Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ:

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

To establish effective communications channels between Eastern IFCA and our stakeholders

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation *Zone*

The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone ('the MCZ') was designated in 2016 under the Marine and Coastal Access Act of 2009 (MaCAA 2009) to conserve certain habitats and features. [1] The protected features include complex, rugged chalk structures which occur in the inshore part of the MCZ, are of national importance and are associated with high levels of biodiversity[2]. These features also support brown crab (*Cancer pagurus)* and European lobster (*Homarus gammarus*) populations. For many generations, these species have been commercially fished, typically using pots, in the area which now encompasses the MCZ, with some fishermen able to trace eight generations within the fishery. This fishery is a defining feature of the cultural identity and heritage of the region, with 'Cromer crab' being a recognisable name in the UK and abroad. The crab and lobster fisheries are important to the local economy, supporting fishing livelihoods, a local seafood processing factory and local restaurants, markets and tourism.

1.2 ARM Approach

In August 2020 Natural England provided Eastern IFCA with formal advice regarding potting activity within the MCZ.[3] This advice concluded that restrictions on the potting fishery would be required and it was recommended that an Adaptive Risk Management (ARM) approach would be appropriate.[4] Under this approach, appropriate management measures will be developed through an iterative process whereby management and research inform each other in a feedback loop.[5] To develop and adapt management measures evidence is gathered through the Research & Development Task & Finish Group, dialogue with Natural England, and feedback from fishermen, conservationists and wider stakeholders (Fig. 1). Collaboration with stakeholders is critical for Eastern IFCA to successfully deliver ARM and further the conservation objectives of the MCZ.
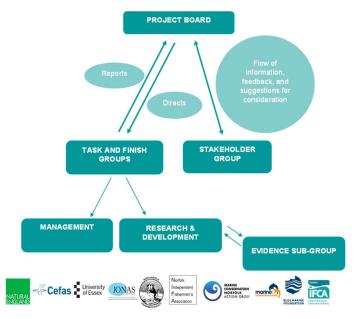

Fig1. ARM Management Structure

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[1] The Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone Designation Order 2016 (No. 4).
[2] Natural England Research Report RR04412 (n6), p. 3.
[3] For a summary of the advice, see Eastern IFCA Media Release (October 2020).
[4] This entails management measures alongside further research and monitoring of the interactions between potting and the habitats in which it takes place, as opposed to an immediate ban on the fishery.
[5] ARM plan

1.3 ARM Engagement and Communication: Context

It is important to recognise that MCZs are intended to ensure important marine features are protected for the benefit of the UK's seas and that they are also intended to be multi-use sites. In other words, fishing activity should be enabled within the MCZ to the extent that it can be within acceptable environmental parameters. The role of Eastern IFCA is to find the right balance: to protect the MCZ whilst avoiding disproportionate impacts on fishing activities.

Given the importance of the area to the coastal community, it is understandable that there is a strength of feeling amongst those associated with the North Norfolk Coast and the MCZ in particular. Since the inception of the MCZ, polarised views have developed as to the extent to which fishing activity is impacting on the site.

These polarised views can lead to conflict and missed opportunities in developing and implementing management collaboratively and for the benefit of who have a connection with the site. Failing to recognise and acknowledge the differing perspectives risks further conflict and reduces the likelihood of successful ARM delivery. Failure to recognise the need to achieve the correct balance and identify the common ground that exists between all those with an interest in the site risks undermining efforts to protect it.

To mitigate these risks, this strategy seeks to identify the key barriers to effective communication relevant to the delivery of ARM, identify the favourable outcome by setting a vision, and setting out how the project will seek to achieve this via objectives and associated principles.

1.4 Reflection

On creation in 2020, the Engagement Strategy was intended to be periodically reviewed to reflect dynamic nature of the stakeholder environment and the project's developing understanding and learnings. This review and revised policy constitute the first major revision of the strategy since it came into effect.

The following key reflections are identified as key learning points on which the revised strategy is based.

- **Engagement has led to positive action** – Fishing industry engagement has facilitated adoption of voluntary measures, including fitting trackers to vessels, adoption of a code of best practice to minimise losing fishing gear at sea and voluntary closed areas to enable a study comparing natural and human disturbance over the site. In addition, the Research Task and Finish Group has brought together academics and the fishing industry to inform and design research activities to inform the project and the Management Task and Finish Group has informed development of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Byelaw 2023 and associated permit conditions bringing together fishing industry, conservation and Natural England Representatives. The Stakeholder Group has informed development of management measures and contributed to a shared understanding of conflicting priorities with regards to the importance of the chalk bed.

