



Four-Year Conservation and Research Plan 2024-2028



Dr Jen Lewis and Dr George Balchin

March 2024

www.sussex-ifca.gov.uk

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Conservation and Research Work Areas	6
Fisheries Management Plans	6
Monitoring	6
Marine Protected Areas	6
Byelaws	7
Consultations	7
Administrative Tasks	7
Appendix I: Workstreams Table	8



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sussex IFCAs Four-Year Conservation and Research Plan is one of a suite of plans that have been developed under the Sussex IFCA management framework. This management framework, and the plans it informs, are in accordance with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and associated Defra guidance. They reflect the Authority's purpose and duties and guide strategic and operational planning.

In line with Sussex IFCAs review of its Four-Year Plan for 2024-2028, the Conservation and Research (C&R) Team have reviewed their plan for the same period. This plan acts as the strategic framework for C&R workstreams. It is used to identify priorities for the team's activities each year in the Annual C&R Plans, together with the resources and capabilities required to fulfil these.

Work conducted by the C&R Team provides evidence required to inform and monitor management decisions, underpinning the Authority's work towards sustainable fisheries and a healthy marine environment within the District, and is therefore central to Sussex IFCAs remit. This plan provides a structure to facilitate the attainment of these goals.

The C&R Teams evidence collection activities include fieldwork and desk-based projects, which are designed to monitor current fisheries and byelaws and lay the groundwork for future changes in management. The ability of the C&R Team to collaborate within partnerships that have synergistic objectives is critical as this allows pooling of resources and networks to secure funding and outcomes that wouldn't be possible in isolation. By using existing data and collaborative working where possible the C&R Team strive to meet the resource demands of each workstream in the most cost-effective manner.

The priority and most substantial workstreams for the 2024-28 period are anticipated to revolve around FMP engagement and evidence collection, the review of existing byelaws, including the review of MPA byelaws with the development of monitoring and control plans in conjunction with this.

INTRODUCTION

Sussex IFCA collects evidence to support the decision-making processes of the Authority. Work conducted by the C&R Team provides essential evidence to both inform and monitor management decisions, ensuring the Authority is fulfilling their fisheries management and conservation objectives.

The Four-Year C&R Plan describes the priority workstreams over the next four years (April 2024 to March 2028), it has been created in step with the IFCA Four-Year Plan and aims to facilitate the attainment of its objectives. Embedded within the Four-Year C&R Plan is the Authority's move towards an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, which aligns with Government policy. Evidence is collected in a way that supports this approach, providing information to assist the development of management measures that both ensure fisheries are exploited sustainably, and best protect natural capital assets and associated ecosystem services.

Sussex IFCA is committed to furthering understanding of Sussex's marine natural capital assets, particularly those that underpin fisheries, such as rocky reefs and other nursery grounds, and ensuring that these assets are adequately protected from damaging activities. Natural capital describes the world's environmental resources, the value of which is associated with the provision of natural ecosystem services. These ecosystem services benefit humans and include food provision, recreational opportunities, and climate regulation. Understanding more about these complex systems and how human activities are affecting them is essential for supporting sustainable marine management.

The C&R Team's work is key for the fulfilment of the Authority's duties with respect to international environmental commitments including Birds, Habitats, Water and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. Following the UK's exit from the EU, it has full responsibility for fisheries policy and management within its waters. How the UK operates as an independent coastal state to sustainably manage stocks outside the EU is a key current issue for sea fisheries and coastal waters.

The Fisheries Act 2020 sets out how this will happen, by creating new powers for the UK and ending current automatic rights for EU vessels to fish in British waters. The Fisheries Act has changed UK fisheries management considerably from that under the Common Fisheries Policy, to ensure that it meets new objectives and management requirements. The Act includes eight objectives on: sustainability, precautionary approach, ecosystem-based management, scientific evidence, bycatch, equal access, national benefit, and climate change. As a legal requirement from the Act, in November 2022 the UK and devolved governments produced a Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) setting out how they will work together to deliver sustainable fisheries management in line with these objectives.

Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are a key feature in the JFS that will consider sustainable management, environmental, social, and economic concerns. To test the framework, six frontrunner FMPs have been developed (crab and lobster, whelk, king scallop, bass, Channel demersal non-quota species (NQS), and Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish), and second tranche FMPs are now in progress with third tranche expected to begin soon. Sussex IFCA will

continue to invest significant resources engaging with the development, implementation, monitoring, and reviewing of FMPs.

The Authority's national commitments to the delivery of its conservation duties within Marine Protected Areas (MPA) remains a core priority in the next four-year planning period. This is reflected in the significant workload contained within this plan related to informing, monitoring, and reviewing MPA management, including Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) and European Marine Sites (EMS).

It should be noted that these plans are subject to change, with the development of Fisheries Management Plans as a good example of substantial work that can become a priority for Sussex IFCA, but which was not captured in the previous Four-Year Plan. As such, the current Four-Year Plan has been designed to be flexible and leave room for the inclusion of work that were not initially anticipated.



Photo credit: Felix Reitze de la Haye



CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH WORK AREAS

Projects have been split into various work areas, relevant to the main duties of the IFCAs. Given the nature of work across the C&R Team, it is recognised that there is overlap and connectivity across work areas for some projects. Where this is the case, multiple areas have been assigned. The below section describes these different work areas. For a full list of projects and associated work area and timeline, see Appendix I.

Fisheries Management Plans

Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) set out frameworks for evidence collection and development of policy to secure the long-term sustainability of UK fish stocks. Projects in this work area relate to either species specific data gathering or general engagement with the development and implementation of the FMPs.

Several of the frontrunner FMPs were relevant to Sussex IFCA and significant resources were invested in researching and consulting on FMPs in the 2023/24 financial year. Five of these six frontrunner FMP's have now been published; however, the work is ongoing and has moved from a development phase into a prioritisation phase. Evidence gaps identified across the frontrunners are now being discussed to categorise them in terms of urgency and importance and highlight any opportunities to address several gaps simultaneously. The final frontrunner and the Skate and Ray FMP are likely to be published in the 2024/25 financial year. Of the FMP's that remain, only a portion are directly relevant to the fisheries that exist with the Sussex IFCA District, for example the Black seabream FMP. As such, although Sussex IFCA expect and intend to continue contributing significant resources to the development and progression of FMP's, the future workload for the C&R team is expected to decrease over the scope of this plan.

Monitoring

Projects in this work area relate to data gathering/processing, for example, our annual fishing vessel effort analysis, annual towed video surveys and the fish telemetry (acoustic tracking) project. Monitoring work is essential to collecting evidence on the effects of management and establishing a baseline for monitoring of future increases or decreases in management.

Marine Protected Areas

Sussex IFCA has statutory duties in relation to MPAs under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (Section 153 and 154) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Related projects focus on managing fishing activity within MPAs in relation to the Conservation Objectives of the site. At the time of writing this plan, management is in place for all but one of Sussex IFCAs MPAs (Beachy Head East MCZ). Formal consultation on Beachy Head East MCZ management is taking place during Q1 of 2024, with submission of the byelaw schedule expected by the end of 2024. Therefore, Sussex IFCA is moving towards a monitor and review phase for all its MPA's. When reviewing management for each MPA, Sussex IFCA will also develop a Monitoring and Control Plan, a process that will span several years. Monitoring and Control plans aim to establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological status which, if our monitoring or other data indicate these thresholds have been

breached, trigger a review process of the current management within a particular site.

