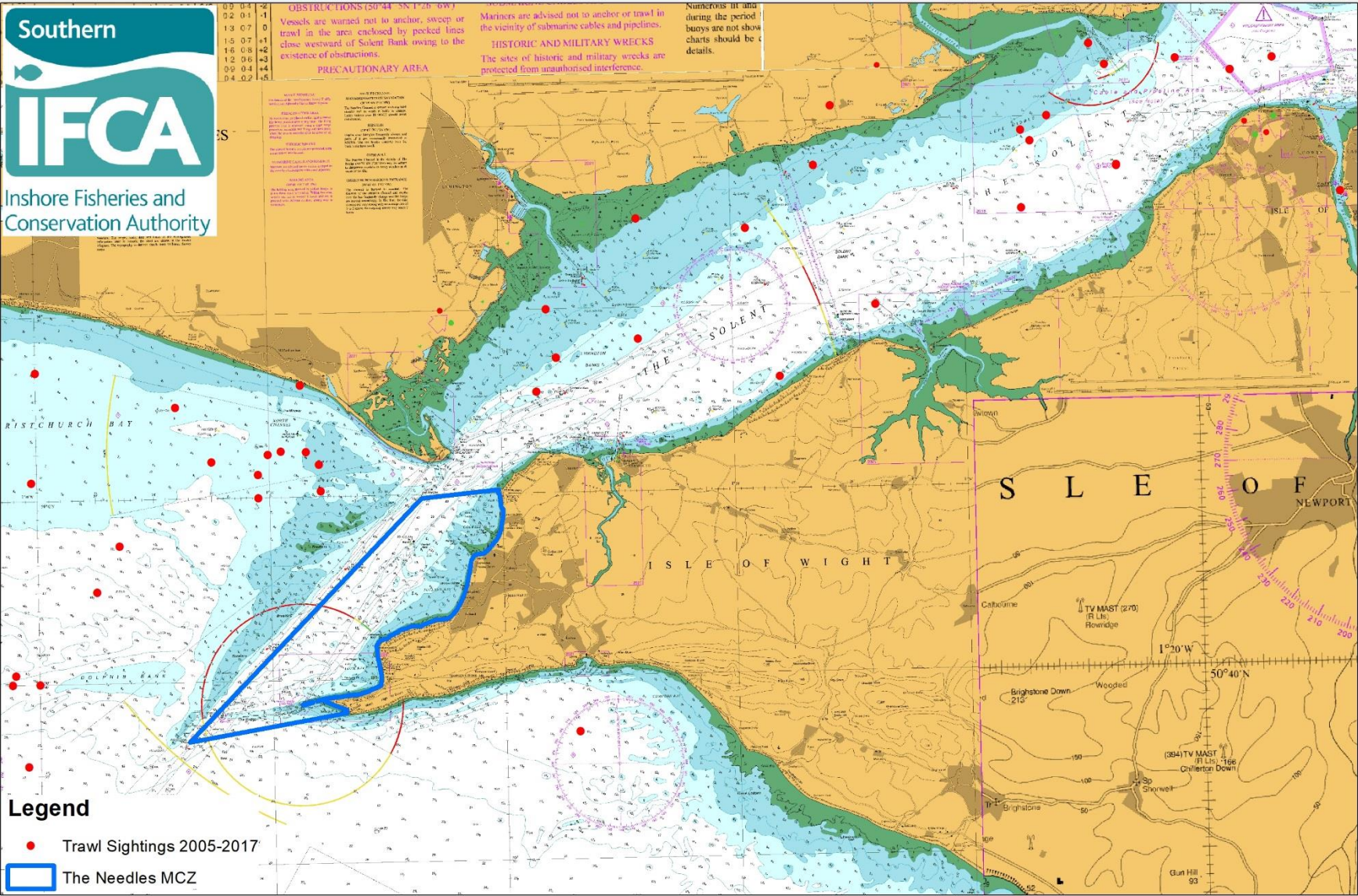
For any queries relating to the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my colleague Andrzej Narozanski (0208 225 6978; andrzej.narozanski@naturalengland.org.uk).