- **Limited resources to deliver engagement** – Engagement requires resource; from developing engagement materials and managing website content to organising drop-in sessions and meetings, the resource required to deliver effective communications is notable. Eastern IFCA, working in partnership with the Marine Conservation Society (a representative of which led on engagement for the project), has not been able to meet its intended communication outputs since 2020. In particular, Stakeholder Group meetings were not generally considered to be frequent enough and reporting on the progress made generally suffered from resource being prioritised towards delivery of the project itself. This has led to some stakeholders feeling disconnected and quite naturally led to some stakeholders

forming a view that less had been achieved than was the case. In addition, some stakeholders have felt their contribution has been restricted by the limited opportunities to engage, particularly with regards to the Evidence Sub-Group, which is intended to be a forum for enabling stakeholder contribution but, as a consequence of limited resource, has met only on a limited number of occasions. The issue of available resource is now compounded by Marine Conservation Society unfortunately having left the project, meaning that Eastern IFCA will continue to deliver engagement from existing resources.

- **The Strategy did not inform a plan** – After adoption of the strategy, it was used to guide engagement decisions and our general approach but not to develop a plan. Decisions on when to provide updates were *ad hoc*, usually driven by progress having been made in one area of the project. Stakeholder group meetings were also generally delayed (compared to an intended meeting date) and stakeholders provided two to three weeks' notice of such a date. Whilst the project sought to address stakeholder concerns on engagement by continuously seeking to enhance communication outputs, this did not align with some stakeholder perceptions which were at times, at odds with what the project could deliver. This disparity between expectations and what was deliverable could potentially have been addressed through publication of an engagement plan.

- **The issues remain complex and effective communication is challenging** – Significant progress has been made during the project's first years and effective communication has facilitated its delivery and identifying areas for further improvement will lead to further enhancements in delivery. However, it is important to recognise that the strength of feeling amongst stakeholders and a lack of resource remain key challenges in facilitating a community effort in managing via ARM. Whilst the revised Engagement Strategy intends to meet these challenges, critical analysis of delivery should be considered in this context.

It is in the context of this reflection that the strategy has been revised. The new and amended components below are intended to enhance the successes so far and address shortfalls where possible.

2.Strategy
The strategy includes a vision to provide overall direction to test engagement proposals against and hold the project to account in delivery of its engagement.

Principles are then provided and explained which will be the main framework against which engagement is developed and tested.

2.1 Vision

Engagement is inclusive of the wide range of stakeholders to enable appropriate participation in the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds ARM Project, increasing the rate at which knowledge is acquired to inform decisions taken by the Project Board and Eastern IFCA to adaptively manage fishing activity within environmental parameters within the MCZ.

2.2 Engagement Principles and commitments
The following principles will be adopted in delivery of engagement and communication pursuant of the vision.

2.2.1 Inclusivity

There is a diverse range of stakeholders with an interest in management of the MCZ with varying backgrounds, perspectives and engagement preferences / needs. Adaptive management relies on rapid information exchange between stakeholders to inform the effectiveness of management which in turns relies on an inclusive approach.

This means that communication should be capable of reaching all stakeholders and take account of their preferences and needs but also, that engagement should recognise any conflicts which exists as a consequence of differing and strong perspectives and mitigate against such so far as is possible.

To achieve inclusivity, the project is committed to:
- Using the full suite of communication tools available to the project, including online and in-person within the scope of the project to cater for the needs and preferences of stakeholders.
- Adaptability and responsiveness to changing circumstances, including changing stakeholder needs.
- Seek to provide opportunities to contribute in ways which avoid or do no exacerbate conflict or if possible, avoid conflict through recognition of common goals.

2.2.2 Transparency

Many of the project's stakeholders have a strong sense of feeling towards the MCZ and its management. Transparency will provide stakeholders with confidence that management of the MCZ is being undertaken appropriately and responsibly and alleviate concerns to the contrary. This is particularly important with regards to this project given that a lack of confidence will reduce stakeholder participation which in turn will ultimately reduce the projects capacity to operate in an adaptive way. Furthermore, transparency provides the opportunity for stakeholders to hold the project to account with regards to its responsibilities and aspirations.

To achieve transparency, the project is committed to:
- Providing regular updates on progress against its plan.
- Publishing notes and reports associated with project board meetings within a reasonable timeframe.
- Ensuring membership of the Project Board and Task and Finish Groups are appropriate and justified.
- Being proactive in providing information to stakeholders.
- Providing opportunity to stakeholders to seek information and provide such in a timely manner.

2.2.3 Clarity

There are two important components of clarity with respect to delivery of the project.

The first relates to the clarity of communication and the language used to convey important information to stakeholders. Noting that the project is complex and, at times, very technical and that stakeholders have differing interests, needs and expertise, clarity will be achieved by communicating in plain English and in a consistent and structured way.

