

# Consultation response



## Response to Fisheries Management Measures within Scottish Offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

14 October 2024

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### Part 1: Fisheries management measures

#### **1. Do you support or oppose the proposed zonal fisheries management measures for offshore MPAs?**

Support

Neutral

**Oppose**

#### **2. Do you have any comments on the proposed zonal fisheries management measures?**

See answer to Question 4 for reasoning behind supporting full site measures rather than zonal. We would of course prefer implementation of partial zonal protection over no additional management measures.

#### **3. Do you support or oppose the proposed full site fisheries management measures for offshore MPAs?**

**Support**

Neutral

Oppose

#### **4. Do you have any comments on the proposed full site fisheries management measures?**

Given the twin biodiversity and climate crises that Scotland's seas are facing, as acknowledged by government, and the declining health of our seas as highlighted in the [Marine Assessment \(2020\)](#) it is imperative that we implement long overdue measures for the entire area of both our inshore and offshore MPAs. With every delay our coasts and seas are falling further behind the goals the Scottish Government has set for healthy, clean, productive, sustainable seas. As such, the Scottish Wildlife Trust supports full site fisheries management measures for all MPAs under this consultation.

#### An Ecosystem Based Approach

Scotland's deep seas and continental shelf seas are vitally important to a range of unique wildlife, including some of our more ancient species such as cold water coral reefs. They are important spaces for many vulnerable species for food and habitat provision, including for commercially important fish stocks. The habitats found in our offshore area are also key carbon stores, particularly in relation to deep sea sediments, and cold water coral reefs play a vital role in nutrient cycling and wider ocean health. The majority of the sites within this consultation are currently in an unfavourable status. The Trust advocates for an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, which is also included in the governments [Scotland's Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030](#). An ecosystem-based approach recognises the vital role of a healthy marine environment to Scotland's economic, social and cultural interests.

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Bottom trawling through a designated corridor of an MPA or only during a certain period of the year (as with the zonal approach) does not correlate with an ecosystem-based management approach, nor with the concept of a protected area. [Scotland's Marine Assessment 2020](#) reported a decline in seabed conditions within our seas and highlighted that bottom-towed fishing was one of the most widespread pressures affecting the health of marine ecosystems. Static gear has its issues as well, for example bycatch of non-target species such as cetaceans and sharks.

### The Cost of Inaction

While the SEIA, and other additional assessments, considers the costs to the fishing industry of full site measures it fails to explore the cost of inaction. There is also no exploration of the potential benefits that properly protecting our environment could have to the marine economy, including any potential long term economic gain, for example overspill or benefits to communities in terms of marine tourism and resilience to climate change. This provides an unbalanced view and perpetuates the idea that conservation measures must always come at a detriment to the economy.

A [report](#) published by the Marine Conservation Society in 2023 on the socio-economic impact of a bottom trawling ban in the UK found that bottom trawling is estimated to occur in 98% of the UK's offshore MPAs, thereby undermining their protected status. The report used models to predict how a ban on bottom trawling could increase the value of marine ecosystem services over two decades. The model predicted, with consideration to the costs of enforcing a ban across all UK offshore MPAs, that the net gain over 20 years would be an additional £2.57 billion, demonstrating that allowing ecosystems to recover can benefit our economy as well as our marine species and habitats. The report highlighted a need to move away from short-term thinking and instead consider the long-term benefits that a healthy, thriving marine environment provides.

The SEIA highlights that the “estimates of costs and benefits are subject to significant uncertainties” in terms of the impacts to the fishing industry following these measures. The Trust supports a just transition for industries affected, which is also a key part of the [Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030](#), to mitigate any impacts whilst recognising that a healthy, restored marine environment is paramount. The Trust would like to see more sustainable fishing practices across the entirety of our seas and advocate for the use of technology such as Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) to play a part in that.

### The Precautionary Principle

A zonal approach does not take into account the precautionary principle, where there may be uncertainty about the distribution of protected features in an MPA. Allowing for certain areas to be fished may impact connectivity across the site, as well as retaining a feature led approach to management as opposed to taking account of the wider ecosystem in a holistic approach as set out in the [Fisheries Management Strategy 2020-2030](#). There is also a concern around monitoring and enforcement of zonal approaches and how that could be achieved.

