

Beachy Head East (BHE) MCZ Informal Consultation Report – Sussex IFCA

Introduction

The introduction of management in Beachy Head East MCZ (BHE) has been a priority workstream for Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (SxIFCA) during the 2022/23 financial year. In association with the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), using the Community Voice Method, and has now completed the first stage of the consultation process; a series of informal workshops.

The first set of workshops introduced the MCZ schedule development process, and the evidence associated with BHE. It also allowed participants to indicate why the MCZ area was important to them and their hopes for what management, such as MCZ's, could achieve in the future. The second set of workshops introduced the proposed management options, facilitated discussion of these options between participants from different sectors and backgrounds, before allowing participants to express the preference regarding the proposed management options, via a questionnaire.

During these workshops various aspects of the MCZ were discussed and participants were encouraged to view potential management from different perspectives, for example, that of a conservation manager, that of a commercial fisher, and that of a recreational sea-user.

Time and locations of workshops

Both sets of workshops were completed in February 2023 at three locations:

- Bexhill-on-Sea (6th and 17th February)
- Eastbourne (7th and 14th February)
- Hastings (9th and 16th February)

The workshops were advertised by SxIFCA and the MCS via social media and email, the SxIFCA website, and by SxIFCA Officers who handed out fliers and communicated with fishers while on patrol throughout the district in the lead up to the workshops. Commercial and recreational fishers were the focus of our efforts to advertise the workshops as a representative sample of, and the chance to engage with the local fishing community was considered a priority.

Workshop questionnaires

When producing a questionnaire and performing the subsequent analysis, SxIFCA focused on gauging the opinions, preferences, and consequences for commercial and recreational fishers of the different proposed management options, including the ability to indicate areas of the MCZ which were of importance; this analysis is detailed below. The responses of a wider variety of stakeholders and local community members, including fishers, was captured by the MCS questionnaire and analysis, for which a separate report is available.

Following the workshops SxIFCA launched an online informal consultation which ran from the 8th March – 5th April. An Information Sheet was produced designed to replicate the information provided and chronology with which it was communicated in the workshops. An online questionnaire was then produced via Survey Monkey, which replicated the questionnaire presented in the workshops, such that the responses from both could be combined, but also included a section for non-fishers to facilitate feedback from interested parties who could not attend the workshops.

Attendance and demographics

There were over 60 attendees in total (across all three sites) at both stages of the informal consultation process. The total number of attendees based on background information provided by attendees upon arrival (self-selected, one tally per person as shown below – data provided by MCS. Where multiple groups were indicated at check in, the first stated stakeholder grouping was used). Representative of all workshop attendees (n=125).

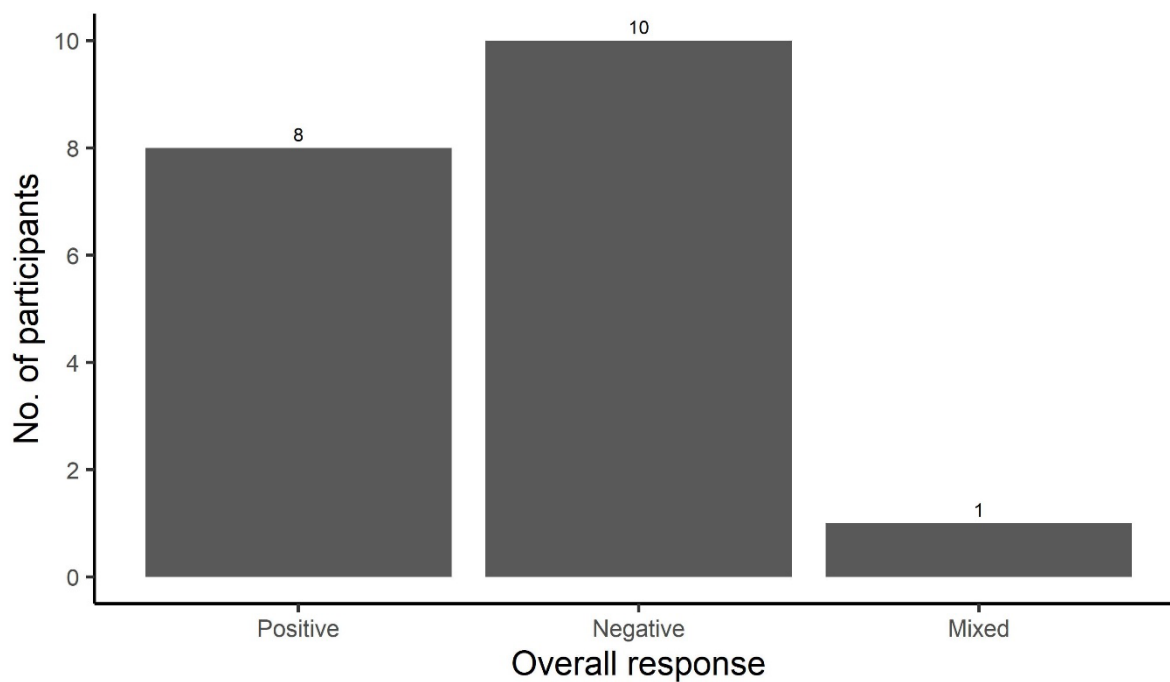
Stakeholder Group	Total Workshop 1 attendances (n)	Workshop 2 attendances (n)	Total overall attendances (n)	Proportion total attendance of 125 people (%)
Environmental group/ organisation/ interest	9	12	21	16.8
Commercial fisher (any fishing type)	16	23	39	31.2
Recreational fisher (any fishing type)	12	12	24	19.2
IFCA committee member	3	1	4	3.2
Councillor / Government	7	6	13	10.4
Marine business - charter boat	3	1	4	3.2
Business – fish shop	0	1	1	0.8
Business – tackle shop	2	2	4	3.2
Business - other	0	1	1	0.8
Academia / research	2	2	4	3.2
Local resident	3	0	3	1.6
Natural England	4	0	4	2.4
Environment Agency	1	1	2	1.6
Marine Management Organisation	1	0	1	0.8
TOTAL	63	62	125	100.0

Questionnaire analysis

Following the workshops and the completion of the questionnaires, the responses and results were collated by SxIFCA to enable both quantitative and qualitative analyses to be drawn from the responses, as detailed below. The analysis of the spatial distribution the most utilised areas of BHE also collated the data individually for different fishing gears, such that fishery-specific patterns could be investigated.

