

Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) response to Examining Authority First Written Questions

Prepared for Deadline 1: 20th February 2023

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. MEEB.

ExA Question		Eastern IFCA response
Q1.3.4 Effects on the Marine Conservation Zone		
Q1.3.4.1	<p>Measures of Equivalent Environmental Benefit (MEEB) The Applicant has proposed planting of oyster beds with the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) as a MEEB [APP-084]. In this respect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Of the options set out in Table 7-1 [APP-083], do you agree with the Applicant's assessment of the feasibility of providing other MEEB? b) If the answer to (a) is no, set out what options are available or preferred instead of oyster bed planting? c) Would the planting of a 1ha oyster bed in itself have ramifications for the composition and quality of the MCZ or would it be a superficial surface element unlikely to upset the balance of the conservation objectives? d) Would the oyster bed (not currently within the MCZ) attract different fish, prey and predator species to the area? e) Would the oyster bed, directly or indirectly, support the food resource for foraging birds? f) What is the likelihood of success of oyster beds establishing in the locality and what confidence can the ExA place upon this MEEB in recommending to the SoS BEIS about discharging their obligations under the MCA? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A) Eastern IFCA's preferred option would be for: 'Planting of native oyster beds at an alternative location (e.g. within SEP and DEP wind farm sites). This is not correctly recorded in Table 7 which states that our preferred option would be for restoration within CSCB MCZ, this would only be the case if it could be guaranteed that there would be no potential for fisheries restrictions to be imposed. We agree with the feasibility assessment for other MEEB. B) Our preference would be for oyster bed planting within the windfarm array where inshore fisheries would not be impacted. Eastern IFCA do not support oyster bed planting within the MCZ if this would require fisheries restrictions to be put in place. Whilst the applicant does not consider static potting to be a key constraint for oyster restoration, Eastern IFCA have concerns that conservation advice or monitoring could indicate the potting activity is hindering the oyster restoration efforts, fisheries restrictions may be required further down the line. The local fishing industry has experienced the effect of conservation advice changing over time: initial assurances that potting fishing activities and conservation features were compatible were rescinded, resulting in restrictions on their activities that were not predicted at the outset. Furthermore, whilst the Applicant suggest that if the oyster beds become sustainable, consideration would be given to trialling the establishment of a commercial fishery, Eastern IFCA understand that the likelihood of this being achieved is very low based on other similar restoration efforts in

		<p>the Kent and Essex IFCA district (Blackwater, Crouch, Roach and Colne Estuary MCZ).</p> <p>Eastern IFCA would not support any MEEB measures which have the potential to reduce, displace or remove fishing activities. Eastern IFCA support the removal of anthropogenic features as an alternative MEEB.</p> <p>C) Defer to NE</p> <p>D) The presence of an oyster bed on the seafloor would likely increase local biodiversity because it would provide a settlement structure (oyster shells) and shelter to invertebrates and fish species, which is otherwise absent in a predominantly sandy seafloor¹. The structure could attract different fish, predator and prey species to the local area – although the significance of this would be minimal given the small size of the proposed oyster bed (1ha) compared with the wider DEP & SEP area.</p> <p>E) The presence of an oyster beds could encourage settlement of other species and fish (see above), which could provide food for foraging birds such as scoter and Eider – although the significance of this from a 1ha oyster bed would be minimal.</p> <p>F) Eastern IFCA suggests a feasibility study is needed to ascertain the likelihood of success of oyster beds establishing in the locality. This should consider the existing environmental conditions (including physical, chemical and biological parameters) and existing activities (in particular, fishing but also other activities that can affect the sea floor) and should research other oyster restoration initiatives in the North Sea.</p>
Q1.3.4.3	<p>MEEB and Sandeels</p> <p>Sandeels are considered an important part of the food resource for bird species, including kittiwakes and sandwich terns [APP-069].</p> <p>a) Could sandeel habitat be artificially formed and sustained in the MCZ?</p> <p>b) If so, would that area be afforded protection from the fishing industry due to the designation?</p> <p>c)</p>	<p>A) Defer to NE .</p> <p>B) A closure has already been agreed by the Eastern IFCA (Closed Area Byelaw 2021) to close all of the MCZ, except for a thin strip along the North East edge, to bottom towed gears, which would protect seabed habitat from towed fishing gears. Eastern IFCA would not support MEEB/Compensatory measures which require further fisheries restrictions (for example to static gears) in the MCZ.</p>
Q1.7.1 Effects on Fishing Stocks		