In order for wider ecosystem recovery and restoration to happen there must be connectivity across the whole of the area of an MPA. A [report](#) published in 2023 by Professor James Harrison on the effectiveness of the MPA network in

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Scotland highlights the support for ecological coherence and connectivity across the entire MPA network, in both international policy frameworks and academic literature.

### Blue Carbon

The recently published Blue Carbon report for Scottish waters estimate that the 20 offshore MPAs under consultation hold an estimated 60 million tons of organic carbon, within the top 10cm of seabed which is nearly 40% of the total organic carbon in Scotland's seas. The report provides vital evidence for the need to protect the seabed from trawling, particularly within our MPAs. They identify the biggest threat to carbon stores is physical disturbance of the seabed. Carbon storage is noted "as a key service provided by marine biodiversity, which needs to be properly protected in MPAs as a priority". There must be a move away from feature-led conservation management to looking at the environment in a more holistic way, that considers wider marine biodiversity functions and services so that ecosystem health is at the heart of decision making.

### **5. Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal (SA)?**

No

### **6. Do you have any comments on the Draft Fisheries Assessments, including the methodology, which have been undertaken for each site?**

No

### **7. Do you have any comments on the Strategic Environmental Report (SEA)?**

No

### **8. Do you have any comments on the Socio-Economic Impact Assessment (SEIA)?**

As mentioned in the answer to Question 4 the SEIA fails to explore the cost of inaction or the potential benefits that properly protecting our environment could have to the marine economy, providing an unbalanced view.

### **9. Do you have any comments on the partial Business Regulatory Impact Assessments (BRIAs) for the fisheries management measures?**

No

### **10. Do you have any comments on the partial Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA)?**

No

### **11. Do you wish to comment on the measures proposed for any specific sites?**

### Yes

No

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**12. A) Do you support the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Anton Dohrn Seamount SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

- **Support**
- Neutral
- Oppose

**B) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Anton Dohrn Seamount SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

No

**13. A) Do you support the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Braemar Pockmarks SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

- **Support**
- Neutral
- Oppose

**B) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Braemar Pockmarks SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

No

**14. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Central Fladen NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Central Fladen NCMPA?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Central Fladen NCMPA?**

As stated in an earlier answer, connectivity of the network of MPAs for species colonisation is vitally important, and this becomes even more important within MPAs themselves. We believe that full site management measures will be

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the most effective option in terms of enabling further colonisation of species such as sea pens. The Trust notes that this MPA has been identified as having potential losses to fisheries associated with management measures and so we reiterate our earlier point on ensuring a just transition.

**15. A) Do you support the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Darwin Mounds SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

- **Support**
- Neutral
- Oppose

**B) Do you have any comments on the full site measures proposed in Darwin Mounds SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

We believe this is the correct decision in order to protect the unique reefs found at this site.

**16. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for East of Gannet and Montrose Fields NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for East of Gannet and Montrose Fields NCMPA?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for East of Gannet and Montrose Fields NCMPA?**

Given the uncertainty in estimating the area needed to support a minimum population of Ocean Quahogs we would encourage a precautionary principle approach – whereby the full site is protected from potential damage.

**17. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for East Rockall Bank SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

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### **B. Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for East Rockall Bank SAC?**

No

### **C. Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for East Rockall Bank SAC?**

The hydrodynamics at this site provide the optimal conditions for specialised sponge aggregations, reefs and corals. It is essential we protect these vulnerable habitats with a full site approach to avoid cumulative effects and also to safeguard particularly long lived species such as coral which can take a long time to recover from damage.

### **18. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

### **B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt NCMPA?**

No

### **C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Faroe-Shetland Sponge Belt NCMPA?**

The deep sea sponge aggregations found in this MPA are important to wider biodiversity and function as refugia for fish as well as refuges for fish. To enhance or restore our MPAs it is imperative that we improve connectivity. While the zonal approach may cover a substantial area of where protected features have been recorded, if we are following the precautionary principle we must assume that this distribution may be uncertain and so full site is the best option to ensure protection and allows species connectivity across the site to aid in recovery.

