

Minutes of the Recreational Angling Sector Group Meeting held on the 27th of June 2018, 17:00, 64 Ashley Road, Poole, BH14 9BN

Present:

Chris Holloway (CH) – Chair
Alan Deeming (AD)
Kim Gibbs (KG)
Brian Bleese (BB)
Phil Higgins (PH)
Charlie Annear (CA)
Tim Ferrero (TF)
Sam Cummins (SC)
Robert Clark (RC) - IFCA
Patrick Cooper (PC) - IFCA
Karema Randall (KR) DEFRA
Sophie Vickery (SV) DEFRA
Gavin Black (GB) Natural England

RC welcomed the group to a special meeting to discuss 3rd tranche MCZs, aiming to provide the angling community with more information to enable a thorough and informed response to DEFRA's current consultation. The group discussed the scope of the meeting and it was agreed that the meeting would be bounded to angling, although there were other potential areas of interest for members of the group (e.g. anchoring) the focus would remain on the areas of interest which the IFCA could potentially manage.

RC took the group through the process to date, highlighting that this was the third round of consultation, following on from 1st and second tranche designations. 41 sites in total are proposed from a pool of originally recommended MCZs (30), sites identified by Natural England and the JNCC to fill remaining ecological gaps (9) and sites proposed by stakeholders for highly mobile species (2). New features were also proposed to existing tranche 1 or 2 sites. RC explained that the current consultation ran between 8th of June and the 20th of July and it was explained by SV that this was now the DEFRA standard consultation period, and although limited DEFRA were trying to actively engage where possible in this period. It was explained by RC that the consultation was designed to invite views from stakeholders on the proposed 41 sites, that new information was welcomed, providing it met the evidence standards set out in the consultation document. Following the consideration of responses, ministers will make final decisions on site designations within a year (i.e. in 2019).

The process post designation was explained to the group, that following designation, management would be developed within 2 years (i.e. 2021), delivered by the regulators (MMO/IFCAs) based on activity/feature and conservation advice provided by NE. GB provided an overview of terminology used in conservation objectives and the use of maintain and recover objectives. NOTE - since meeting GB has provided formal definitions for Recover and Maintain:

Recover GMA (Assigned where feature is in an unfavourable condition):

Management of certain activities may be required to remove pressures to which the feature is sensitive, so that feature can recover to a favourable condition.

Maintain GMA (Assigned where feature is in a favourable condition):

Current levels of activities are compatible with the feature, provided that they are managed to ensure no increase in pressures and the feature remains at favourable condition.

AD highlighted that previously it had been stated that recover did not always mean management, and maintain did not always mean that no management required. GB agreed stating that in some cases it highlighted sensitivity and vulnerability, requiring further assessment.

CH asked how the baseline objective was achieved and GB stated that a Recover or Maintain General Management Approach (GMA) was developed through an assessment of the current condition of each feature in each site. This condition assessment was achieved by carrying out a vulnerability assessment and considers the sensitivity of a feature to a pressure (e.g. abrasion) and whether the feature is exposed to that pressure through an activity occurring (e.g. shipping, trawling, laying cables etc). Best available evidence was used to inform this process which relied on a variety of sources. Sensitivities were based on research collated by the Marine Biological Association, who considered available literature, studies and research, and can be found here <http://www.marlin.ac.uk/habitats/az>. Verification surveys were undertaken and combined with existing data to determine presence/absence and extent of features. Knowledge of activities occurring was based on a combination of local knowledge, data and evidence from managing authorities. All these data were checked and quality assured. If a feature was found to be sensitive to one or a series of pressures and an activity/activities causing that pressure occurred over the feature (at a level to which it is considered vulnerable) then that feature was considered in unfavourable condition and a Recover GMA was assigned.

RC began running through each MCZ in the district:

Purbeck coast was highlighted as a large site in west Dorset and the group discussed the features. Members pointed out that much of the area was already protected by the Bottom Towed Fishing Gear byelaw. The bream feature was discussed in detail, SC enquired as to the evidence which suggested the bream required protection, GB stated that the evidence suggested that bream are sensitive to removal, as well as disturbance and impacts to habitats, therefore considered vulnerable, leading to a proposed Recover GMA.