The second relates clarity of the process and structures of the project, including the roles of stakeholders and other partners in the project.

In both cases, to achieve clarity the project commits to:
- Producing updates which are clear and easily accessible in terms of the language used and their availability to stakeholders.
- Generating clear and succinct summaries of technical reports used to inform the delivery of the project.
- Generate and use a consistent structure / format for updates and meeting notes.
- Generate an engagement plan to provide clarity of how and when stakeholders will be engaged.
- Clearly establish the roles of all parties within Terms of Reference for the projects board and Task & Finish Groups.
- Provide clarity on how stakeholders can contribute and participate in the project and the roles and responsibilities of the project's partners within the ARM Plan.

3. Communications and Engagement Plan

A key finding of the reflections of the previous strategy was that using the strategy to inform a plan would provide stakeholders with clarity and transparency of what to expect from engagement and communication.

Drawing on the review of the original strategy, the vision developed for communication and the principles and commitments above, the following plan has been developed.

3.1 Key Engagement Deliverables

The Stakeholder Group:
Rationale The stakeholder group aims to be an open and inclusive forum for discussion, knowledge exchange and idea sharing. The Stakeholder Group provides a direct channel of communication between the Eastern IFCA's Project Board and community members affected by, or interested in, the impact of fishing activity and the development of regulation at the CSCB MCZ. This ultimately allows the project board to draw on wider sources of knowledge and information where necessary and appropriate to inform decision making, while also connecting with local perspectives. **Format** Organised by Eastern IFCA, the Stakeholder Group meetings will occur once a year with the proposal of another face to face meeting if resources allow. Established through the group a face-to-face inclusive workshop was preferred option which will occur during the first quarter of the year, intended to be in February. If resources allow another meeting will occur towards the end of the year which is intended for November. **Frequency:** February (and November if resources allow), yearly

Update bulletin
Rationale A continuous update in an accessible format aims to be a channel in which information on the development of the ARM project and update for individual ARM workstreams each quarter. This channel will provide all interested persons with accurate information, key updates, and ways to remain in touch in order to increase trust, communication, and collaboration **Format** A short infographic bulletin will provide an update, intended to comment on the previous quarter ARM workstreams. This will be posted to stakeholders, and broadcast across a variety of communication channels

Frequency:
1ST Month, every quarter.

IFCO Engagement:
Rationale As the outward face of Eastern IFCA, IFCOs are best placed to deliver information and updates and to gather informal feedback. They provide face-to-face communication and also act as a consistent line of communication between Easten IFCA and industry. **Format** IFCOs, will continue to gather information, feedback and comments surrounding the ARM development which will advise consultation and the continued development of Cromer Management. The IFCOs will also where necessary inform stakeholders of updates, meetings or information from lines-to-take issued by Eastern IFCA to ensure clear, consistent messaging. **Frequency:** Continuous

Existing communication networks
Rationale In order to remain flexible and have a variety of channels in place we will aim to use these alternative communication channels where possible to share information or when other pathways are not available. Although these channels will not be the preferred method of communication, they will remain in place in order to be flexible and utilize when key information needs to be broadcast to a wide base of stakeholders or if information if specific to a group of stakeholders. **Format** Existing groups include various fishing Associations, conservation groups such as MCNAG and any other group that Eastern IFCA become aware of. **Frequency:** Continuous, when necessary.

Website
Rationale The website provides a space for a number of types of communication, largely for sharing information to stakeholders. The website provides a platform which is accessible to all who wish to view it. The Cromer MCZ page provides a space for stakeholders to view and understand the ARM project in more detail. **Format** Every quarter the update bulletin will be posted, news items will be posted for key events and updates and the Cromer MCZ page will provide a space for more in-depth explanations of key areas of the ARM project **Frequency:** At a minimum 1st Month, every quarter.

Social Media
Rationale Social media pages like X (Twitter) and Facebook provide an accessible platform to provide key information and links to all those who subscribe. The platforms allow for concise posts like links to

websites as well as brief explanation and information updates, allowing stakeholders to be up to date without delay.

Format
Every quarter the update bulletin supplemented by key events and key updates in between will be posted on Eastern IFCA's X (formally known as 'Twitter') and Facebook page.

Frequency:
At a minimum 1ST Month, every quarter.

3.2 Timeline

		Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4		
		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Tailored meetings	**Stakeholder group meetings**											*	
	Project Board meeting												
Media	**Infographic bulletin**												
	Website updates		*	*		*	*		*	*		*	*
	Social media posts		*	*		*	*		*	*		*	*

*dependent on need and available resources