



Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone Consultation: A summary of response from the consultation

October 2019

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1. Aim of this report

This report has been prepared for members of the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA) Technical and Scientific Sub-Committee. It will also be made available on the NIFCA website for all stakeholders to read.

The report aims to review the proposed measures and to document the findings of the consultation. All information from the consultation will be made available to ensure openness and transparency in the process.

The report is intended to assist in the decision-making process of members regarding potential management measures in consideration for mobile gear within Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

To make use of this report:

1. Members to examine the collated response information from the consultation in section 4 of the report;
2. Members to use report to consider next steps.

2. Background

Coquet to St Mary's Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) covers approximately 192 km² of intertidal and subtidal habitats, stretching from Alnmouth in the north to Whitley Bay in the south, and from mean high water out to approximately 7.5km at its seaward-most extent.

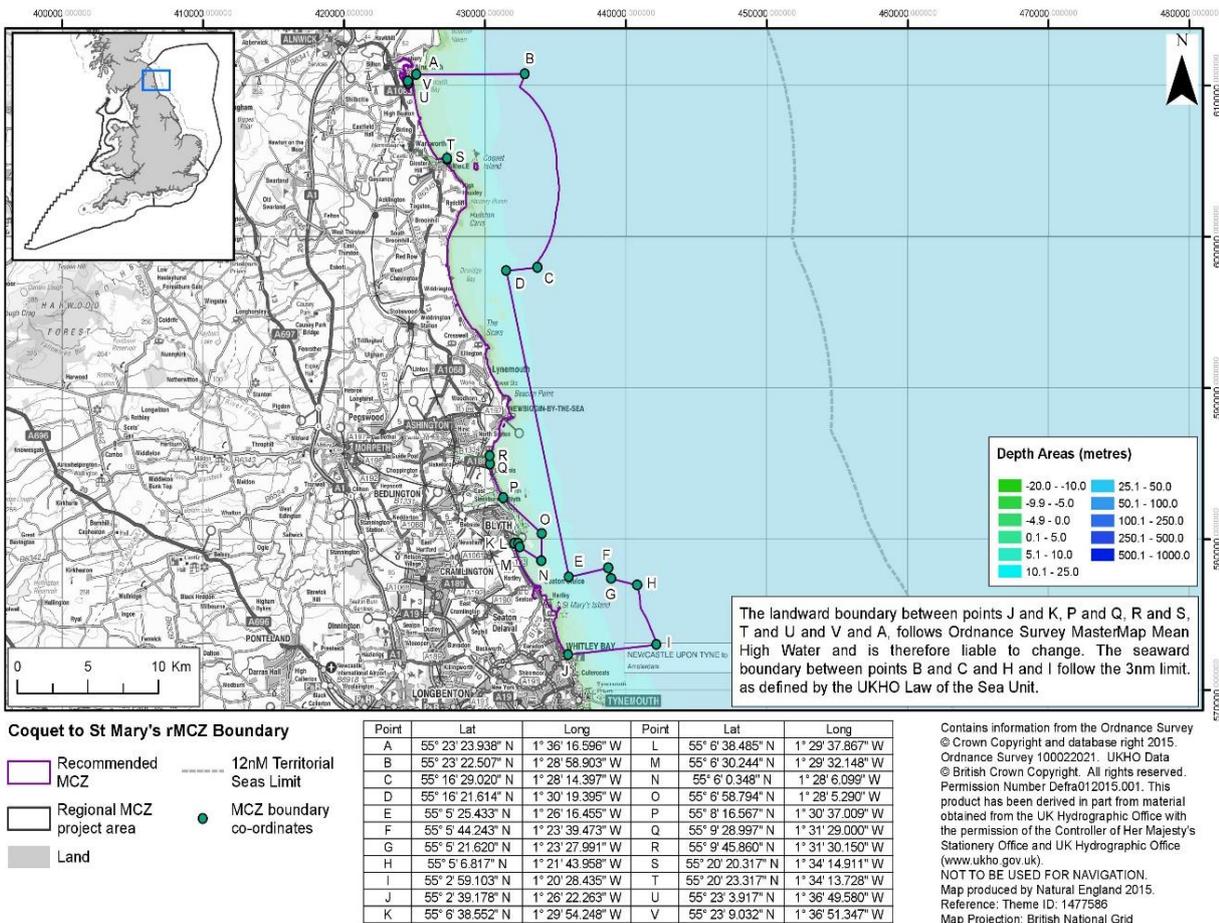


Figure 1. Map of Coquet to St Marys MCZ.