Yours sincerely



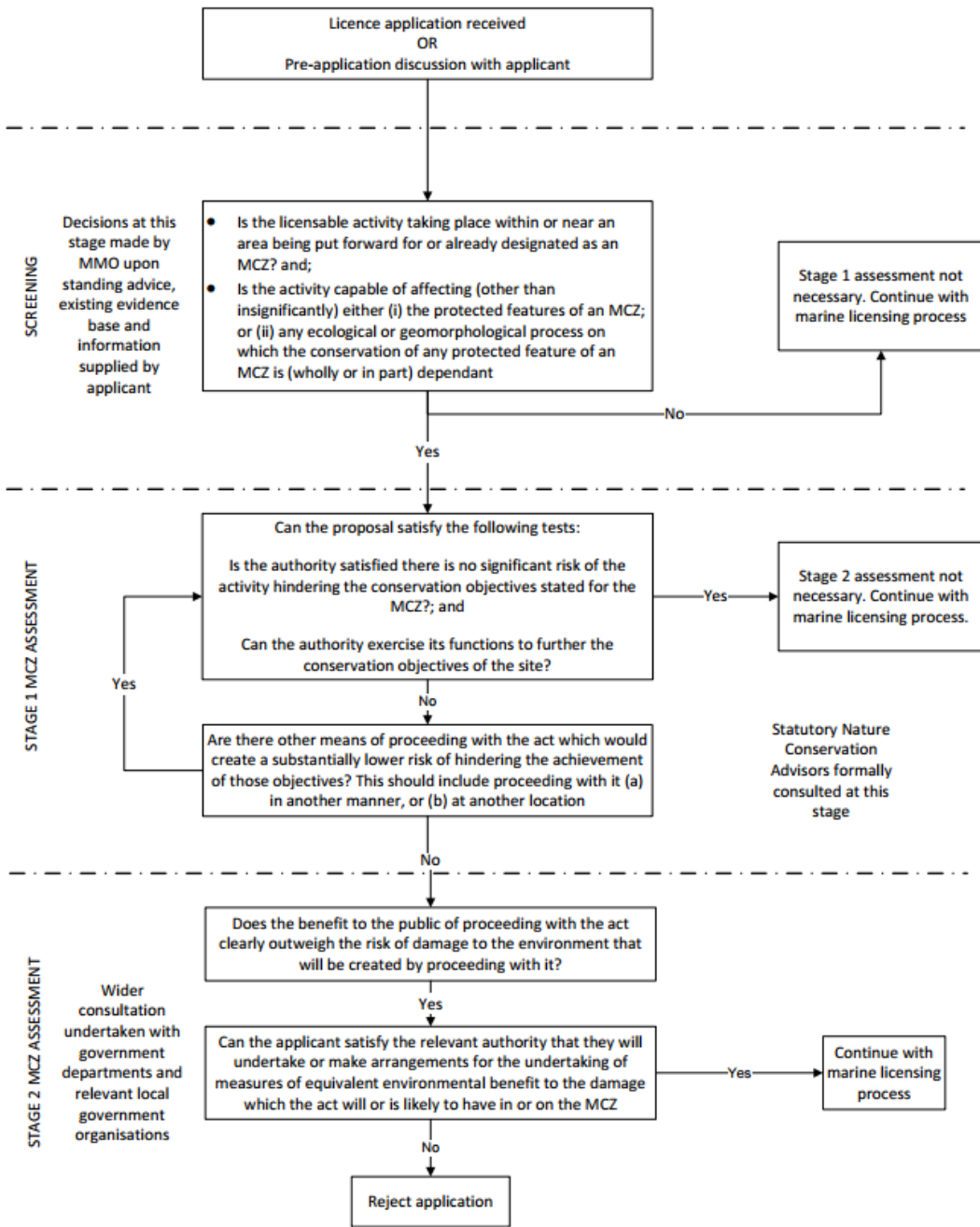
Richard Morgan
Marine Lead Adviser
Hampshire Coast & Isle of Wight Team
E-mail: richard.morgan@naturalengland.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 060 0240

Annex 5. Fishing activity maps using trawl sightings data from 2005-2017 in (a) Western Solent (b) Wider Solent



Annex 6. Summary of MMO assessment process for MCZs

N.B. This process will be integrated into the marine licensing process



Annex 7. Initial screening of commercial fishing activities - The Needles MCZ.

