

Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1) on Strategic Offshore Matters, including Development Consent Order

Wednesday 18th January 2023

Prepared for Deadline 1: 20th February 2023

Summary of Oral submission made by Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA):

Please note: Eastern IFCA's interest in the SEP & DEP project is limited to its overlap with the Eastern IFCA district (0-6nm limit between Haile Sand Fort in the north to Felixstowe in the south). This includes matters related to the inshore section of the export cable route and the proposed potential MEEB.

Responses to questions raised by the Examining Authority:

1) Have Eastern IFCA been involved in the development of the Fisheries Liaison and Co-Existence Plan and is it appropriate?

Eastern IFCA are a regulatory body, we do not represent fishing industry. Furthermore, our remit is out to 6nm and so we only provide comment here in terms of the inshore section of cable corridor and not the array. We support the development and agreement of a Fisheries Liaison and Co-Existence Plan, and have had some involvement in its development; we are happy to provide feedback and comment on this but it is for the fishing industry and the applicant to agree on appropriate and effective mitigation.

2) What are Eastern IFCA's experiences of windfarms reducing access to fishing grounds?

Most of our experience has been with wind farm export cables coming through our district rather than windfarm arrays. Initial cable lays, and some subsequent required reburial (e.g. within The Wash embayment) has necessitated some localised closures to fishing. The cumulative impacts windfarms are having on the industry (referred to as spatial squeeze) is a common concern we hear from fishermen. We do not have any quantitative data on this. We have been informed that certain fishing grounds within and close to wind farm arrays no longer support the target species they used to since the wind farms have been constructed (e.g. mussel beds); although we have not undertaken bespoke research to understand this, we concur that the occurrence of mussel beds has reduced over this time period. Consultation with fishing industry members themselves is key to fully understand the impacts in the area and by learning from previous experience from other windfarms.

3) What do we know about fishing activities in the inshore area and what are our thoughts on compensation packages as a mitigation measure?

Eastern IFCA holds limited information on inshore fishing activities. Data on the spatial distribution of fishing activities is particularly sparse, or only available at large scales, such as ICES sub-rectangles, which does not always differentiate between inshore and offshore areas. The majority of fishing vessels in the north Norfolk inshore area are less than 10m in length, meaning they are not yet required to use vessel monitoring systems (VMS), so there is no automatic reporting of these fishing vessels' positions.

In relation to the inshore area around the SEP&DEP export cable route, we know that potting is the main type of fishing that takes place, targeting species including crab, lobster and whelk. It is possible that there is a low level of trawling and or netting in the area. [However, fishing with demersal trawls (bottom-towed gear) will be prohibited in most of the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) area when Eastern IFCA's Closed Areas Byelaw 2021 is implemented.]

We would again defer to fishing industry for detailed information on fishing activities in the area as we are not able to share this personal information, and there is limited data available. We do know that there are seasonal and spatial patterns in activities and suggest consultation with industry to understand these patterns could help develop appropriate mitigation during the construction phase of the cable route by avoiding certain areas at certain times of the year.

Compensation packages are not our favoured approach to mitigation as they are not a long-term solution and can in some cases provide fishermen with money to buy more pots and displace effort elsewhere.