NIFCA have a duty under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 to seek to ensure that conservation objectives of any MCZ in the district are furthered.

For more information on Coquet to St Mary's and the protected features of this site, please refer to the consultation document which can be found on the 'Consultations' section of the NIFCA website.

The interaction between bottom towed gear and protected rocky reef features in the MCZ has been categorised as 'red' or high priority and could be at risk of damage. In scientific studies looking at this interaction, long recovery times have been recorded from a single pass of gear and there is evidence of an adverse impact on reef and associated biota^{1 2}. Statutory advice from Natural England to the IFCA is that this interaction should be managed. Discussions of the NIFCA Technical and Scientific sub committee have led to the following proposals:

- To restrict gear to light otter trawl gear only;
- To limit activity by placing restrictions on permits to allow fishers with a track record to fish in the MCZ.

It is important to note that this is the first stage of a consultation process to understand stakeholder views. The measures are **only to restrict the type of gear to light otter trawls** and to **limit the effort to current levels**. No management measures have been agreed or taken to any further stage. **There are no current plans to prohibit all trawling from the site at this time.**

3. The consultation process

This is the first time this method of consultation has been used by NIFCA. The process involved compiling all relevant information into a detailed document, respondents could review the information and choose the most convenient methods of responding. This was either through an online questionnaire, or a postal questionnaire. Respondents also had the option to phone up to speak to officers, and/or arrange a convenient time and location to respond face-to-face.

This process was chosen because:

- it gives respondents a variety of options to submit comments;
- it means comments can either be made anonymously, and/or without having to respond face to face meaning respondents can be more open;
- it can reach a wider range of people;
- respondents do not have to take time to travel and attend events to respond;
- it is less resource intensive.

The consultation was communicated to stakeholders through various means. All permit holders were directly notified through email or letter when the consultation commenced. Information about the consultation was also published on the NIFCA website, in the news section, and through social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). The consultation was open to all stakeholders regardless of their interest or fishing sector.

¹ Foden, J., Rogers, S.I., Jones, A.P. 2010. Recovery of UK seabed habitats from benthic fishing and aggregate extraction- towards a cumulative impact assessment. Marine Ecology Progress Series. Vol. 411, 259-270

² Kaiser, M.J., Clarke K.R., Hinz, H., Austen M. C. V., Somerfield, P. J., Karakassis, I. 2006. Global analysis of response and recovery of benthic biota to fishing. Marine Ecology Progress Series. Vol. 311, 1-14

4. Response from Stakeholders

A total of 20 responses were received to the Coquet to St Mary’s MCZ consultation which ended on 30th September 2019. Responses were received through a variety of formats (Table 1) and from multiple groups (Table 2). All (106) NIFCA permit holders were notified, 15 responses were received from NIFCA permit holders representing 14% of those notified. Information about the consultation also went out through social media and the website, 6 responses were received from other groups.

The content of the responses was varied, please see below for a detailed breakdown.

Table 1 Number of responses received through the available formats.

Response format	Number of responses
Email	16 ³
Post	2
Face to face	2

Table 2 Number of responses group into sectors.

Response group	Number of responses
Fishing industry	15 ³
Recreation	1
Environmental NGOs	1
Research/Education	2

5. Results

Results have been collated and reviewed by officers. Of the 15 respondents from the fishing industry, 14 said that they fished within the MCZ. Fishing activity includes trawling, potting, netting, lining (Figure 2). This is greater than the number of respondents as the total responses as some respondents recorded multiple fishing practices in one response.