Broad Gear Type (for assessment)	Aggregated Gear Type (EMS Matrix)	Fishing gear type	Does it Occur?	Details	Sources of Information	Potential For Activity Occur/ Is the activity anticipated to occur?	Justification	Suitable for Part A Assessment?	Priority
Bottom towed fishing gear	Towed (demersal)	Beam trawl (whitefish)	N	Currently not known to occur.	Local IFCO	Y	Has historically occurred and so has the potential to occur (i.e. suitable trawl ground due to coarse substrate). If the activity were to occur, it would most likely be on an irregular basis on the fringes of the site. The likelihood of the activity occurring is therefore considered to be low.	Yes	Medium to High
		Beam trawl (shrimp)	N		Local IFCO	N	Target species does not occur.	No	
		Beam trawl (pulse/wing)	N		Local IFCO	N	Prohibited via Electric fishing byelaw.	No	
		Heavy otter trawl	N		Local IFCO	N	The activity has the potential to occur but is not	No	

							anticipated to occur. The boats which operate within the district (and the Solent) are small in nature (restricted to 12 m or less in length) and so are restricted in the size of gear used. This means light otter trawls are used instead of heavy otter trawls.		
		Multi-rig trawls	N	Currently not known to occur, however one vessel operating within the area uses a multi-rig trawl and has historically fished on the edges of the site with a light otter trawl.	Local IFCO	Y	Has not historically occurred and is not currently known to occur, however one vessel operating within the surrounding area has recently started operating a multi-rig (triple) trawl and this vessel has historically fished on the edges of the site with a light otter trawl. If the activity were to occur, it would	Yes	Medium to High

							most likely be on an irregular basis on the fringes of the site. The likelihood of the activity occurring is therefore considered to be low.		
		Light otter trawl	Y	Currently takes place at a low level, about 1 to 2 times a year by 1 or 2 vessels. The activity takes place on the fringes of the site over areas of subtidal coarse or mixed sediments. Target species will vary depending on location, vessel size and time of year but may include flatfish, skates and rays.	Local IFCO	N/A	Activity is known to occur.	Yes	High

		Pair trawl	N		Local IFCO	N	It is not anticipated to occur as it has not historically occurred. Furthermore there is limited potential due to the space required to accommodate two vessels and the size/power of vessels needed.	No	
		Anchor seine	N		Local IFCO	N	Gear type has not been historically used within the area and is not anticipated to occur. Activity needs a large area and in the site considered would be limited. In addition, large vessels are also required for this gear type and vessels over 12 m in length are prohibited from fishing within the Southern IFCA district.	No	

		Scottish/fly seine	N		Local IFCO	N	Gear type has not been historically used within the area and is not anticipated to occur. Activity needs a large area and in the site considered would be limited. In addition, large vessels are also required for this gear type and vessels over 12 m in length are prohibited from fishing within the Southern IFCA district.	No	
Pelagic towed fishing gear	Towed (pelagic)	Mid-water trawl (single)	N		Local IFCO	N	Gear type has not been historically used within the area. Activity has the potential to occur however this gear type does not come into contact with the seabed and therefore there is no chance for interaction with designated features.	No	

		Mid-water trawl (pair)	N		Local IFCO	N	Gear type has not been historically used within the area. Activity has the potential to occur however this gear type does not come into contact with the seabed and therefore there is no chance for interaction with designated features. Also limited potential due to the restricted area of the site to accommodate for two vessels.	No	
		Industrial trawls	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity is not able to occur due to the size of vessel required. Vessels over 12 m are prohibited from fishing within the Southern IFCA district.	No	
Bottom towed fishing gear	Dredges (towed)	Scallops	N		Local IFCO	N	Gear type has not historically occurred within the site. Whilst the activity does	No	