The group provided opinions that black bream had been fairly stable in recent years, with PH stating that his catch records indicated it was as good as it have ever been and raised concerns that the supporting data was not accurate. The impact assessment was raised, and members of the group identified that the commercial values may be underestimates. CH and RC pointed out that the recreational value of the Black Bream was as yet unquantified. CH asked whether the Drew report or the Sea Angling 2012 could be used for this.

RC stated that management scenarios should be considered. Members of the group questioned the requirements of management due to low angling retention. GB indicated that this was due to the vulnerability around the nesting period. BB suggested that a voluntary code of practice around bream may be productive, PH indicated that many of these measures (bag limits etc) were already operated by the charter fleet. RC asked GB what the likelihood would be of bag limits and catch and release being acceptable under a recover objective, GB indicated that this would be difficult. Since bream is a non-quota species there is little data on the stock so advice had to be given based on pressures occurring at each site. Based on research it is considered that bream are especially sensitive to disturbance, removal and direct mortality at a site level and there is a lack of data on bream returning to the nest following catch and release. GB suggested that potentially this could include advice that a closure to all impacting activities (including fishing) over the site between April

and July is necessary. PH stated that the impact to the charter fleet and to the local economy would be huge, with most of the work the charter fleet has during that period being focused on the Bream.

Members of the group asked whether management could be considered, developed and monitored without total closure. SC enquired as to why it was necessary to provide socio-economic impact, when evidence of fishing impact was lacking or on a precautionary basis. Members asked for more details on the timeline and whether management would be immediate or provide enough time for research to be undertaken. RC stated that damaging an MCZ would become a general offence on designation (this excludes certain activities) and the current policy is that management would follow within at the latest 2 years of designation. At the point of designation, the IFCA would begin developing management on the basis of the conservation objectives and, unlike at designation stage, would not be able to consider socio-economics; at this stage the conservation objective would be the focus of managers – clearly if there is a choice of management options which achieve the conservation objective then those which have the least economic impact would be prioritised. KG asked whether management would be based on biomass, RC stated that resources would have to focus on achieving the conservation objectives in the first instance and that the designation and management would be site based. Currently the extent and number of nests at the sites is not fully known (though nesting is known to take place); a conservation objective of recover in the absence of data on the extent and density of nesting would draw heavily on conservation advice on the vulnerability of features.

Members of the group enquired as to whether Kingmere could be considered an example, GB said that NE are revising their conservation advice for that site presently, so therefore it is not likely to provide an indication of future management for the Dorset sites.

RC took the group through the other sites, including Poole Rocks and Southbourne rough where similar concerns were raised regarding the Bream. CH raised that areas in Southbourne Rough had already been identified as requiring protection from bottom towed gear due to their value to the commercial fleet.

Studland Bay rMCZ was mentioned, but recreationally from an angling perspective, not considering management outside the IFCA's remit, the group did not see any key issues for the group. South of Portland and the additional feature to Chesil and Stennis ledges were also discussed.

The sites in the East of the district were also considered, including Bembridge and Yarmouth to Cowes. AD enquired as to why the seagrass beds were considered in the MCZ around Bembridge. GB said this was as there were areas of seagrass beds not protected by the South Wight Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) that existed. AD asked whether it was too late for Black Bream to be considered for designation, GB indicated that Defra's process for 3rd parties to propose sites for highly mobile species had occurred in 2016.

Yarmouth to Cowes was also discussed, AD enquired as to why Newtown Harbour was now included having previously being considered for removal due to existing high levels of protection. GB indicated that this was to consider features not included in other designations. AD enquired as to whether already protected features, which are subject to change, particularly seagrass, would have extents updated to improve the evidence base. GB stated that it was Natural England's responsibility to monitor the condition of features and would where resources are available. Please note that seagrass beds in Yarmouth to Cowes rMCZ were not being considered as they were already protected by the Solent Maritime SAC.

CH asked more generally as to why black bream were considered for protection and why other species which were threatened were not. SV indicated that consideration was given to species which could be spatially managed.

CH and PH reiterated that the economic effects, both primary and secondary to the local economy would be significant. Both were concerned regarding the recover objective. The group asked whether recover could be put on hold until more research is gathered, RC indicated that the conservation objectives would have to be met in accordance with the previously mentioned guideline a partnership approach to data gathering could be considered and would be welcome; upon designation there would be a duty to achieve the conservation objectives.