Beachy Head East MCZ

Sabellaria Spinulosa – New Evidence

Background to survey:

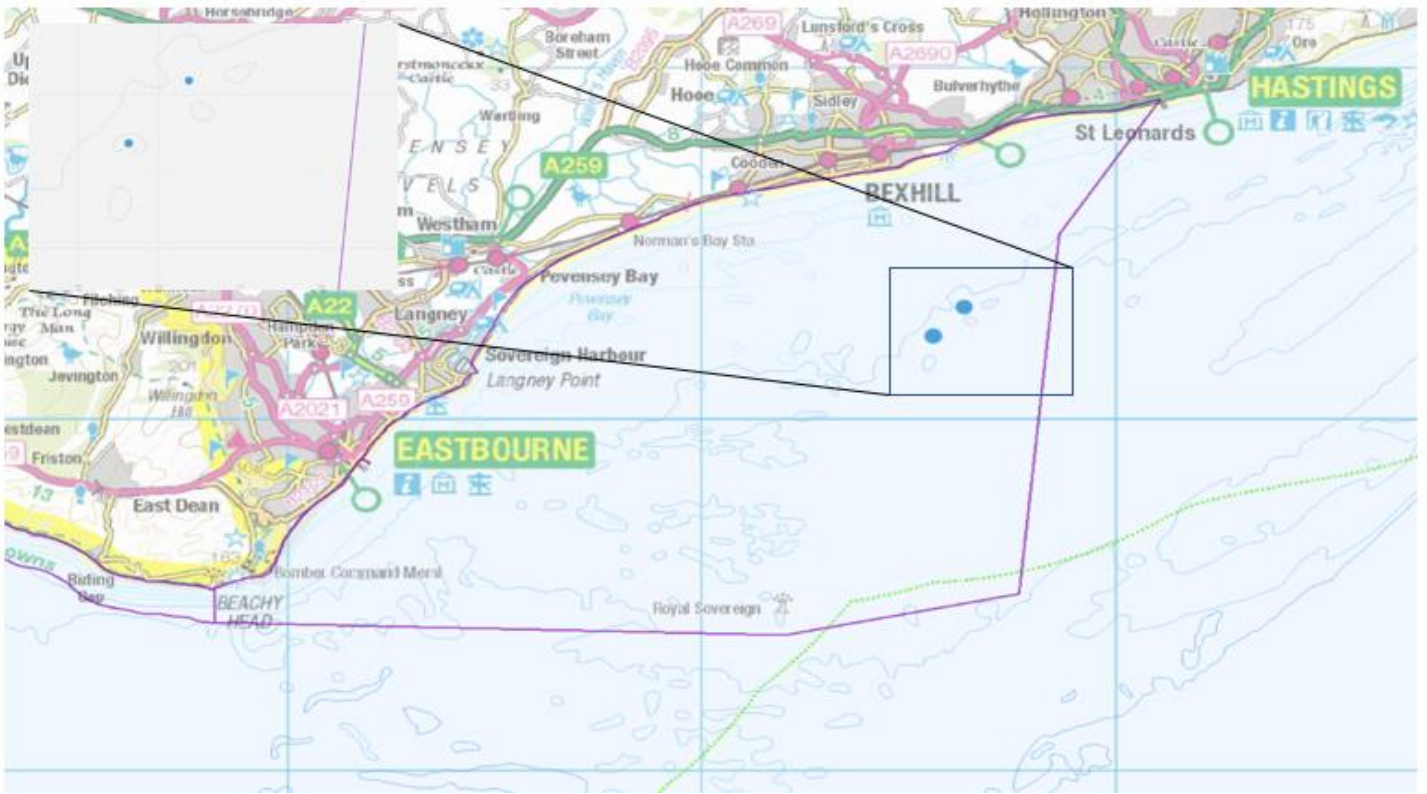
Earlier this month as part of a NE funded species recovery project, the NE Dive team were enlisted to survey different areas within Beachy Head East and West MCZs searching for seahorse. NE are seeking to increase our knowledge and understanding of the short snouted seahorse species within the Sussex area. The dive survey targeted locations where habitat suitability modelling (produced by CEFAS), and Seahorse Trust sightings data indicated a higher confidence for encountering seahorse. A key aim of each dive survey was to improve our understanding of the biotopes at the chosen locations and record features of interest.

The weather before the surveys had been relatively stormy but the surveys progressed and visited contingency locations further offshore where visibility was better. The surveys provided sightings of two seahorse (pregnant male) at a depth of approximately 12m, located just outside BHE MCZ (based off Seahorse Trust data).

NE took the decision to search the same depth contour within the MCZ. The team were not lucky enough to sight seahorse at this location but did gather biotope information. This included Sabellaria Spinulosa clumps and reef within Zone 2 of the IFCA proposed byelaw area. The biotopes recorded during the dive surveys are in the table below.

Dive location 1 (the northern most blue data point) is the 1996 Seasearch data point – no Sabellaria was recorded at this location by the dive team.

Dive location 2 (the southern blue point which is within a raised area of seabed, which may indicate the extent of the Sabellaria – further survey required.



Further Surveys

Natural England have commissioned environmental survey of BHE MCZ (camera and grab survey). This survey contract is being managed by Cefas and was awarded last week. The contractor is due to commence the contract by the end of September(weather permitting). This survey will include review of the Seasearch single data point that has been disputed and the new Sabellaria data provided above. Some images taken by the divers during the survey are included below.

Date	LatWGS84	LongWGS84	Habitat	BiotopeCode	BiotopeDesc
07/08/2023	50.75290279	0.14872048	Barren sand	SS.SSa.IFiSa	Infralittoral fine sand
08/08/2023	50.81451679	0.574027847	Sand and gravel with some cobbles and pebbles	SS.SMx.IMx	Infralittoral mixed sediment
08/08/2023	50.81207905	0.572814923	Fine muddy sand interspersed with pebbles, gravel, shell with tubes	SS.SMx.CMx.ClloMx.Nem	Cerianthus lloydii with Nemertesia spp. and other hydroids in circalittoral muddy mixed sediment
09/08/2023	50.79400347	0.490196118	Mostly sand, some small stones	SS.SSa.IFiSa	Infralittoral fine sand
09/08/2023	50.79400347	0.490196118	Pebbles with **clumps of Sabellaria**	SS.SCS.ICS	Infralittoral coarse sediment
09/08/2023	50.79428445	0.490523272	Boulder and cobble interspersed with gravel and fine sand including **Sabellaria spinulosa reef**	SS.SBR.PoR.SspiMx	**Sabellaria spinulosa on stable circalittoral mixed sediment**
09/08/2023	50.80233972	0.500588964	Sand and gravel	SS.SMx.IMx	Infralittoral mixed sediment