General feedback on the specific management proposals presented:

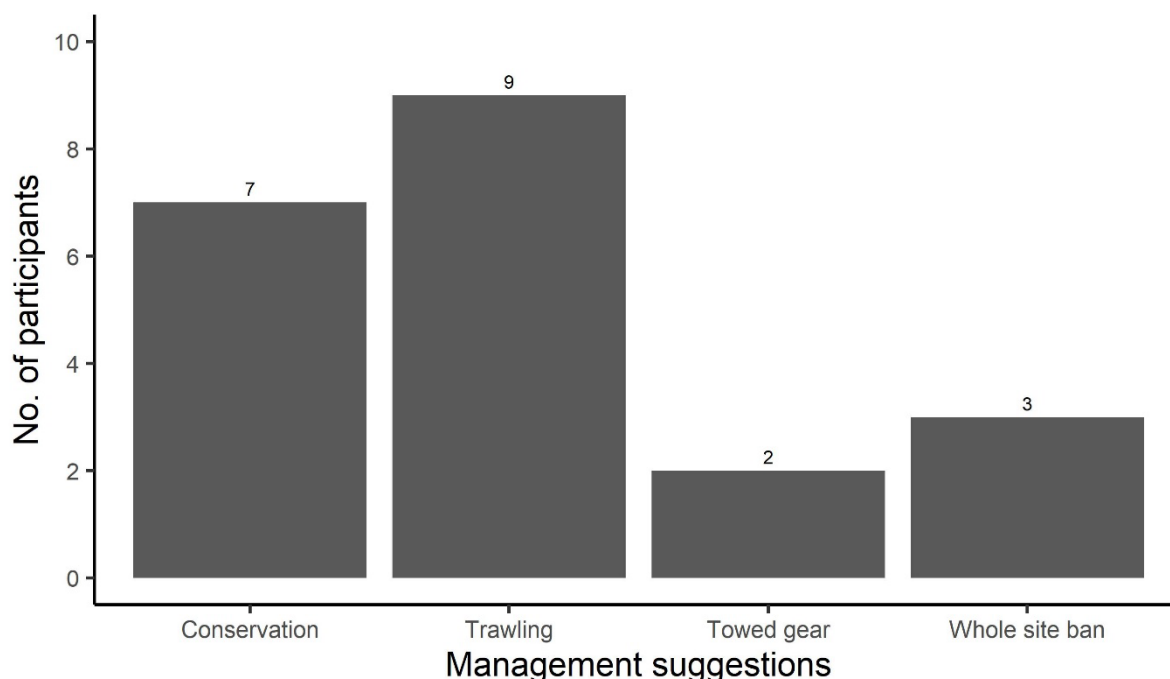
The first question asked for general comments on the management proposals presented at the workshops, which were interpreted by SxIFCA Officers as generally positive, negative, or mixed, and subsequently quantified:



- 19 respondents commented on the specific management proposals presented, with a roughly equal split between positive and negative feedback.
- Issues mentioned included trawling and multiple respondents wanting a whole site ban.
- Desire for differentiation between trawling types (beam and otter)

General suggestions on the management required in BHE:

It was also possible to draw out common themes from respondent answers to the first question, which were categorised and quantified:



- Conservation of habitats, juvenile fish and future sustainability of fisheries seen as priority by many, with some mentioning a whole site ban (on bottom towed gears)
- Trawling/towed gears mentioned specifically by many participants.

Example response excerpts:

Positive

- *Seems sensible to put a trawling exclusion zone in as trawling does cause damage to habitat.*
- *Proposal 4 (100m) is the favourite choice as it allows plenty space for both conservation and fishing.*
- *I would like to see whole site MCZ management with a ban on trawling throughout the whole site.*
- *I would like to see protection of the fauna which will in turn impact fish stocks. Juvenile fish need protection so that they can safely grow to maturity.*

Negative

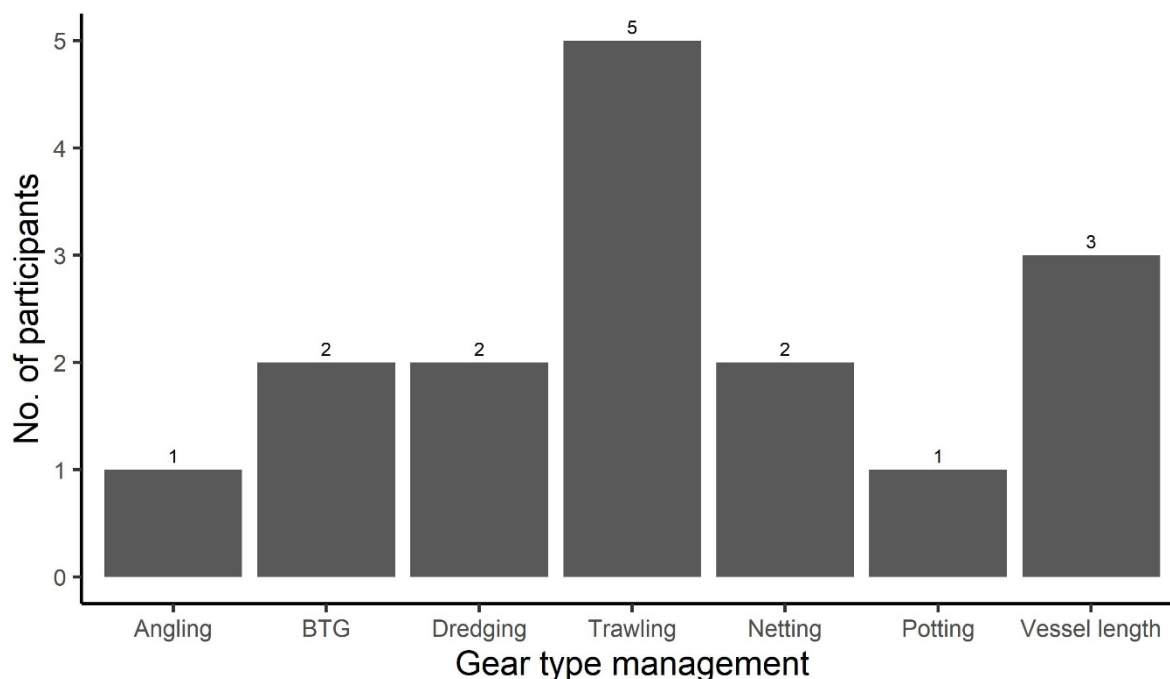
- *Think this has been only targeted at the towed gear sector.*
- *Any fish conserved in zone will simply swim out into deeper water in winter months to be caught by EU vessels on 6 mile limit.*
- *There was no difference between otter and beam trawling.*

Mixed

- *Banning trawling should have a positive effect but may lead to an increase in netting.*

Suggestions for management of gear types and broader management approaches:

The second question asked attendees for any general comments on their thoughts on the management that would be appropriate with BHE, specifically asking which fishing gears they thought be the target of management