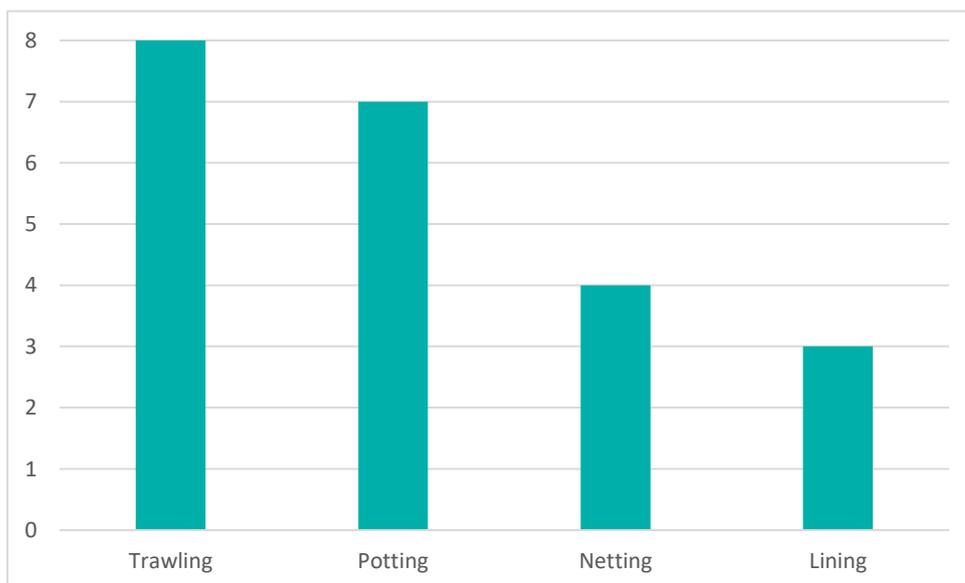


Figure 2 Number of respondents engaged in each fishing activity within the MCZ.

³ One respondent sent in two responses, answers were collated and treated as one response.

5.1 Priorities in relation to Coquet to St Mary's MCZ

Of the responses, 8 prioritised a healthy marine environment. Respondents could select more than one answer, with 5 selecting economic benefits (Figure 3). Respondents could also select other, and indicated that fishing grounds in the MCZ were a priority.

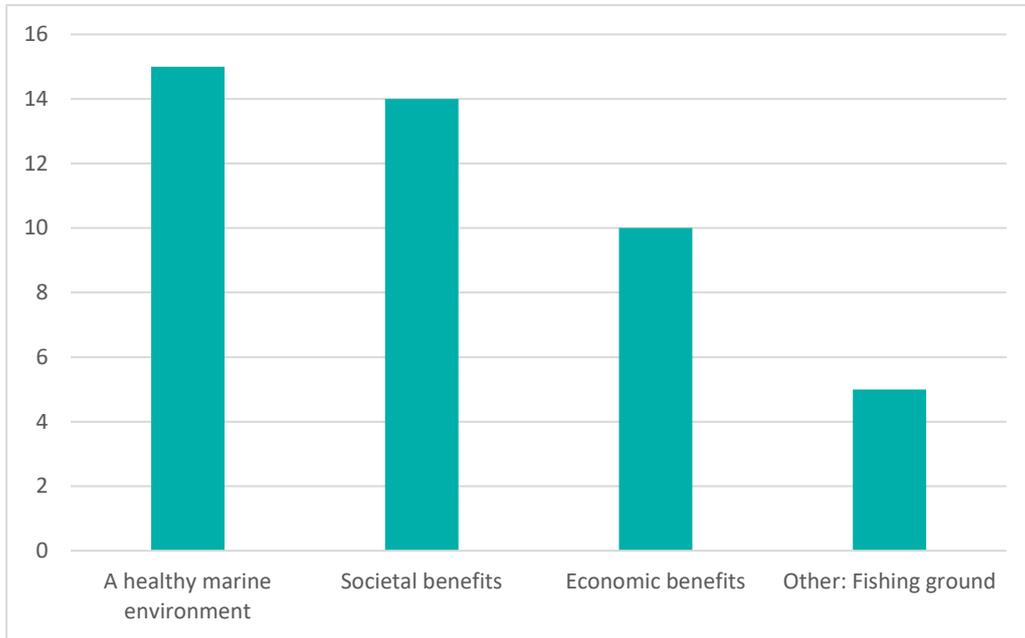


Figure 3 Respondents priorities in relation to the MCZ.

5.2 Will the measures affect current practice?

80% of **all respondents** said that the proposed measures would affect them (Figure 4) either positively or negatively.