<p>Q1.7.1.1</p>	<p>Electromagnetic Field The ES [APP-098, Paragraph 377] states that no experiments have highlighted significant concerns with EMF and the magnitude of impact of EMFs is generally considered to be low for most marine organisms. What is your stance on this issue?</p>	<p>Eastern IFCA maintain that not enough is known about electro-magnetic field impacts on marine fauna. This position is informed by studies such as Hutchinson <i>et al</i> 2020 ([REDACTED]). We do not consider this can be addressed by a single developer; instead, there is a responsibility for the marine cable industry to investigate and conduct research to better understand impacts from EMFs on marine organisms. However, we note that for every new electricity cable that is laid, the potential for cumulative impacts increases. This is of particular concern in the southern North Sea which already contains a high number of wind farm cables and electricity interconnector cables that could be impacting marine species, including commercial fish and shellfish.</p>
<p>Q1.7.1.2</p>	<p>Effect to Fish and Shellfish Stocks Is there evidence that can be provided as to the effects to fish and shellfish stocks as a result of the Proposed Developments such as that proposed with SEP and DEP?</p>	<p>Eastern IFCA are not aware of any sources of evidence, but lessons can be learnt from other operational windfarms where post operational monitoring surveys have been conducted. Once again, Eastern IFCA advocate consultation with the local fishing industry to ascertain their experience of effects on fish and shellfish stocks (for example effects of existing Sheringham and Dudgeon OWF cable routes).</p>
<p>Q1.7.2 Effects on fishing enterprises as a result of navigational or special restrictions</p>		
<p>Q1.7.2.1</p>	<p>Restricted Fishing The ES states: “The Applicant considers the most effective way this could be achieved would be to restrict fishing on sandeel, and with respect to prey availability for Sandwich tern, sprat or juvenile herring in UK waters. However, this would need to be implemented either by Defra in the case of sandeel or the relevant Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) in the case of sprat and juvenile herring fisheries within UK inshore waters.” [APP-069, Paragraph 127].</p> <p>What is your assessment of the economic effects on fishing communities if such restrictions were imposed?</p>	<p>There is currently no sandeel fishery within the Eastern IFCA district which extends 0-6nm between Haile Sand Fort in the north to Felixstowe in the south. Defer to other IFCA’s and the MMO regarding sandeel</p> <p>There is a herring and sprat fishery in the Eastern IFCA district, which is of high importance to a relatively low number of fishing enterprises. Whilst the economic value is not high, for example compared with shellfisheries in the Eastern IFCA district, the importance of the herring fishery to those individuals who target it is high. Eastern IFCA oppose any proposal for MEEB or compensatory measures relating to wind farm impacts on marine protected areas that would restrict fishing activities, as we consider the impact of such measures should not be passed on to a different sector.</p>