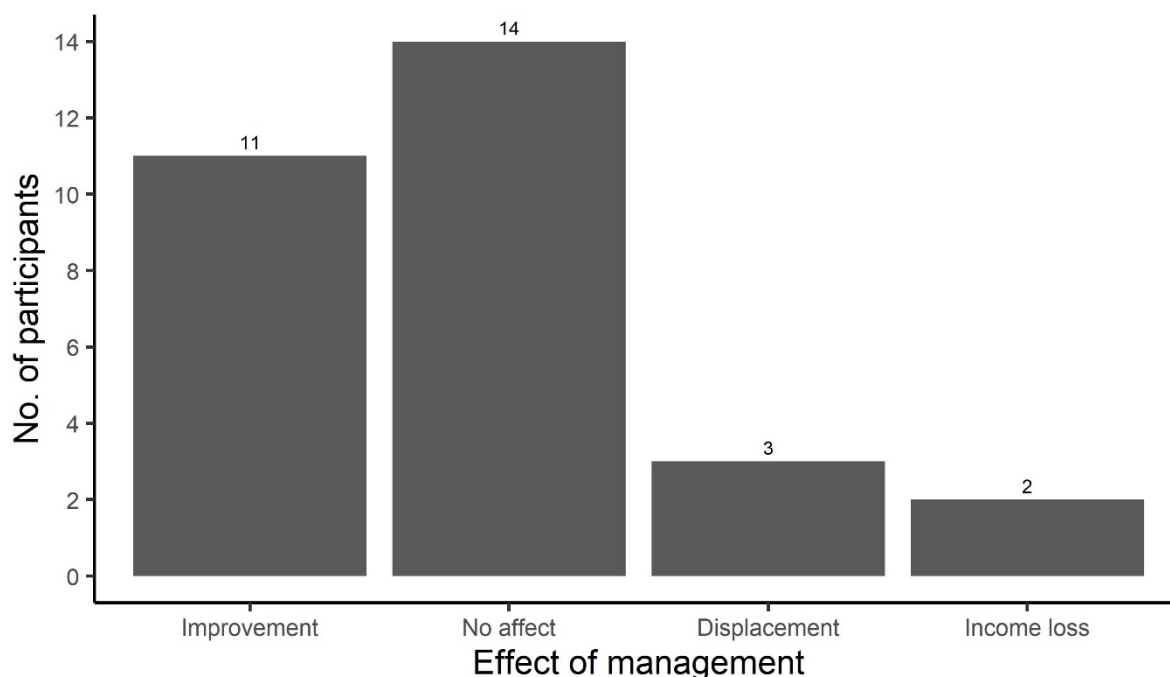
- 15 responses with management proposals, of which 11 suggestions were for gear-type management and 4 were for broader approaches.
- Gear types with proposed management included trawling, potting, netting, dredging, and angling.
- Other proposals included seal management, grandfather rights and vessel length restrictions.
- Issues raised included dumped gear and changes in minimum conservation reference sizes for fish.

Example response excerpts:

- *Potting sector because of dumped gear.*
- *Let those that fish area finish their time.*
- *We need to progress some work to look at proactive seal management before the problems associated with them really get out of hand – we need commercial fishermen for sustainable food and food security reasons.*
- *I would like to see static nets moved out further to half mile minimum from the beach, not only to help recreational angling but conserve the nursery areas.*
- *Trawling limited to ≤ 10 m boats and limited to 'light otter trawls' only.*
- *I think there should be an increase in the minimum size for fish caught here*

How will the proposed management affect your current fishing activities?

The third question asked fishers to express how they might be affected by the proposed management, which were categorised and quantified.



- Largely (83%) positive and/or neutral views on the impacts of the proposed management on current fishing activities.
- Almost half of respondents stated they would not be affected by the proposed management which we view as a positive outcome. This is mainly because potting and angling will not be managed.
- Many hoped there would be an increase in fish stocks as a result.
- Concerns were raised over the potential negative impact on income and displacement.

Example response excerpts:

Positive

- *It will not directly affect my activities.*
- *Hopefully means that we have more fish for shore anglers to catch.*
- *More fish will be able to spawn and survive within the inshore waters, and thus many more and bigger fish will survive improving the overall recreational fishery.*

Negative

- *Any ground we loose will affect our income.*
- *Will increase fishing activity further East towards Dungeness, more pressure on the scalloping grounds.*
- *Loss of earnings.*

Mixed

- *Minimally but it could restrict future activities.*
- *Minimal affect on trawling but more affect on dispersal of scalloping vessels.*

Additional comments

- Only a minority of respondents had additional comments and almost all additional feedback was positive.
- The area is valuable to fishers for the variety of species and is recognised as an important nursery area that needs greater protection.
- There was a desire for compromise between fishers and conservationists as well as a request for clear signposting when management is introduced.
- Previous issues raised regarding seal management and vessel length restrictions were reiterated.

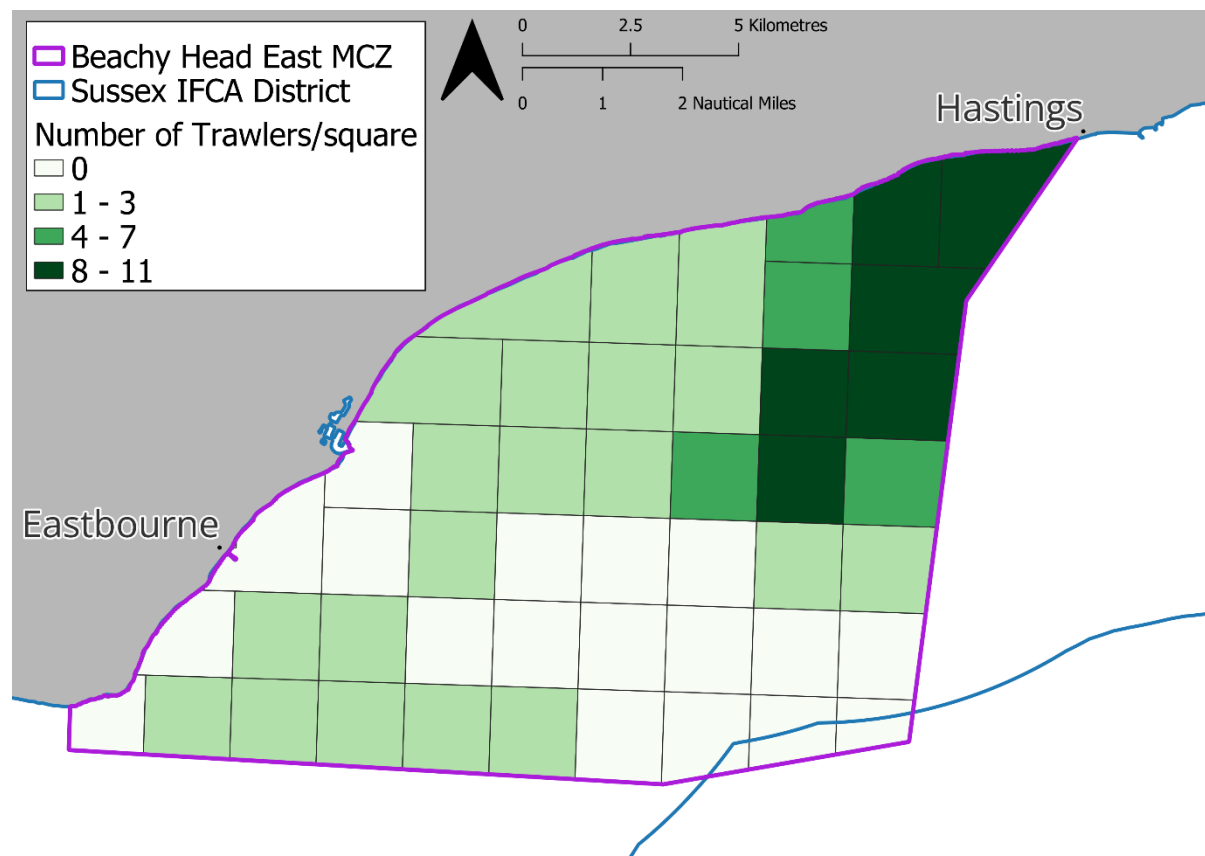
Example response excerpts:

- *Overall this should be positive for fishers and conservationists. It would be wise to settle in the middle to please both parties – strengthen trust.*
- *The large amount of rough ground and ledges is a natural conservation area.*
- *If proposals are pursued, then Byelaw should be clearly posted on information boards (on the beaches) throughout the site.*
- *Since I began angling at Bexhill in the early 1970's I have personally witnessed a worrying decline in both the number and size of fish in the area. This MCZ is urgently required to encourage the recovery of fish stocks.*

Spatial distribution different fisheries/gear type activity

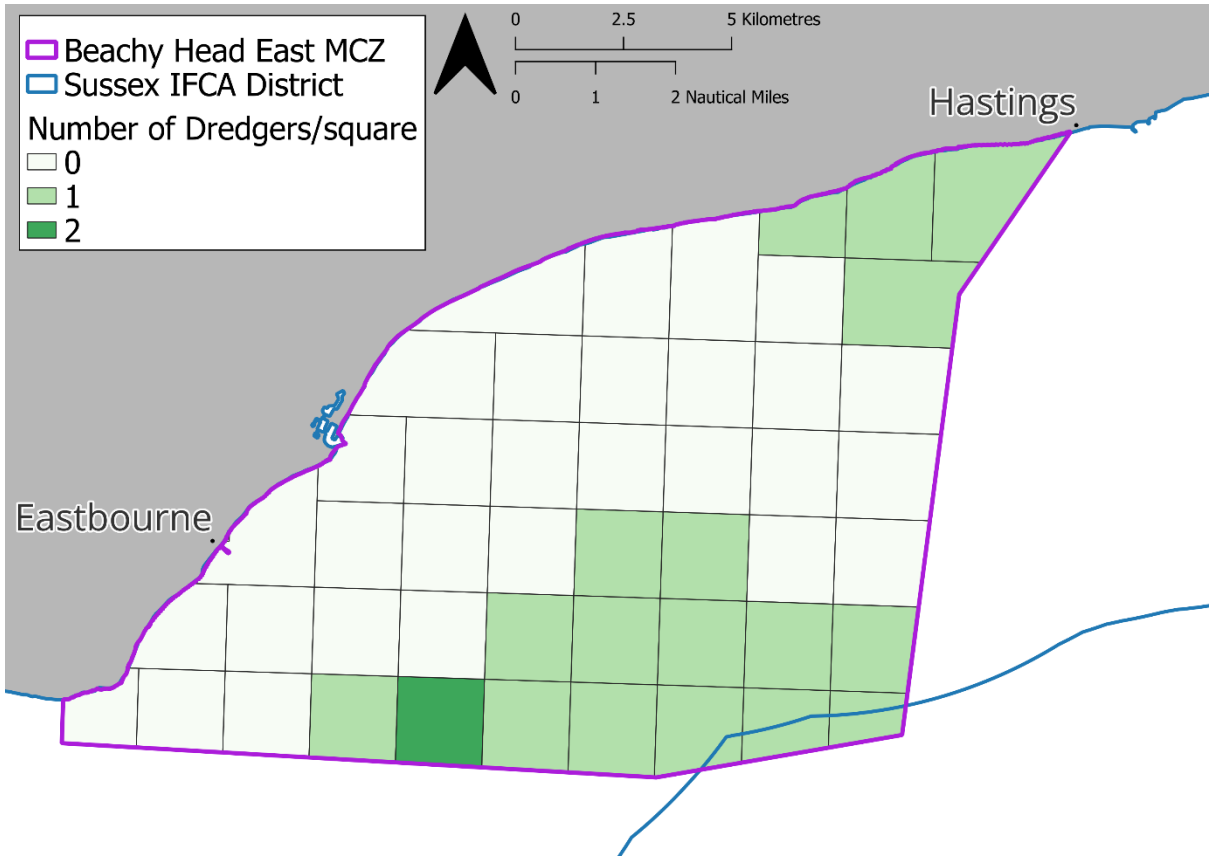
Participants were asked to indicate on a map which areas of BHE were most important for their fishing activities. A map was provided for each gear type (trawling, dredging, netting, potting, and angling). From these maps the spatial distribution of each gear type was mapped using GIS

Trawling:



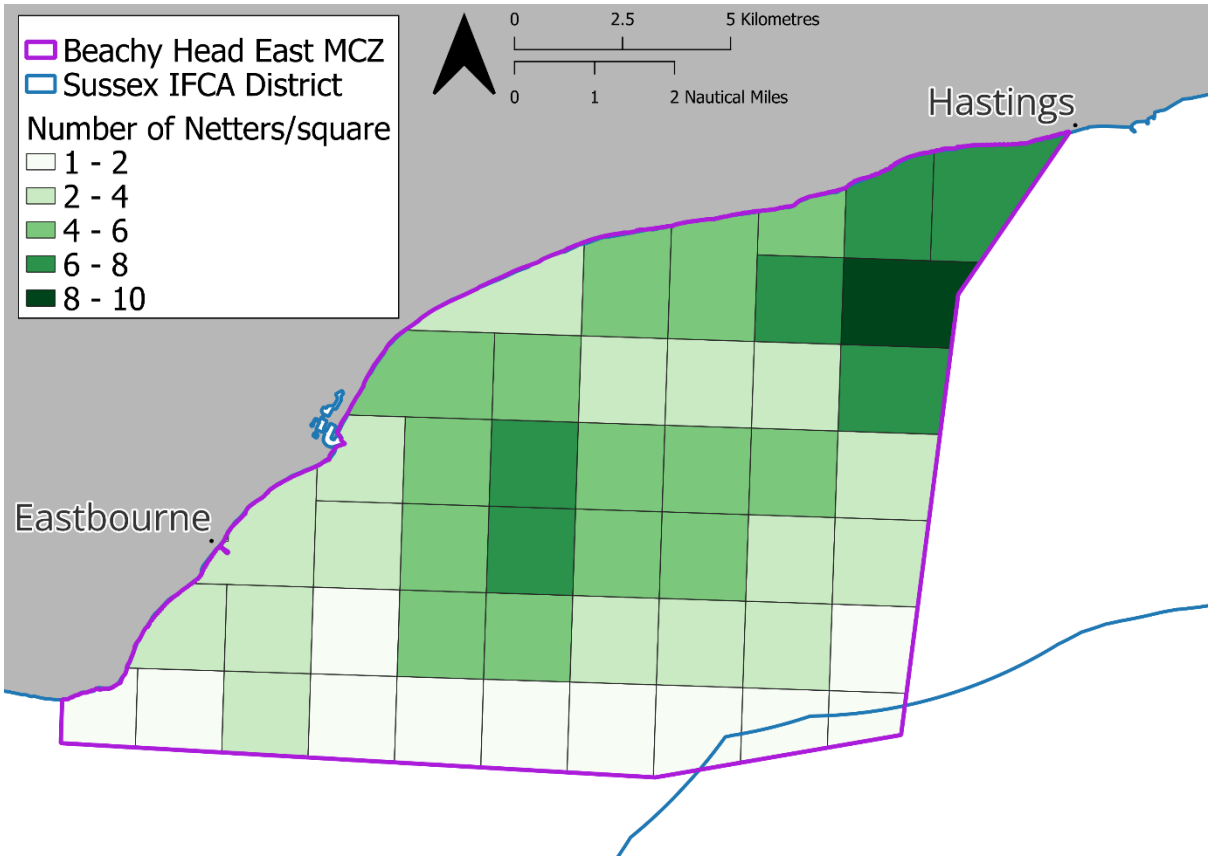
The map indicates that the north-east of BHE is the most important for trawlers.