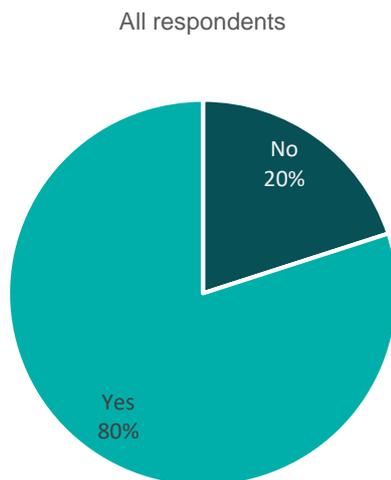


Figure 4 Will the proposed measures affect you?

While 93% of fishing respondents said that the measure would affect them, only 60% reported that it would change the way they fished (Figure 5).

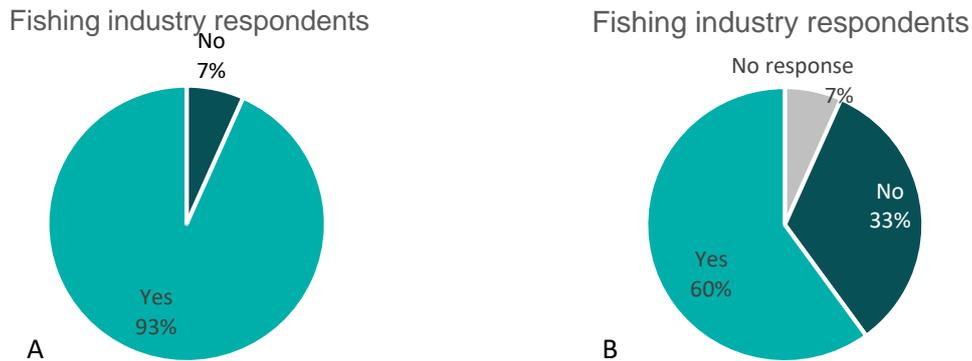


Figure 5 Fishing industry respondents only. A) Will the measures affect you? B) Will the measure change the way you fish?

Comments relating to these questions from the fishing industry were mainly negative. These included displacing fishing effort to other areas, which would be a safety concern in poor weather; and reducing income by restricting days at sea.

There were fewer comments from other sectors/groups, but the one comment received said that the measures could be beneficial for them.

5.3 Financial impacts

A question on financial impacts was included at this stage to inform the impact assessment that may be required if the management measures are taken forward. 70% of all respondents said that this measure would have a financial impact on their business. 87% of respondents from the fishing industry said that this would have a financial impact on their business (Figure 6).

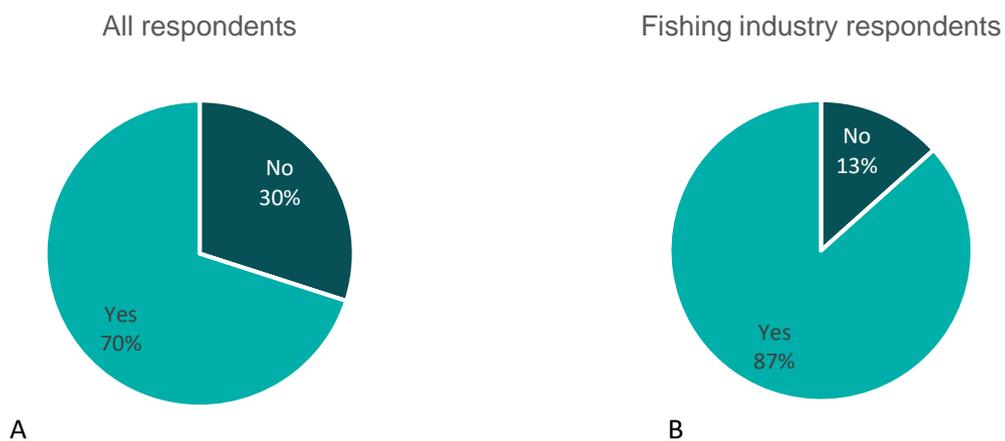


Figure 6 Would the proposed measures have a financial impact on your business? A) All respondents B) Fishing industry respondents only.

Respondents were asked to estimate how much this could be annually with the majority saying it could have a negative financial impact. As indicated in the comments, it is difficult to quantify.

