

NORTHUMBERLAND IFCA **DREDGING (BYELAW 2) MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION**

Northumberland IFCA would like to invite you to have your say on the proposed management measures for dredging. Your views are important to us and the information provided will be considered and could influence management measures.

1. Background

The current IFCA byelaw package was confirmed at the end of 2015, coming into operation during 2016. The Authority undertakes a review of the byelaws in place at least once every three years, therefore the review falls in this calendar year. Byelaw 2: Dredging is a byelaw under consideration.

Under Byelaw 2, currently all vessels fishing using a dredge within the Northumberland IFCA district are required to have a permit issued by the Authority.

1.1 Scope of Consultation: NIFCA District

NIFCA is responsible for the sustainable management of the sea fisheries resources in its district. The district is located off the North East Coast of England and extends from the middle of the River Tyne in the south to the English-Scottish border in the north and out to 6 nautical miles from the coastal baseline including all estuaries up to their 'Normal Tidal Limit' within the landward boundaries of the NIFCA District.

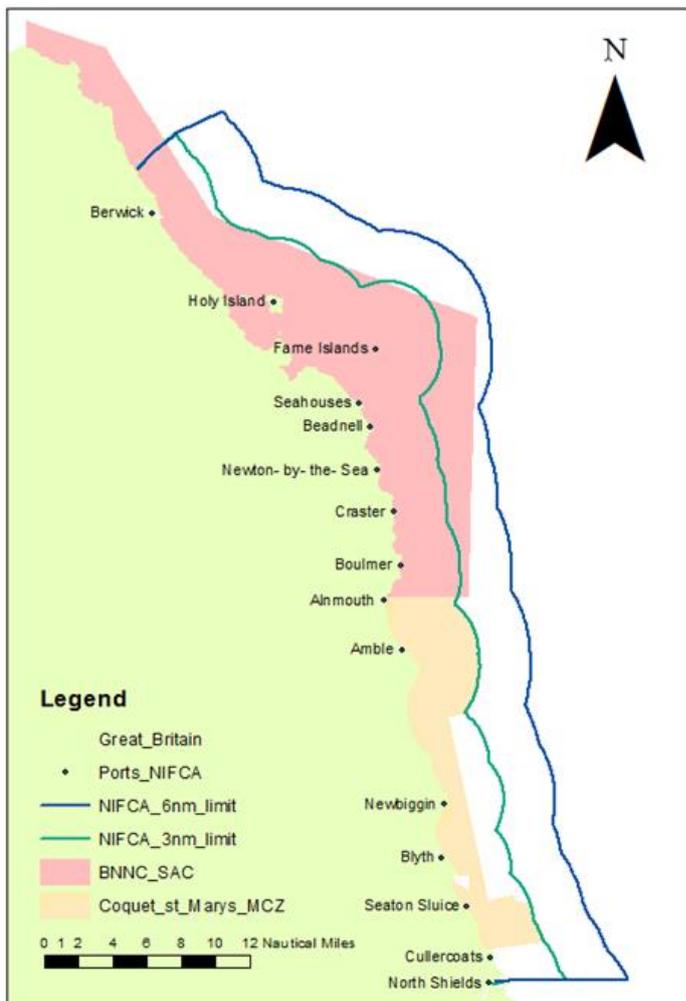


Figure 1: The NIFCA district showing the location of the 3 nautical mile and 6 nautical mile limits, Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast SAC and Coquet to St Mary's MCZ.

1.2 Fisheries

1.2.1 Scallop Dredge Fishery

Scallop dredging is a form of mobile gear fishing. Scallop dredges consist of a triangular frame approximately 750mm wide with a toothed bar at the front to penetrate the seabed and flip scallops out of the seabed and into a collecting bag behind it. The bottom of the collecting bag is made of chain links forming a chain mesh (the belly) to reduce damage to the ground. The top of the bag is made of either chain mesh or netting. Several dredges are towed behind a heavy spreading bar on each side of the vessel. The length of the bar and number of dredges is dictated by the power of the vessel and length of the vessel. Within the NIFCA district vessels are limited to 10 dredges (NIFCA Byelaw 2).

Scallop dredging occurs sporadically, by a small number of boats within the Northumberland IFCA district, predominantly targeting king scallop (*Pecten maximus*). In 2018, there was a total of five Dredge Permit holders registered to dredge within the NIFCA district. All of these permits were registered to visiting fishing vessels and no local vessels applied for permits. Scallop dredging activity occurs primarily in the North of the district at around 5-6 miles offshore.