							<p>have the potential to occur, the post-survey site report does not report the occurrence of the King scallop (<i>Pecten maxim</i>), the main target species, which is targeted on the eastern side of the Isle of Wight. The report does mention the occurrence, albeit at very low levels (4-7% occurrence) of the Queen scallop (<i>Aequipecten opercularis</i>) which is also targeted commercially in other parts of the UK. Based on the very low levels of potential target species and lack of historical activity, the activity is not anticipated to</p>		
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							occur within the site.		
		Mussels, clams, oysters	N		Local IFCO	Y	<p>Clam target species are not known to occur within the site. The post-survey site report reports a 68% occurrence of the blue mussel (<i>Mytilus edulis</i>) and 7% of the horsemussel (<i>Modiolus</i>) from grab samples and 4% occurrence of the blue mussel from video samples. Unfortunately no information is provided on density, size of individuals or the substrate type where each sample was taken. The relatively high occurrence of blue mussels found in grab samples may suggest a potential for mussel</p>	No	

							<p>dredging to occur. The lack of historical activity within the area and lack of information known about size (mussels can only be harvested over 50 mm unless consent is granted for relaying in a private fishery) and densities, mean it is not anticipated to occur. Oyster dredging has historically taken place within Alum Bay which occurs within the site. The Solent oyster population has since been in decline and there are currently no indications of recovery, however restoration efforts commenced in 2015 and</p>		
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							continue to do so. Based on the current status of the Solent oyster population and the direction of decline (from west to east) in the Solent, the activity is not anticipated to occur within the site within the foreseeable future.		
		Pump scoop (cockles, clams)	N		Local IFCO	N	This activity takes place in relatively shallow waters. The substrate type found at these depths (i.e. bedrock and coarse sediments) is largely unsuitable for this method of fishing. In addition, target species (clam and cockle) are not known to occur within the site.	No	

Suction	Dredges (other)	Suction (cockles...)	N	Not allowed in the district.	Local IFCO	N	Suction dredging for cockles, clams, mussels and oysters is prohibited (by default) in the Southern IFCA district (by Southern IFCA byelaws).	No	
Tractor		Tractor	N		Local IFCO	N	The activity has not historically occurred within the site. The potential for activity to occur is limited due to limited access and substrate suitability.	No	
Intertidal work	Intertidal handwork	Hand working (access from vessel)	N		Local IFCO	N	Handworking with access from a vessel infers a muddy habitat where there difficulty accessing areas. At this site, the dominance of coarse and bedrock substrate means there is limited need for a vessel as the substrate means the area is accessible on	No	

							foot.		
		Hand work (access from land)	N		Local IFCO	N	<p>The activity has not historically taken place within the site and is not anticipated to occur. There is limited potential for the activity to take place due to a dominance of unsuitable substrate for hand gathering activities. Designated features, which would be suitable for hand gathering (i.e. mud, seagrass) are not intertidal and therefore whilst there is limited potential for the activity to occur it is not likely take place over designated features.</p>	No	

Static - pots/traps	Static - pots/traps	Pots/creels (crustacea/gastropods)	Y	Potting for crab and lobster takes place closer inshore due to the rocky substrate type. It is currently potted by 1 to 2 vessels, but could be potted by up to 5. The number of pots within the area is unknown. In the outer area of the site, where subtidal sediments exist, there is potential for whelk potting. The level at which it occurs is however unknown. The area is likely to be less favourable due to the rushing tide which affects the outer area of the site.	Local IFCO	N/A	Activity is known to occur.	Yes	Medium
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		Cuttle pots	Unknown	Unknown	Local IFCO	Y	It is not currently known if potting for cuttlefish takes place within the site. There is however potential for the activity to take place and it is anticipated the activity may occur or is already occurring.	Yes	Low to Medium
		Fish traps	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur.	No	