Byelaws

Inshore fisheries are regulated through local IFCA byelaws. Work in this area relates to evidence gathering to aid the development of new byelaws and the review of existing byelaws (not including the MPA Byelaw). The 2024-2028 period is expected to be dominated by reviews of existing byelaws, with no current plans to develop additional byelaws, however Sussex IFCA does plan to investigate the potential for new fisheries in Sussex. The resource requirement to review individual byelaws will vary significantly, with the Shellfish Permit Byelaw and Nearshore Trawling Byelaw reviews expected to have significant resource requirements.

Consultations

Sussex IFCA has a responsibility to respond to relevant consultations administrated by the Marine Case Management System and the Planning Inspectorate, for example dredge aggregate disposal and developments in the marine environment. This work has the potential to take up considerable resource so is included as part of the four-year plan.

Administrative Tasks

This work area includes reporting for and attending Authority meetings, team meetings, 121s, appraisals, training and development, equipment maintenance, and supporting external partnerships and projects. This has not previously been captured within four-year plans but has been detailed here as they require considerable resource. Broad stakeholder engagement is also an important aspect of the C&R Teams work, including identifying key contacts and groups, their requirements, and the most effective way to communicate. This includes supporting University lectures and coastal partnerships and forums.



APPENDIX I: WORKSTREAMS TABLE

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
Annual	Shellfish Permit Byelaw annual report	- Produced for July Committee - Reporting temporal/spatial trends	Monitoring
Annual	MCMS consultations	- Administrate marine licensing consultations via the MCMS portal - Content and requirement of any response to be discussed with C+R Managers before being sent/removed from workbasket	Consultations
Annual	121s and IPPs	- Fortnightly catch ups between Research Officers and Research Managers - Plan the weeks ahead and discuss any issues - Set annual goals and priorities for each member of the C+R Team	Internal Business
Annual	Budget planning	- Throughout year - calculate costs, remaining funds, and remaining commitments. - Next years budget request	Internal Business
Annual	C&R Annual Plan	- Taken from 4-year plan (4-year plan updated to include additional year) - Include projects that need to be carried over from current Annual Plan - Update FMP R+D spreadsheet following annual plan completion (AIFCA request)	Internal Business
Annual	C&R Annual Report	- Produce Annual Report for Q2 Committee meeting - Update on C+R work across the year - Research, monitoring, consultation, stakeholder engagement, partnerships, etc	Internal Business
Annual	Committee Meetings	- Produce C&R update, relevant decision/information items - Attend committee and technical subcommittee meetings	Internal Business

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
Annual	Kit maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance schedule to be developed, guidance, and log for C+R equipment - Developed quarter by quarter across 24/25 and incorporate into 25/26 plan 	Internal Business
Annual	Partnership meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attending partnership meetings as required - Attendee for each meeting specified in Partnership Meetings doc - Attendees to update on meetings outcomes/discussions as appropriate 	Internal Business
Annual	Review C&R website material	<p>Check that all C+R related materials are up to date. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact Assessments - Codes of conduct - MCZ leaflets and other comms materials - Research reports 	Internal Business
Annual	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As required, for example: - STCW - Small fish ID - Statistics and GIS - Condition and Habitat Regulation Assessments 	Internal Business
Annual	Data sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production of agreements when sharing data - All data sharing requests to be reviewed/approved by C&R Manager - Liaise with DASSH to send and update survey metadata on MEDIN 	Internal Business

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
Annual	Input into Enforcement casefiles – Environment impact summaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research Officers to draft environment impact summary section for Enforcement casefiles - All draft sections to be reviewed/approved by GB or JL before being sent to Enforcement 	Internal Business
Annual	TAG meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical Advisory Group - Environmental leads across all IFCA's - C+R Managers to attend and administrate actions - Update TAG on developments in Sussex as appropriate 	Internal Business
Annual	Interactive map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Update existing layers - Write tutorial on how to update layers 	Internal Business
Annual	Volunteer projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated by Volunteers lead - Steyning Grammar school - Annual - Uni of Sussex - Annual 	Internal Business, Research
Annual	Acoustic array maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As and when required in coordination with Uni of Plymouth - UoP to lead on dates with MAROPS, C+R to support as able 	Monitoring
Annual	BLUE Potting survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing SKRP collaboration since 2021. - Potting surveys in August measure the abundance, size, weight, sex and condition of Edible Crab, European lobster and Spider Crab caught in the pots at sites in and outside the Sussex Nearshore Trawling Byelaw area. - Data analysis by Adam Rees and Annual Report by Emily Bulled 	Monitoring
Annual	Fishing Vessel Effort Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce fishing vessel effort grids for previous 5 years - Watchful track data and data from sightings log to be processed to create a district wide 1kmsq grid network to indicate the average number of sightings per square km patrolled by FPV Watchful. 	Monitoring