Dredging:



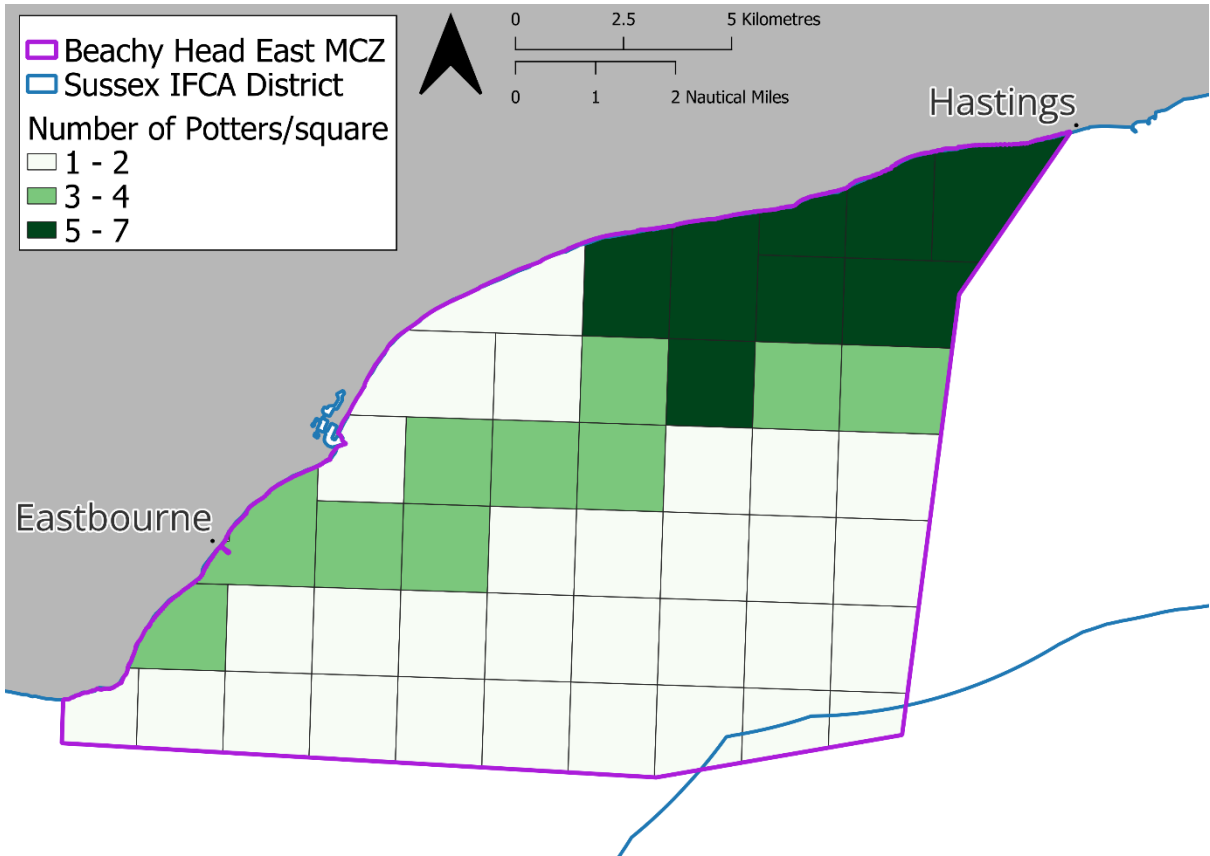
The map indicates that the north-east and southern boundary of BHE is most important for dredgers, but that relatively few of the fishers surveys utilise BHE for dredging.

Netting:



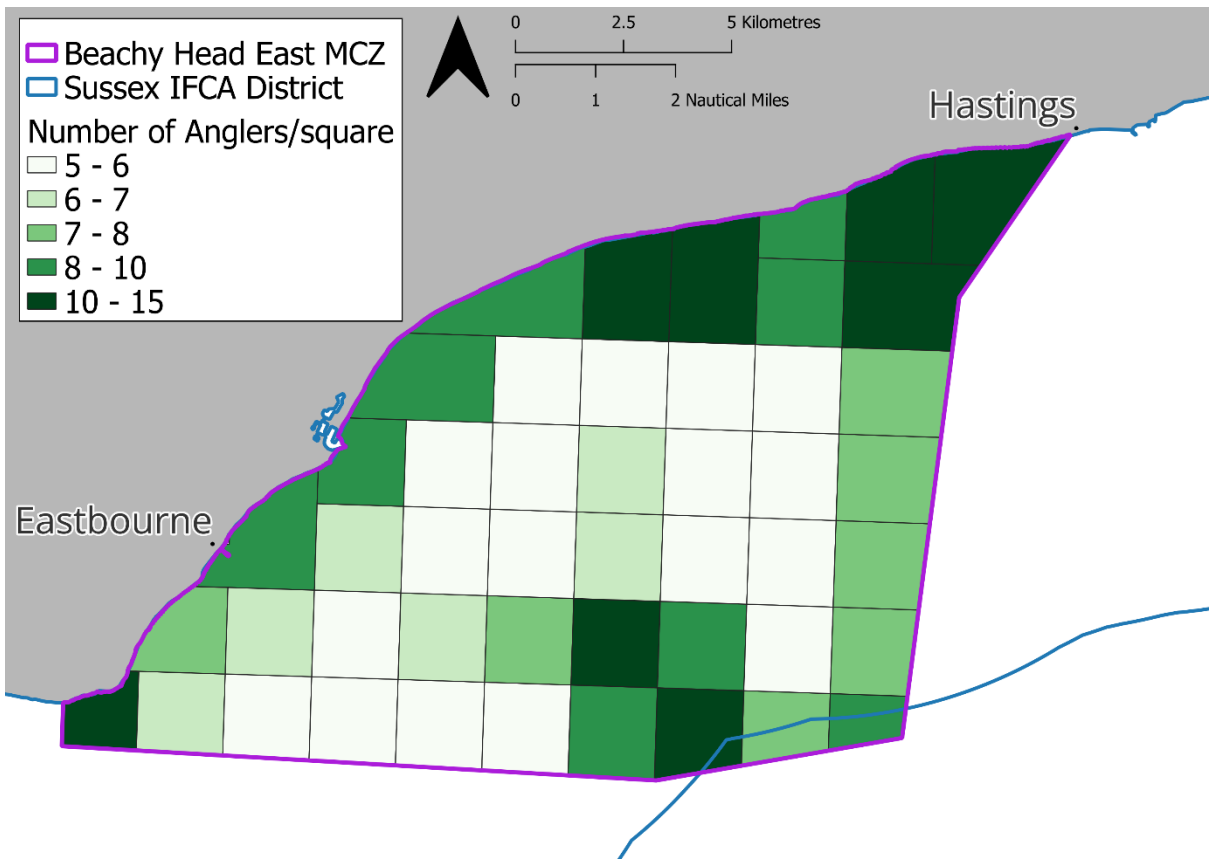
The map indicates that the north-east and centre of BHE is the most important for netters.