One respondent said the impact could be positive with healthier seas leading to more tourism.

Please see Annex 1 for full details on comments relating to financial impacts.

5.4 Agreement with proposed measures.

Respondents were asked: Do you agree with the measures listed in the consultation statement?

- "To restrict trawling to light otter trawl gear only;
- To apply a condition on the permits that trawlers must have a track record of fishing within the MCZ."

65% of respondents did not agree with the proposed measure (Figure 7).

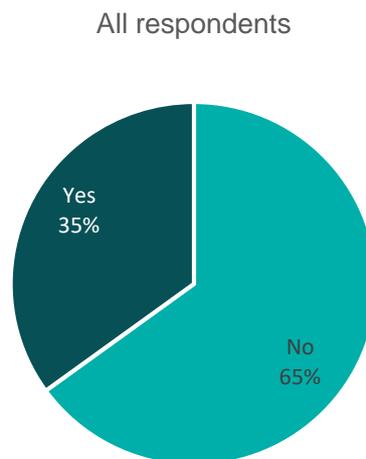


Figure 7 Do you agree with the proposed measures.

Respondents were asked to comment on why they agreed or disagreed with the measures. Comments where respondents disagreed with measures include lack of environmental concerns around this activity, lack of impacts of rockhopper gear, small number of trawlers compared to 20 years ago, more area for pots, safety concerns, increased burden on the inshore fleet, it prevents diversification in fishing activity, and loss of fishing days.

One respondent agreed partially with a need for management, but not these measures.

Comments from respondents in agreement with the measures include agreement that rockhoppers should be stopped, support for restrictions on mobile fishing gear to protect benthic marine habitats, support for permit to keep fishing opportunities local. One respondent would like to see a reduction in lost fishing gear and increased biodiversity in the area.

5.5 Alternative measures

Respondents were asked if they felt that any alternative measures for the MCZ. Four comments were received to say no measures are necessary, one said continue to monitor and one said a restriction on gear size or horsepower should be considered.

5.6 Comments not relating to the measures proposed

Comments relating to closed areas or the total closure of the MCZ, or comments relating to areas outside of the MCZ were submitted. These comments have been reviewed and

archived. However, they are not included in this consultation review as **these measures are not part of the consultation.**

6. Conclusions

The consultation results suggest that there is more trawling activity being carried out in the MCZ than previously thought, with 7 vessels saying they trawl inside the site.

The majority (65%) of the respondents are against the measure. It is important to note that this is the first stage of a consultation process to understand stakeholder views. The measures are **only to restrict the type of gear to light otter trawls** and to **limit the effort to current levels**. No management measures have been agreed or taken to any further stage. **There are no current plans to prohibit all trawling from the site.**

Comments received along with the questionnaire broadly followed these themes:

- Safety in poor weather
- Removal of fishing areas
- Displacement to other areas
- Increase in number of pots
- Removal of choice
- Negative economic impacts
- Lack of environmental impacts of trawling
- Increased negative impacts on the environment
- Positive impacts of measure for local environment

All comments should be reviewed and considered by the Authority. A full breakdown of all comments can be found in Annex 1. This report is intended to inform members and all stakeholders about the results received from the consultation.

Next steps: paper for discussion at the Technical and Scientific meeting.

Annex 1. All comments received through the consultation:

Safety in poor weather:

“A ban on using rock hopper gear would push us further off shore when the weather is ban causing safety concerns especially for smaller boats”

“if we had to move away from these areas to fish we have no other option than to go out into the fare deeps which is approximately 11 mile to the nearest starting point, anything above a force 3 wind that far into the sea is just about unworkable for a boat of our size and dangerous to the point were peoples lives would be at risk as the boat wasn't made to fish that far out into the sea..its an inshore boat and we depend on these inshore areas to make a living”

“We would still trawl but some days wen weather is rubbish the prawn grounds at croquet were good save going further out in poor weather”

“I will have to move to another area putting more pressure on this new area.i would be forced to fish further from the safe haven of my home port and have to work further offshore more exposed to the weather elements,especially in the winter.”