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
Annual	Habitat mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extend the SCHIP 2 project to cover entire District; detailed habitat data will underpin much of C+Rs work - Anticipated to be a multi-year collaborative project 	Monitoring
Annual	Potting survey - Officer observer on local vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Send officer up to Alex A in Northumberland to learn methodology - Liaise with Charlie to find local potter that's willing to have an observer on board 	Monitoring
Annual	Small Fish Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting small fish surveys across the District from June - September 	Monitoring
Annual	Towed video surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of ongoing monitoring of the Nearshore Trawling Byelaw area - Surveys usually take place late July/early August - Once completed analysis is undertaken by ZSL 	Monitoring
2024-25	Minimum Size Byelaw communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop materials (posters/leaflets) summarising management - Assist with dissemination of materials, help with socials - Must include dissemination of Elasmocoelom CoC 	Byelaw development
2024-25	Shellfish Permit Byelaw review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Assessment of potting activity and impacts - Analysis of catch return data to-date - Review of Shellfish Permit Database functionality - Review of management - Possible publication of report 	Byelaw review
2024-25	SPB Catch returns prelim analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volunteer project - Candidate to be selected from Sussex Uni - Basic visualisations of SPB data, across space and time - Possibility of some preliminary statistical analysis - Will form basis of analysis for the SPB review 	Byelaw review, Monitoring, Research

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2024-25	Kingmere MCZ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management against Conservation Objectives - Development of M & C plan (liaison with NE) 	Byelaw review, MPA
2024-25	5-year towed video survey report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of data and report by Chris Yesson and Francesco Marzano - Officers to be closely involved with review of drafts - May need to find some additional funding to pay for Chris' time to write the report 	Byelaw review, Research
2024-25	Rampion 2 consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation with the Planning Inspectorate for Rampion 2 (Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project) development - Provide comment on potential impacts to local marine habitats and species, fisheries, and fishers 	Consultations
2024-25	Black seabream FMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend relevant meetings, investigate membership of working group, respond to consultations/draft FMPs - Link in with Kingmere MCZ review and M+C plan 	FMP
2024-25	Skate and Ray FMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend relevant meetings, investigate membership of working group, respond to consultations/draft FMPs - Attend Working Group 	FMP
2024-25	Create website page for data sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning resources page to be refurbished to a data sharing page - List of available data with brief description of datasets and associated reports - Contact details to request access also included - Data request form must be completed before data is shared 	Internal Business

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2024-25	Flying array set up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up kit - bridle, camera, lasers etc - Test from Watchful 	Monitoring
2024-25	Additional telemetry tagging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Possible purchase/deployment of additional telemetry tags - In collaboration with Uni of Plymouth - Officers to assist with tagging - Builds on previous telemetry work with Uni of Plymouth 	Monitoring, Research
2024-25	Scallop potting trial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trail to investigate the viability of a scallop potting fishery in Sussex - Trial to be conducted near Bognor - Analysis of data to produce LPUE, total landings, etc - Expected to take some time to reach the point of establishing a fishery - Collate necessary evidence to support viability (or not) of fishery 	Monitoring, Research
2024-25	Beachy Head East MCZ byelaw consultation and submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Analysis of statutory consultation responses - Assist with Committee Paper as required - Assist with byelaw submission as required 	MPA
2024-25	Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay SPA Extension HRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All gear types known to occur in Sussex to be assessed with a test of Likely Significant Effects - Any gear types known to occur within the site taken through to Appropriate Assessment to assess current activities and management against the Conservation Objectives of the site 	MPA
2024-25	Kingmere MCZ M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA
2024-25	Offshore Overfalls MCZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review management of Sussex IFCA section of the site - Light touch 	MPA