Demersal nets/lines	Static - fixed nets	Gill nets	Unknown	Unknown	Local IFCO	Y	It is anticipated that static fixed nets are used within the site in areas of shallow water, although effort is likely to be low with the area worked by 1 to 2 vessels. The activity is unlikely in deeper water due to the rushing tide in the outer reaches of the site.	Yes	Low to Medium
		Trammels	Unknown	See 'gill nets'	Local IFCO	Y	See 'gill nets'	Yes	Low to Medium
		Entangling	Unknown	See 'gill nets'	Local IFCO	Y	See 'gill nets'	Yes	Low to Medium
Pelagic nets/lines	Passive - nets	Drift nets (pelagic)	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity is not anticipated to occur and potential for the activity is limited by the rushing tide that effects the site, particularly the outer areas.	No	
Demersal nets/lines		Drift nets (demersal)	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity is not anticipated to occur and potential for the activity is limited by the rushing tide that	No	

							effects the site, particularly the outer areas.		
	Lines	Longlines (demersal)	Unknown	Unknown	Local IFCO	Y	It is anticipated that demersal longlines are used within the site, although effort is likely to be low with the area worked by 1 to 2 vessels.	Yes	Low to Medium
Pelagic nets/lines		Longlines (pelagic)	N		Local IFCO	N	The activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur.	No	
		Handlines (rod/gurdy etc)	Y	This activity is conducted by commercial, recreational and charter vessels, as well as from the shore. The activity takes place within the Needle Channel on the fringes of the site. Three to four commercial vessels conduct the	Local IFCO, Deeming, A.	Y	The activity is known to occur however this gear type does not come into contact with the seabed and therefore there is no chance for interaction with designated features. Shore-based angling is limited and due to the nature of the shoreline is highly unlikely to interact with any of the	No	

				<p>activity. The activity is also unlikely to be the main activity of commercial vessels due to operating multiple gear types. The activity is only undertaken during the summer months on a spring tide, up to four to five days at a time. Target species of the activity is predominantly bass. From the shore, angling is relatively limited due to the nature of the shoreline. Limited shore-based angling takes place in east half of Alum Bay, west half of Totland Bay and far eastern port of Colwell Bay (close to</p>			<p>designated features (which are predominantly subtidal).</p>		
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				Fort Albert).					
		Jigging/trolling	Y	See 'handlines (rod/gurdy etc)'	Local IFCO	Y	See 'handlines (rod/gurdy etc)'	No	
Purse seine	Seine nets and other	Purse seine	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur.	No	
Demersal nets/lines		Beach seines/ring nets	N		Local IFCO	N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur.	No	

Miscellaneous		Shrimp push-nets	Unknown	Unknown	Local IFCO	N	The occurrence of the activity is unknown. It is not anticipated to occur as it is not thought to have occurred historically within the site. The activity has the potential to occur but is unlikely to because of a lack of areas with suitable substrate to support the target species. In addition, activity is conducted intertidally and designated features are not intertidal and therefore whilst there is limited potential for the activity to occur it will not take place over designated features.	No	
EA Only		Fyke and stakenets			EA Only	EA Only	EA Only	EA Only	

Miscellaneous	Miscellaneous	Commercial diving	N	Not known to occur.		Y	Activity has not historically occurred but has the potential to occur over circalittoral rock habitats for king scallops (<i>Pecten maximus</i>) (although they have not been recorded in the site in the post-survey site report) and queen scallops (<i>Aequipecten opercularis</i>) (which are recorded in the post-survey site report albeit it low occurrences - 4-7%). Based on the low occurrence of target species and lack of historical activity, the activity is not anticipated to occur.	No	
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Bottom towed fishing gear		Bait dragging	N			N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur. The majority substrate present is not suitable for the activity to take place. As such, the target species are also not present.	No	
Miscellaneous		Crab tiling	N			N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site or Southern IFCA district and therefore is not anticipated to occur.	No	
Intertidal work	Bait collection	Digging with forks	N			N	Activity has not historically occurred within the site and is not anticipated to occur. The majority substrate present is not suitable for the activity to take place. As such, the target species are also not present. In	No	

							addition, activity is conducted intertidally and designated features (which may be suitable for digging with forks i.e. mud, seagrass) are not intertidal and therefore whilst there is limited potential for the activity to occur it will not take place over designated features.		
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