

Annex J3c Qualitative impacts on commercial fisheries arising from groups of rMCZs in the Irish Seas Conservation Zones Project Area

1 Displacement impacts on UK vessels

J3c.1 This section of the IA presents information on qualitative impacts of rMCZs that could arise as a result of the combined impacts of groups of rMCZs. Impacts of individual rMCZs are presented in Annex I. This focuses on the following: bottom trawling, pots and traps, and impacts on non-UK vessels.

1.1 Method

J3c.2 Three meetings were held with representatives of the Northern Irish and Cumbrian fishing fleets. These fleets are likely to be those most impacted by the designation of Recommended Marine Conservation Zones (rMCZs) in the Irish Sea Conservation Zones Project Area. The meetings sought to collect information about how the behaviour of these fishing fleets is likely to change if rMCZs are designated. The following impacts were discussed: vessel displacement to other fishing grounds; vessel adaptation to new gear types and target fisheries; vessels leaving the industry; and wider economic impacts on the processing sector, supporting industries and the marine environment.

J3c.3 Four other fleets (Barrow, Fleetwood and the Welsh and Scottish fleets) are anticipated to be impacted by the designation of rMCZs, but to a far lesser degree compared with the Northern Irish and Cumbrian fishing fleets. They were also contacted by email and post in an attempt to understand how their fishing behaviour is likely to change if rMCZs are designated. However, none responded to the request for information.

J3c.4 Two staff members from the project team attended each interview. One conducted the interview while the other took notes of the meeting. An agenda, information about the management scenarios (Scenarios 1 and 2 only¹) and maps of the sites under discussion were sent to the interviewees a week in advance. Minutes were taken and sent to them after each meeting to ensure that a correct understanding of the meeting was taken away. Interviewees had the opportunity to amend the meeting minutes if they so wished within a two-week period. Each meeting lasted 2 to 4 hours. The interviewees were asked whether they were happy to represent the interests of the fleet in question and whether any other individuals should be interviewed. On this basis, meetings with two fisheries agents in Northern Ireland were also held.

J3c.5 A summary of the findings is described below, broken down by groups of sites. The description identifies the fleets that are potentially affected.

¹ Scenario 3 was identified by Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in November 2011. The meetings with the fishing fleets took place in August 2011.

2 Bottom trawling

2.1 rMC Zs 1, 2, 6, 7; rMCZ Reference Areas A, F and G and the Potential Co-location Zone

Baseline

J3c.6 These rMCZs are primarily fished by the Northern Irish fleet, which mainly targets nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus* using bottom trawls (otter trawls, nephrop trawls, and pair and single rig trawls). Recommended MCZ 1 and rMCZ Reference Area A are also important fishing grounds for the Cumbrian bottom trawling fleet, which also primarily targets nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus*. Both the Northern Irish and Cumbrian fishing fleets have significant concerns about the impact of rMCZs on their fishing fleets. Their concerns are set within the context of challenging finances for vessels (due to increased fuel prices and decreased catch per unit of effort), reducing profit margins, increasing policy and legislative restrictions, and the loss of fishing grounds due to other industry proposals. Representatives said that both fleets feel that they are being 'squeezed' on all sides (both spatially and financially) (Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO), 2011; Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation (NIFPO), 2011; Whitehaven Fishermen's Association & North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NWIFCA), 2011).

Impacts on the commercial fisheries sector arising as a result of the rMCZs

Displacement of effort to other fishing grounds

J3c.7 The Cumbrian fleet anticipates that approximately 30 of its vessels will be displaced by the prohibition of bottom trawling in rMCZ 1 and rMCZ Reference Area A. This will effectively concentrate fishing effort into a smaller area within the existing nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus* grounds to the east and south of rMCZ 1. However, the combined impacts of MCZs, existing and proposed wind farms, and competition from the Northern Irish fleet will collectively impact on the viability of the Cumbrian fleet (Whitehaven Fishermen's Association & NWIFCA, 2011).

J3c.8 The Northern Irish fleet is very concerned about the future viability of its vessels once rMCZs are designated. At least 90 to 100 Northern Irish vessels are likely to be displaced to other existing fishing grounds which would create pressure on, and additional tension with, other bottom trawlers that already work those fishing grounds (e.g. those located in the Irish Sea and the Clyde Estuary). This is expected to result in fewer landings for all vessels in the fleet, making each vessel less financially viable (ANIFPO, 2011; NIFPO, 2011).

J3c.9 The meetings with the Northern Irish and Cumbrian fleets (2011) captured more detail regarding displacement of effort and affected grounds on maps (not provided in the Impact Assessment). These maps show that:

- In response to MCZs, vessels would be concentrated into fewer existing fishing grounds as they are displaced from a portion of their existing fishing grounds (in the Irish Sea and elsewhere in UK waters);

- the area of fishing grounds lost is greater than the area within the rMCZ boundaries. This is because some of the fishing grounds adjacent to rMCZs 1, 6 and 7 will become impractical to trawl due to their remaining size and dimensions.

Vessel adaptation to new gear types and target fisheries

J3c.10 Representatives of the Northern Irish fleet indicated that its fleet's vessels are unlikely to target different species or change gear type in response to the prohibition of bottom trawling in rMCZs as there are few other viable fishing opportunities in the Irish Sea. Other fish stocks that are viable are already targeted to full capacity and there is no scope for new vessels to enter these fisheries. Plus, only those vessels with the available capital to invest would be able to change gear type or target different species. There may be fishing opportunities in the herring fishery if it could obtain Marine Stewardship Council accreditation but this requires investment capacity that this industry does not have. These impacts combined with those of other industry proposals and legislation mean that vessels in the fleet cannot change gears or target species in response to the management scenarios for rMCZs (ANIFPO, 2011; NIFPO, 2011).