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2024-25	Solent and Dorset Coast SPA - HRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All gear types known to occur in Sussex to be assessed with a test of Likely Significant Effects - Any gear types known to occur within the site taken through to Appropriate Assessment to assess current activities and management against the Conservation Objectives of the site 	MPA
2024-25	Assessment of potting activity and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combine fishing effort analysis with SPB catch returns - Per ICES sub square - Literature review of benthic potting impacts - Assessment of Blue Marine Foundation potting study 	Research, Byelaw review
2025-6	Hand Gathering Byelaw communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop materials (posters/leaflets) summarising management - Assist with dissemination of materials, help with socials 	Byelaw development
2025-6	Fishing Instruments Byelaw review (Legacy byelaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure byelaw is still suitable in context of recent byelaws/management - Review/update IA - Review technical gear specifications - Review oyster management now beds are not classified 	Byelaw review
2025-6	Chichester EMS SAC review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and Site Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management against Conservation Objectives 	Byelaw review, MPA
2025-6	Mixed Channel Flatfish FMP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend relevant meetings - Investigate membership of working group - Respond to consultations/draft FMP 	FMP

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2025-6	Environment Agency trial kelp monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mNCEA scheme run by EA to map UK kelp distribution - Sussex shortlisted for tranche 2 survey sites - Assist with surveys - TBC with Erin - Will likely require Watchful time, possibly modifications 	Monitoring
2025-6	Beachy Head East MCZ M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring
2025-6	Chichester EMS SAC M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring
2026-7	Netting Permit Byelaw comms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop materials (posters/leaflets) summarising management - Assist with dissemination of materials, help with socials 	Byelaw development
2026-7	Nearshore Trawling Byelaw review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review/update IA - Assess impacts of byelaw - Consolidate monitoring/research to-date 	Byelaw review
2026-7	Oyster Permit Byelaw review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure byelaw is still suitable in context of recent byelaws/management - Review oyster management now beds are not classified 	Byelaw review

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2026-7	Scallop Closed Season Byelaw review (Legacy byelaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure byelaw is still suitable in context of recent byelaws/management - Review/update IA - Ensure local measures are concurrent with any national closed season 	Byelaw review
2026-7	Vessel Length Byelaw review (Legacy byelaw)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure byelaw is still suitable in context of recent byelaws/management - Review/update IA 	Byelaw review
2027-8	Beachy Head West MCZ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management against Conservation Objectives 	Byelaw review, MPA
2027-8	Pagham MCZ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management - Specifically whether it is meeting the Conservation Objectives 	Byelaw review, MPA
2027-8	Selsey Bill and the Hounds MCZ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management - Specifically whether it is meeting the Conservation Objectives 	Byelaw review, MPA
2027-8	Utopia MCZ review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of current fisheries management within MCZ site - Review/update IA and MCZ Assessment - Use available evidence to assess current management - Specifically whether it is meeting the Conservation Objectives 	Byelaw review, MPA

Year	Project name	Project description	Work area
2027-8	Beachy Head West MCZ M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring
2027-8	Pagham MCZ M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring
2027-8	Selsey Bill and the Hounds MCZ review and M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring
2027-8	Utopia MCZ M+C plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review current and historical fishing activity and landings within the site - Establish upper and/or lower thresholds in fishing activity and/or ecological metrics - Define review process that is triggered when thresholds are breached 	MPA, Monitoring