Q1.7.2.4	Restrictions to Fishing within Operational OWFs Clarify the extent of any restrictions on fishing fleets within the wind farm areas once they are operational and whether the existence of the turbines would result in any significant impingement or practical difficulties on fishing activities in these areas?	<p>Defer to MMO. The windfarm array areas do not overlap with our district boundary (0-6nm limit between Haile Sand Fort in the north to Felixstowe in the south).</p> <p>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 impingements and practical difficulties turbines have on fishing activities in the area and by learning from previous experience from other windfarms.</p>
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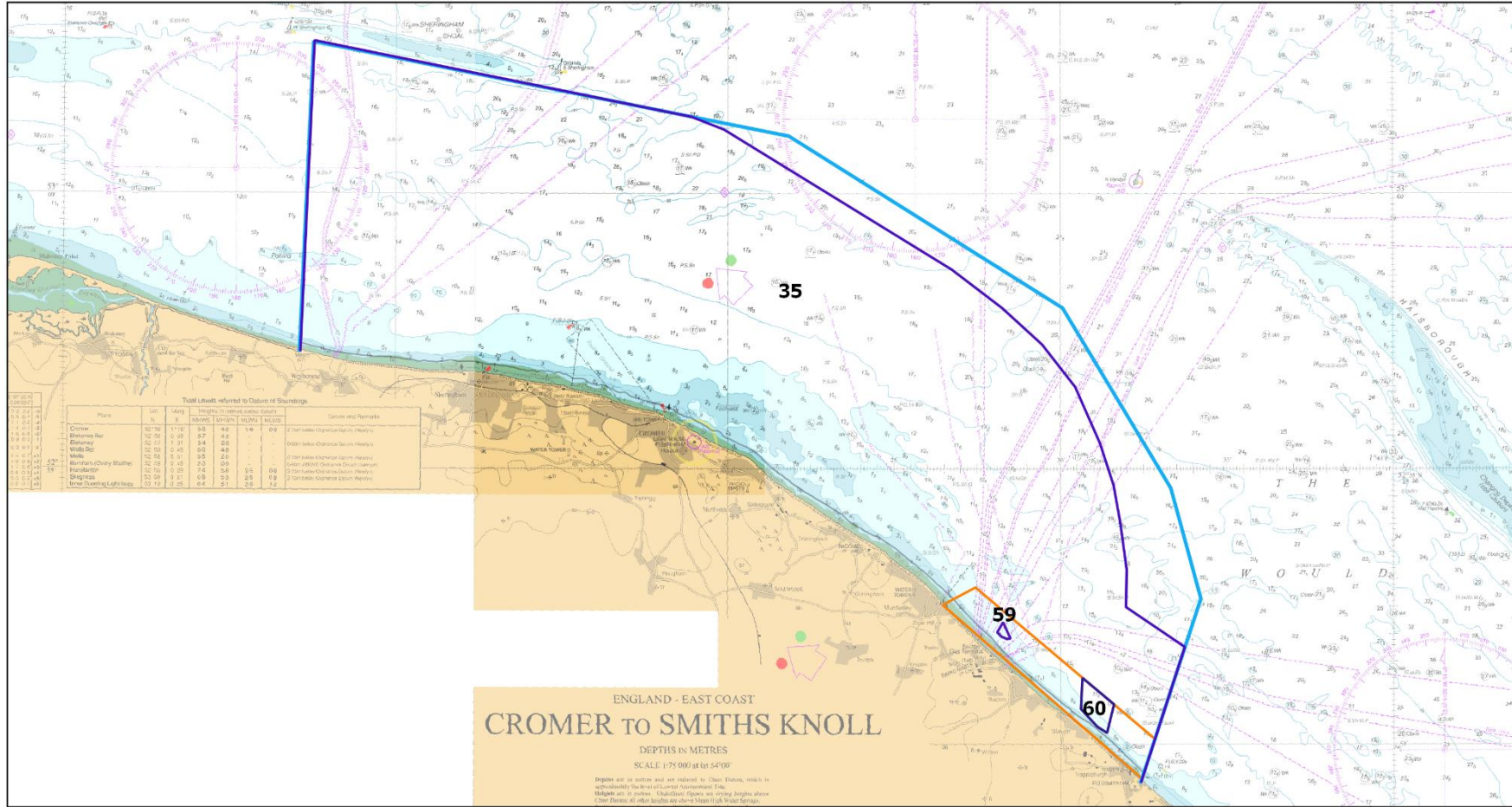


Chart 4: Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ - Restricted Areas 35,59 and 60 and the Artisanal Shrimp Management Area

— Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ boundary
 Restricted area to bottom towed gear
 Artisanal shrimp management area

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Date: 01/10/2021
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 Projection: Lat Long WGS1984
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Figure 1: Spatial restrictions in Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds MCZ agreed by the Eastern IFCA (not yet in force)