“we would have to go and fish in the farne deeps and due to weather conditions this would probably be unviable and extremely dangerous for a boat of our size”

“Under 10M boat (inshore) restricted by weather”

“Safety: This area is only 20 minutes steaming time from Amble, providing a safe adjacent fishing area for small, traditional, low powered under 10 metre vessels. It is especially important in periods of strong offshore winds due to its close proximity to both Port and land. The nearest alternative grounds are an hour away 2 to 6 nautical miles off Newbiggin/Blyth, or The Farne Deepes at 12 nm or nearly two hours steaming time.”

Removal of fishing areas

“In the fishing there is no youngster's comming in the job now and for this reason you closing ground down that's not getting any fishing inpacked in it”

“I would no longer be able to use a method of fishing for which I have payed for a licence for I could use currently.”

“Using only smooth ground gear I wouldn't be able to fish in all the areas available previously. Better qaulity prawns are targeted using small disk nets trawl”

Displacement to other areas:

“It would mean I couldn't use my current gear in this area and I would only be able to work outside the area.”

“shifting the few that trawl on the harder bottom areas moves them onto the other areas causing more pressure in those ie. displacement effects to other areas”

“displacement of others leading to more use of the other available ground that i use”

Increase in number of pots

“Any restrictions on trawling activity inside the 6mile would seriously affect my living especially during the winter and summer prawn fishery, there is only a small area

from 6 mile into about 4 mile from the tyne to amble where local fishermen trawl the vast majority of this proposed area is left alone from trawling activity, there is no need to restrict this what so ever, there is already local ifca rules ban on twin rig etc in place to protect prawns etc why is this needed? This will only increase the number of pots being fished in the area!"

"more pots in the area"

"fishing(trawling) has been carried out inshore firstly inside the 3 mile limit then encompassing the move out to 6 miles by mostly under 10 mtr boats on the smooth patches of ground for generations providing valuable fishing opportunities for the smaller vessels,take this away for them and more area for more pots!"

Removing choice

"Although I have not previously fished methods in the area it is something which currently I could do if I chose to and I have thought about doing in the future."

"Lack of diversification."

"will prevent future diversification. If lobster stocks crash, what would static fishers do?"

Negative economic impact for local industry

"These restrictions would only marginally affect my current business activities, however based on historical fishing patterns they would have a profound negative impact. These restrictions would severely restrict the viability of the three under 10 metre trawlers that have fished, from Amble, for Nephrops consistently within this area over the past 12 months. A substantial proportion of fishing income is derived from within the MCZ"

"It would reduce my income by restricting my days at sea. Without the restrictions I could work within the MCZ during westerly gales and there are times during the year when I would rely on the plaice fishing in that area."

"As a small scale fisher and businessman I'm potentially going to loose approximately 20 fishing days per year when I target better quality prawns using disc net trawl"

Lack of impacts of fishing activity:

"Trawling has been going on for generations in this area so if it was doing any harm how are the grounds still profitable??no measures are needed as the current bylaws/rules in the area are working perfectly."

"you have got zero evidence that inshore trawling has any impact on these inshore grounds, were is your evidence or any data from 30 to 40 year ago up to the present day showing the destruction that bottom trawling has done to these inshore areas.."

"its absolutely laughable that any restrictions or bans should be put on the few boats that fish the inshore grounds, and in 37 year at sea I have yet to see any evidence that bottom trawling is doing any harm either to the sea bed or any marine creatures"

"Environmental Impact: The recent comparatively low levels of trawling activity in this area are a significant reduction in the environmental impact of fishing activity"

“The impact on the seabed of properly used rock hopper trawl gear is minimal. Please see the Seafish report for full information
<https://www.seafish.org/gear/gear/profile/demersal-trawl-rockhopper-trawl>”

“the limited number of vessels trawling on the hard ground don't do any harm.”

Increasing negative impacts on environment

“Any closure would force vessels to displace activity to another area thereby increasing the environmental impact there and also vastly increasing their CO2 emissions due to increased travelling time. This increased fossil fuel use would also lead to increased fishing time and impact to cover extra fuel costs and maintain viability.”

“Increased burden on inshore fleet”

“Things are getting harder and harder for the inshore fleet as it is.”