Potting:



The map indicates that the north-east of BHE is the most important for potters.

Angling:



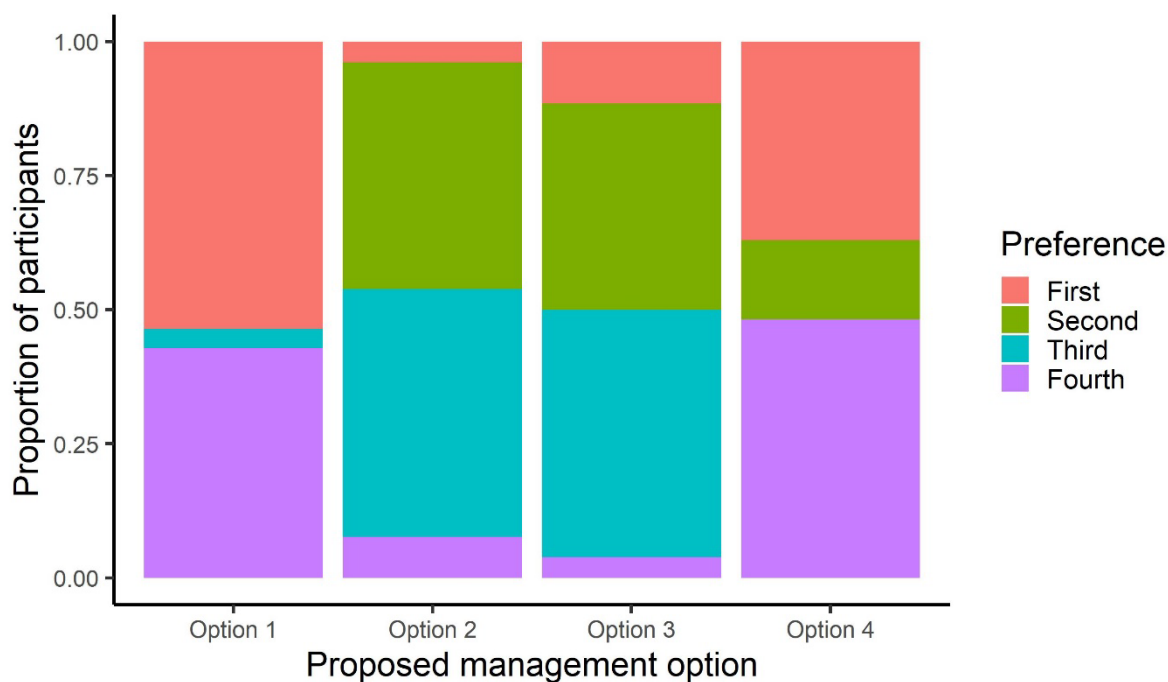
The map indicates that angling is more disparate throughout the MCZ, relative the other fishing gears. The north-east, central north, central southern boundary and south-west of BHE is the most important for anglers.

Preferences for proposed management

Boundary margin

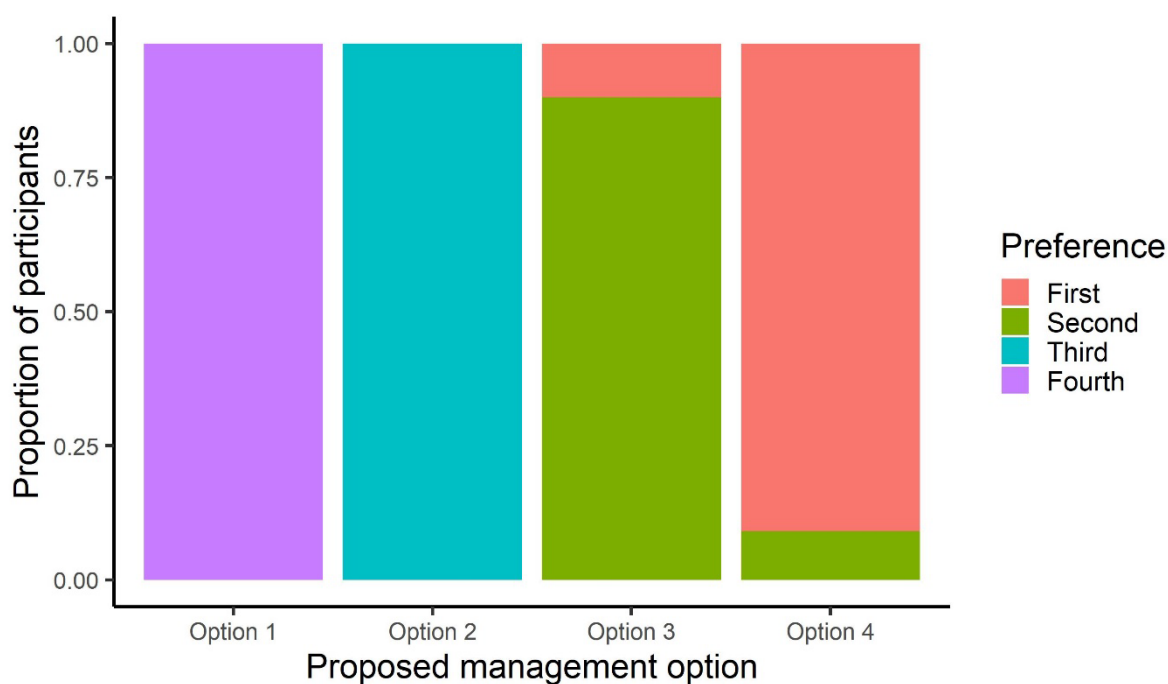
Participants were asked to rank the management options from most to least preferred, the results were then plotted and filtered to show how different sectors on the commercial inshore fishing fleet felt towards the proposed management.

All fishers:



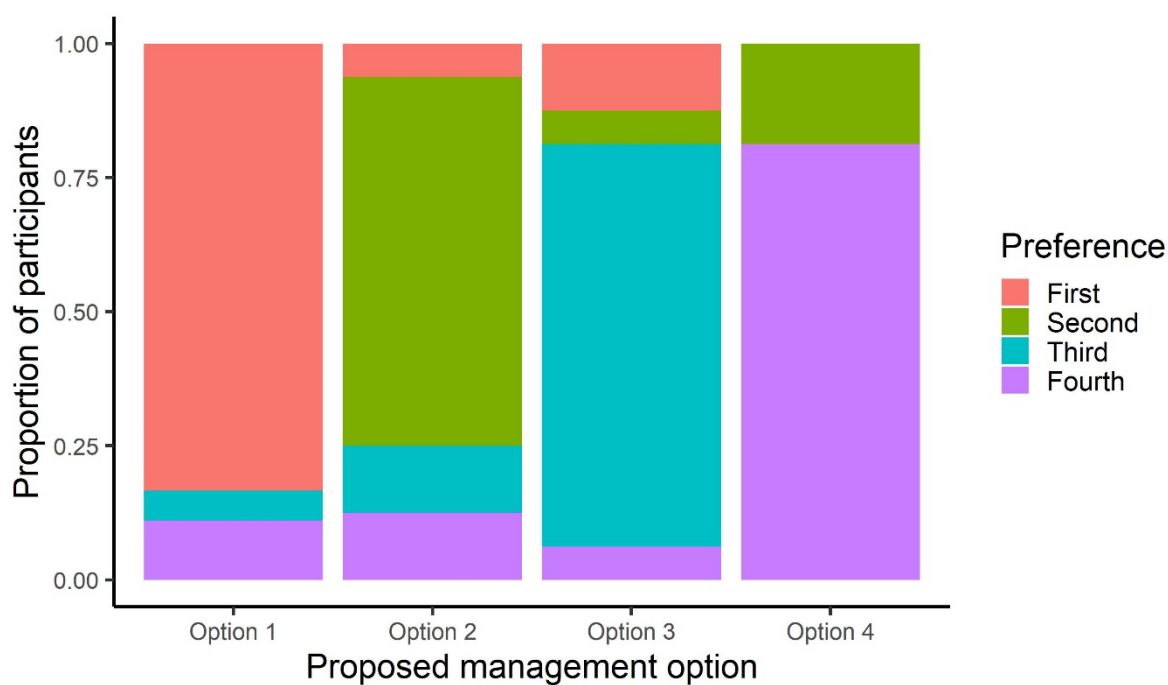
- As might be expected the Option 2 (500m boundary) and Option 3 (200m boundary) were most commonly selected by the second and third preferred choice, and Option 1 (full site management) and Option 4 (100m boundary) were selected as the most or least popular choice.
- Option 1 was the most common first choice, and Option 4 was the most common fourth choice.

Bottom-towed gear (BTG) fishers:



- All BTG fishers selected full site management as the least preferred option.
- Almost all BTG fishers selected the 100m buffer as the most preferred option.

Non-BTG fishers:

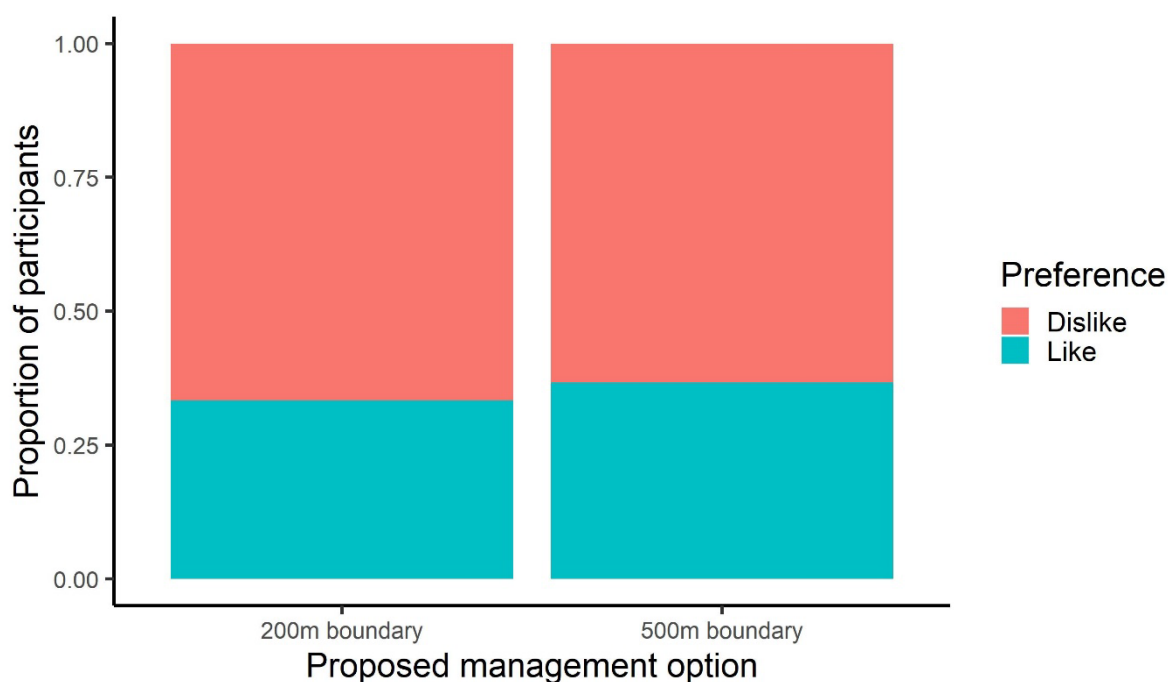


- The majority of non-BTG fishers selected full site management as the most preferred management option.
- They also selected the 100m buffer as the least preferred option in the majority of cases.

Outlying points

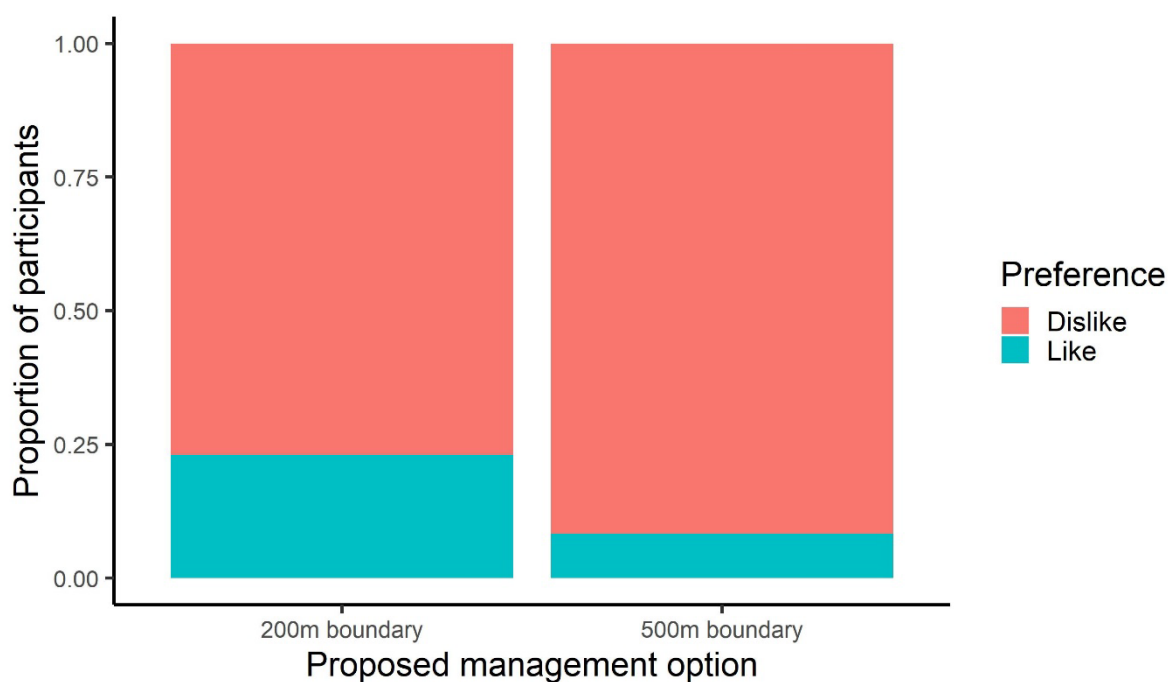
Participants were also asked to express whether they “liked” or “disliked” the proposal to management the two outlying points (of subtidal chalk and *Sabellaria spinulosa*) in the east of BHE, for both the 200m and 500m boundary management, the results were then plotted and filtered to show how different sectors on the commercial inshore fishing fleet felt towards the proposed management.