Vessels leaving the industry

J3c.11 The Northern Irish fleet anticipates that newer and larger fishing vessels will be impacted the most by the prohibition of bottom trawling in rMCZs (as they have larger borrowing costs) and may have no alternative but to leave the fishing industry. These vessels are likely to be the best and most reliable suppliers to the fish-processing sector (ANIFPO, 2011; NIFPO, 2011).

Wider economic impacts on the processing sector and supporting industries

J3c.12 Both the Northern Irish and Cumbrian fleets anticipate that the prohibition of bottom trawling in rMCZs' will have knock-on impacts for fisheries agents in Northern Ireland and Cumbria) and processors (in Northern Ireland only). They indicated that this would have resulting implications for employment, supply and service industries and ultimately impact on the local economy and community well-being. This is because they expect that the number of fishing vessels and landings into Northern Ireland ports will decrease as a result of the MCZs (landings in terms of value are expected to decrease by approximately 20% due to MCZs). The Northern Irish fleet is also concerned about the lack of other employment options for fishermen in Northern Ireland, due to the high dependence of the local economies of Kilkeel, Portavogie and Ardglass on fisheries-related employment (in addition to agriculture and manufacturing) (ANIFPO, 2011; NIFPO, 2011) (Whitehaven Fishermen's Association & NWIFCA, 2011).

Impacts on the marine environment

J3c.13 Representatives of the Northern Irish fleet anticipate that the concentration of vessel effort into smaller areas of existing fishing grounds in response to the prohibition of bottom trawling in MCZs will increase pressure on biodiversity and nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus* stocks in those areas. They are concerned that this could undermine recruitment for what is currently a sustainably

harvested stock to the west of the Isle of Man (harvested at maximum sustainable yield) (ANIFPO, 2011; NIFPO, 2011).

J3c.14 The fleet's representatives do not feel that MCZs will offer any benefits to the nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus* stock. They are very concerned that, without vessels working a fishing ground, the nephrops *Nephrops norvegicus*' biomass/recruitment would diminish and the seabed habitat would become unproductive. They have experience of this occurring off the Cumbrian coast. Twin rig otter trawls have been banned for some years inshore (within 6nm) of the Cumbrian coast. Due to this restriction, the seabed here has reportedly turned to 'unproductive slime'. The Northern Irish fleet is very concerned that the same would happen in MCZs where bottom trawling is subject to additional restrictions (ANIFPO, 2011).

J3c.15 The Northern Irish fleet is also concerned that the concentration of vessel effort into smaller areas and the decrease in financial viability of a number of vessels would result in fishermen trawling the remaining fishing grounds all year round in order to try to maintain their income. Currently, the grounds are fished only in some months of the year. Continuous fishing of the grounds would remove the natural 'breathing space' for the grounds and reduce the opportunity for the fish stocks to rejuvenate before the next fishing season begins (ANIFPO, 2011).

3 Pots and traps

3.1 Impacts of rMCZs 10, 11, Reference Areas H, I, J, K, T, W and Y on commercial fisheries

J3c.16 Inshore, the closure to fisheries of the rMCZ Reference Areas along the Cumbrian coast is not anticipated to affect commercial fishing significantly, apart from closure to the use of pots and traps in rMCZ Reference Area T. The intertidal area in rMCZ Reference Area T is reportedly fished by two or three vessels commercially. Gill netting in rMCZ Reference Areas I and J may also be affected. Gill netting in the region of St Bees Head may also be impacted on if it is found to impact on the black guillemot population and additional management is required. Commercial harvesting of winkles and hooking for crabs may be impacted in the areas covered by the management scenario that involves additional management of hand collection of shellfish in rMCZ 11. Recreational angling is known to take place in rMCZ Reference Areas H, J and I and this will be affected if rMCZ reference areas along the Cumbrian coast are designated (Whitehaven Fishermen's Association & NWIFCA, 2011).

3.2 rMCZs 13, 14 and Reference Area Z

J3c.17 Information was sought from NWIFCA but no response was received.

4 Displacement impacts on non-UK vessels

4.1 Vessel displacement to other fishing grounds

J3c.18 The proposed restrictions in rMCZs 2, 3, 4, 5 and Reference Areas B, S and C would be a financial 'disaster' for the Belgian fleet, which anticipates that eight Belgian vessels that currently fish in the Irish Sea would be forced to leave the fishing industry. Displacement will 'dramatically' increase the concentration of vessels into smaller areas, which will massively increase competition. If fishing

grounds are reduced in area, it is anticipated that fishing quota will also be restricted with significant financial repercussions for the Belgian fishing fleet. The Belgian fleet is gradually adopting a new gear type, the Sumwing, which is a lighter gear and impacts the seabed less than traditional beam trawls. However, if this gear type is also prohibited in the rMCZs, there would be no alternative for the Belgian vessels fishing in the Irish Sea. It is not feasible for Belgian vessels to adapt to pots and traps to fish in the Irish Sea (Belgian fisheries, pers. comm., 2011).

J3c.19 Information was sought from the Republic of Ireland, French and Spanish fleets with regard to their activities in the Irish Sea but no comments were received.

References

Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers' Organisation (ANIFPO) 2011. *Qualitative Assessment of the Impact of MCZs upon the ANIFPO Fleet Meeting*, 3 August 2011.

Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation (NIFPO) 2011. *Qualitative Assessment of the Impact of MCZs upon the NIFPO Fleet Meeting*, 2 August 2011.

Whitehaven Fishermen's Association & North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NWIFCA) 2011. *Qualitative Assessment of the Impact of MCZs upon the Cumbrian Fleet Meeting*, 3 August 2011.