1.3 Potential Impacts on the Marine Environment

Bottom towed fishing gear can have significant impacts upon marine habitats and associated species. For example, fishing with bottom towed gear can cause species living on the surface of the seabed to be dislodged when the gear is in contact with the seabed. Studies have recorded decreases in species biomass, species richness, production, diversity and alterations to species composition and community structure associated with bottom towed gear.

The impacts of dredging on subtidal mud are more severe than otter trawls given the nature of the gear with the toothed dredges physically penetrating the seabed. A single tow of this gear can cause an adverse impact to faunal assemblages and recovery can take almost two years. Although a single pass from a vessel creates less of an impact than that of repeated disturbance, an isolated 'single pass' may result in a high level of impact, to which later passes only add a marginal degree of additional impact. This is both in terms of the structure of the feature but also impacts to the organisms that live in that benthic environment. There is evidence that scallop dredging alters benthic communities and that the closure of areas to commercial dredging may allow the populations of some species to increase and some communities to become more diverse.

Rocky reef habitats can be severely damaged if heavy bottom towed fishing gear is towed across them. Generally, light otter trawling is unlikely to occur over the rocky reef features listed above as there is a risk of gear getting snagged and damaged. However as highlighted above both heavy otter trawl gear and dredges are used occasionally in the area. Due to the sensitivity of the subtidal mud and subtidal reef features a single pass of some types of bottom towed gear (such as heavy trawl gear with rock hoppers attached or scallop dredges) may be enough to significantly impact features and associated species.

1.4 Summary

Dredging currently occurs at relatively low levels within the NIFCA district, but there is no management in place to prevent activity levels increasing in the future. The activity can cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed, with the impacts of dredging more severe than the impacts of other mobile gear activity (such as demersal otter trawls). In summary, there is a

potential risk from dredging having an adverse impact on the seabed and associated habitats found within the NIFCA district.

1.5 Existing Management Measures

The current management measures in place that relate to dredging activity within or within the vicinity of the NIFCA district:

- NIFCA Byelaw 2 Dredging.
- NIFCA Byelaw 7 Prohibition of the use of mobile Fishing Gear within the English section of the Berwickshire and North Northumberland Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Northumberland IFCA have another consultation running for management of mobile gear within Coquet to St Mary's MCZ, which could affect trawling within the Authority's district. For more information, and to respond to this consultation, please click [HERE](#).

2. Proposed Management

The Authority has developed proposals to modify the above byelaw in order to optimise management of the fishery.

The following proposals have been put forward for consultation by the committee of the Authority:

1. Prohibition on activity in the district
 - a. Inner Area 0-3 nautical miles
 - b. Whole of the Authorities district
 - c. No further restrictions on dredging within the Authorities district.
2. Move permit fee from being a byelaw clause to a byelaw condition.

These measures can be incorporated into the existing byelaw which can be found on the NIFCA website <https://www.nifca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/FULL-BYELAWS-March-2019-updated-7.5.19.pdf>.

Byelaw 2 is a permit byelaw. Therefore, to fish commercially within the NIFCA district, fishers must obtain a permit from the Authority. This permit has conditions attached to it which the Northumberland IFCA can change without going through the time consuming and costly full byelaw making process. The Authority can add or change permit conditions based on: data collected from permit holders, scientific and survey data, advice provided by Cefas, any Impact Assessment of proposed changes, advice given by Natural England, information from any other relevant source, as specified in the byelaw. Including the permit fee as a permit condition will allow the Authority to adjust the cost of the permit in-line with inflation and other relevant costs. Northumberland IFCA do not profit from permit fees.

Have your say

We would like to speak to as many interested parties as possible about the development of this byelaw. We need to know how the proposals in this byelaw will affect your interests. You can complete online or downloadable questionnaire (links below), or if you prefer you can call our office to discuss your concerns. If you would like more information or would like to talk to an officer face-to-face, we can arrange a meeting.

To respond to the consultation, you have a few options to choose from:

1. You can respond online by clicking [HERE](#)
2. You can respond by post to our office in Blyth. To download a form, please click [HERE](#).
3. If you would like to speak to one of our officers directly, call our office on 01670 797 676 to give your feedback or to arrange a date for you to meet with an Officer.

The deadline for all responses is 14th October 2019.

We look forward to hearing your views.