All fishers:



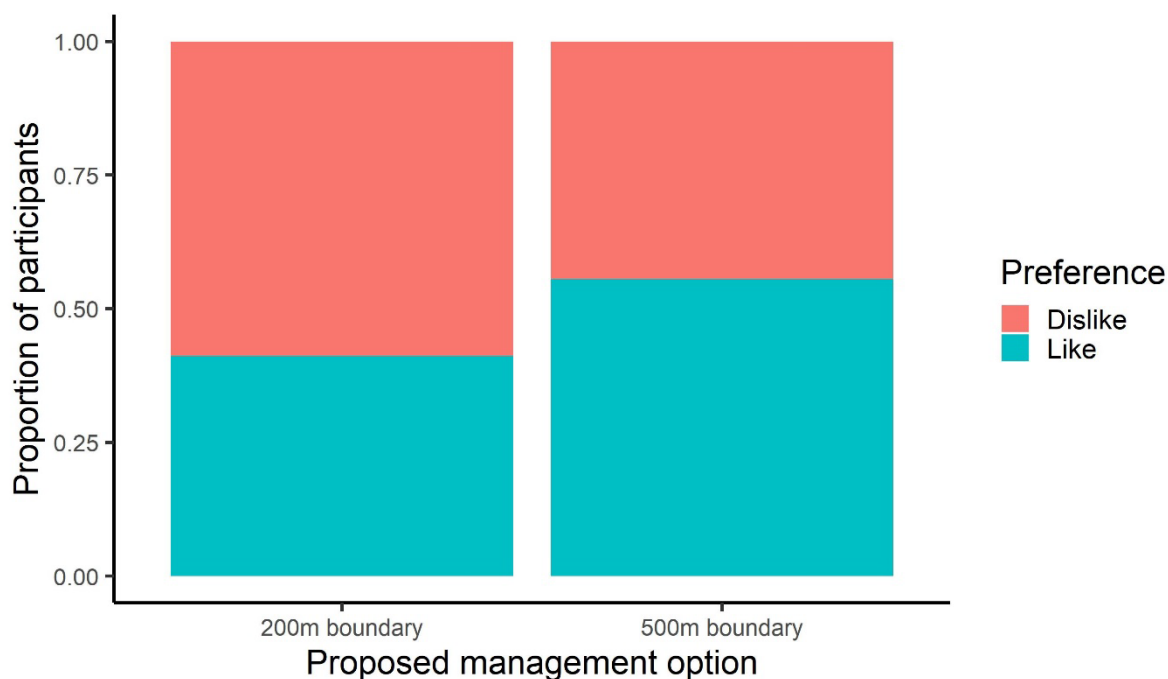
- Most fishers disliked the proposed management of the outlying points, regardless of boundary size, with very similar results for both

BTG fishers:



- The vast majority of BTG fishers disliked the proposed management of the outlying points, however the 200m was seen as more palatable.

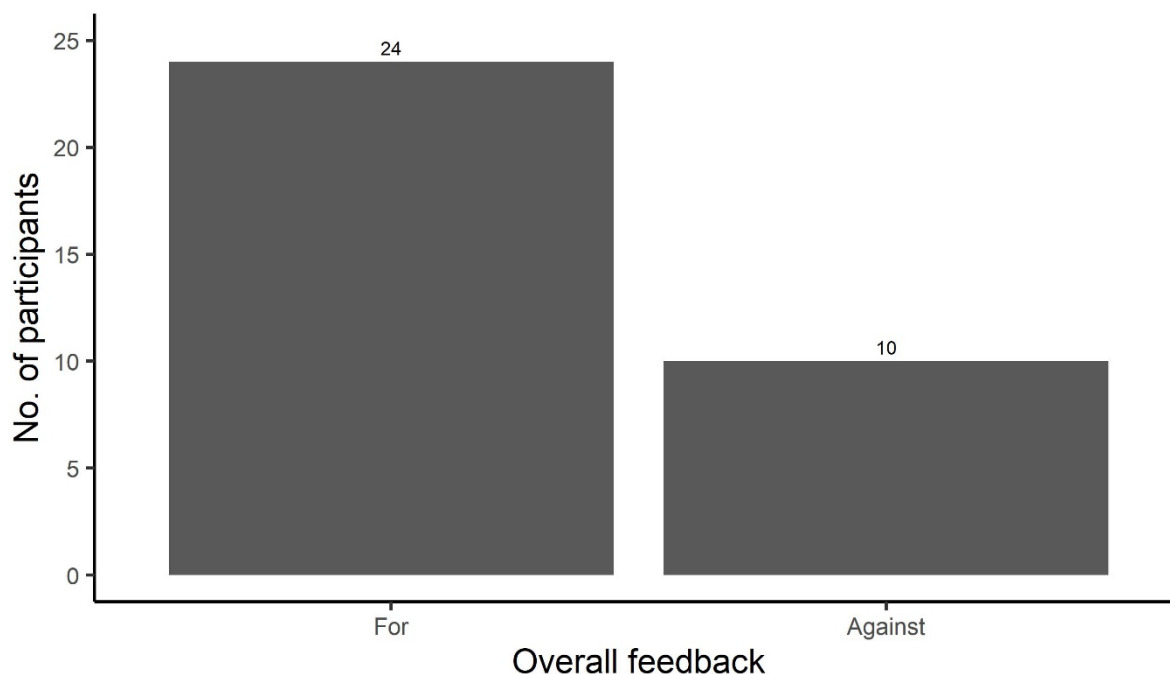
Non-BTG fishers:



- For non-BTG fishers, more than half liked the 500m boundary management option of the outlying points, however the minority liked the 200m boundary option.

General impression

Once each individual response was processed, Sussex IFCA RO's were asked to gauge whether each respondent was generally for or against the proposed management, or at least some form of management in BHE to secure sustainable fisheries. This is of course subjective, but it was felt a general interpretation of each response as a whole was valuable.



- More than double the number of respondents in support of management for BHE than against it.

Conclusion

SxIFCA feel the attendance at the informal workshops demonstrates that there was good engagement with fishers and the wider community in the informal consultation process. This likely reflects the efforts made to advertise the workshops and will hopefully facilitate a more productive and efficient statutory consultation process.

Taken as a whole, the questionnaire responses indicate that fishers recognise the need for management in BHE. Management of bottom-towed gears (BTG) came up repeatedly, however there is a clear split in the preferences of fishers using different gear types. As might be expected, non-BTG fishers more commonly preferred more extensive management of BTG, with full site management being the most popular option. Conversely, BTG fishers exclusively listed full site management as their most preferred option and instead indicated an overall preference for the least extensive management option; a 100m boundary around the conservation features. Management of the outlying points was generally unpopular across all fishers, with the exception that just over 50% of non-BTG fishers “liked” the 500m boundary proposal. There appears to be little overlap in the areas of BHE that are important across different gear types, especially when comparing BTG to non-BTG fishers. Despite this lack of spatial overlap, the ranking of the management options by non-BTG fishers appeared to indicate that they felt management of BTG within BHE would be beneficial to them and/or more broadly for conservation and fisheries within the MCZ.