Other

“Area Fished: All Recent trawling activity within Coquet St Marys MCZ has been in an historically important area of mud/sand 1.5 to 3 nautical miles off Hauxley and Amble known as the Alnmouth Ground and Second Buoy. This area was heavily fished in the past by up to 12 vessels from Amble, Seahouses and Blyth 20 years ago. Due to restrictive quota regimes, fleet reduction policies, fisheries legislation and the burgeoning inshore lobster fishery the number of inshore trawlers has dwindled to a handful. This low level of impact has led to a vast increase in the stock of inshore nephrops with these few vessels making approximately 80% of their income from inside the IFCA district and about half of that from this small prolific area.

MCZ totals 192 sq km, the majority of which is sand and mud. This small area is less than 10 sq km, about 5% of the total. There are vast swathes of smooth ground untouched, year on year, by any fishing gear.”

“Before putting new measures in place you need to manage what's already in place a lot better.”

Positive impacts on local environment

“They would be beneficial to the local wildlife and therefore offer more interactions with wildlife during outdoor education sessions”

“Although I can understand the potential economic impact to fishermen, I would like to see a reduced amount of lost fishing gear and increased biodiversity in the area”

“broadly supportive of these proposals to ban mobile fishing gear, which have a hugely negative impact on benthic marine habitats and also prevent recovery of these habitats where they are no longer present due to past damage”

Changes to annual income

“30 to 40k”

“Further away from home so using more fuel, cost depending on the price of fuel. plus more time spent away would also push my food bill up.”

“not sure yet as just started potting again after unjustly losing salmon drift net fishery and selling over 15 mtr trawler,”

“60 to 80 %of our yearly income”

“In summer months wen there is a good fishing of prawns we could lose any where from 20.000/40.000 a year like this year prawn fishing has been really good”

“£5000”

“Impossible to quantify. We exist and fish within a vibrant, cyclical and evolving marine ecosystem and fishing activities and patterns also evolve with the natural availability of species. The imposition of highly restrictive closures on local inshore fishing grounds has the potential to negatively affect not only current fishers but the local fishing and port infrastructure as well as any future fishing recruits.”

“£50,000 60,000”

“It's difficult to say. Fishing is not an easy business to estimate but it could have a serious impact on income.”

“This impact could be positive - healthier seas could mean more large mammals, healthier seabirds and more tourists”

“Potentially due to a lack of opportunity to diversify and if more boats came inshore to fish.”

“Approx 50%”

“During summer month lobster pots are moved inshore allowing me to fish using disk nets. These grounds are then fished by pots during the autumn and winter. Approximately 20 day a year is fished usnig disk nets in MCZ.”

Comments relating to the total closure of the MCZ, although it is important to stress that this measure is not being considered at this time:

“Obviously if I'm stopped fishing one area I will have to move to another area to fish putting more pressure on another area”

“If area closed you would restrict earnings by at least 50%”

“If I reverted to trawling at any time then this byelaw would prevent access to all local trawling grounds. The next productive trawling area not within the MCZ is almost 10km from the port of Amble.”

“A dont think it's fair to close an area down that we have fished for years !”

“if we had to move away from these areas to fish we have no other option than to go out into the fare deeps which is approximately 11 mile to the nearest starting point, anything above a force 3 wind that far into the sea is just about unworkable for a boat of our size and dangerous to the point were peoples lives would be at risk as the boat wasn't made to fish that far out into the sea..its an inshore boat and we depend on these inshore areas to make a living”

“I will have to move to another area putting more pressure on this new area.i would be forced to fish further from the safe haven of my home port and have to work further offshore more exposed to the weather elements,especially in the winter.”

“In the fishing there is no youngster's coming in the job now and for this reason you closing ground down that's not getting any fishing inpacked in it”

“I would no longer be able to use a method of fishing for which I have payed for a licence for I could use currently.”

“there is only a small area from 6 mile into about 4 mile from the tyne to amble where local fishermen trawl the vast majority of this proposed area is left alone from trawling activity, there is no need to restrict this what so ever”

“Any closure would force vessels to displace activity to another area thereby increasing the environmental impact there and also vastly increasing their CO2 emissions due to increased travelling time. This increased fossil fuel use would also lead to increased fishing time and impact to cover extra fuel costs and maintain viability.”

Comments not relevant to consultation:

“Bait collection rights under covernant. Loss of flexibility, cannot diversify and swap to another fishery.”

“Current restriction proposed may prevent the development of [razor clam] fishery.”