### **19. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Firth of Forth Banks Complex NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

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**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Firth of Forth Banks Complex NCMPA?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Firth of Forth Banks Complex NCMPA?**

No

**20. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope NCMPA?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope NCMPA?**

We do not believe that trawling, even on a “somewhat restricted basis” as described in the documentation, is sustainable within an MPA given the damage it can do to vulnerable habitats such as burrowing megafauna communities. We would again reiterate the concern of how monitoring and enforcement could be effectively carried out to ensure zonal approaches were being followed.

**21. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for North-East Faroe-Shetland Channel NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for North-East Faroe-Shetland Channel NCMPA?**

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No

### **C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for North-East Faroe-Shetland Channel NCMPA?**

The rationale for the management measures is again based on the “known distribution” of the protected features, and so does not take into account the precautionary principle. Even using fishing gear in a small part of the MPA, as is suggested for this site, will not allow for giving the priority features the full protection that is so long overdue, and undermines the MPA as a space for recovery and restoration. It is also highlighted in the documentation that the impacts static fishing gear “at high levels of fishing activity are less well understood”. As with all the sites we would advocate for an ecosystem-based approach, taking into account the precautionary principle and support full site management measures.

### **22. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for North West Rockall Bank SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

### **B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 in North West Rockall Bank SAC?**

No

### **C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 in North West Rockall Bank SAC?**

While under the proposed zonal measures 98.24% of the Annex 1 reef would be protected we would again advocate for full site measures to give the greatest amount of protection to these habitats.

### **23. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Norwegian Boundary Sediment Plain NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

### **B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 in Norwegian Boundary Sediment Plain NCMPA?**



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No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 in Norwegian Boundary Sediment Plain NCMMPA?**

No

**24. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Pobie Bank Reef SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- Option 2 (full site)
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Pobie Bank Reef SAC?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Pobie Bank Reef SAC?**

No

**25. A) Do you support the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Scanner Pockmark SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

- Support
- Neutral
- Oppose

**B) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed for Scanner Pockmark SAC? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

Given that the submarine structures at this site, which support a wide variety of marine species including cod, haddock and king crab, are effectively irreplaceable we support full site measures to protect them from damage where recovery would be virtually impossible.

**26. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Solan Bank Reef SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

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- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Solan Bank Reef SAC?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Solan Bank Reef SAC?**

The Trust would like to see ecosystem based management of fisheries and therefore trawling within an MPA is not seen as a sustainable practice, even if it is only for a limited period of the year. We therefore support full site measures.

**27. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Stanton Banks SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for Stanton Banks SAC?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for Stanton Banks SAC?**

While a large proportion of the reef habitats will be protected under zonal measures we would still advocate for a full site approach. A full site approach takes into account the precautionary principle (where features distribution data may not reflect reality) and will allow for full protection of the features from any changes in future. For example it is noted in the documentation that “if fishing intensity were to increase to high levels in the future, there is a risk of significant impact to the structure and functions of the habitats”. It is imperative that the full extent of MPAs are protected, given the need to restore our oceans in the face of the climate and biodiversity crises. In terms of zonal approaches there would also be the concern of monitoring and enforcement to ensure that the restrictions were adhered to, with resources needed for this that could be better utilised for research and data collection.

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**28. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for The Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures options proposed under Option 1 for The Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount NCMPA?**

No

**C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures options proposed for under Option 2 for The Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount NCMPA?**

No

**29. A) Do you support the full site fisheries management measures proposed for West of Scotland NCMPA? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

- **Support**
- Neutral
- Oppose

**B) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed in West of Scotland NCMPA? To note only one option for potential measures is proposed for this site.**

No

**30. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for West Shetland Shelf NCMPA under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?**

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

**B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 for West Shetland Shelf NCMPA?**

No

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### C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 for West Shetland Shelf NCMPA?

As this is one of the few sites with favourable status we support full site measures to ensure that it remains in this condition. We again reiterate the point that robust monitoring of the condition of MPAs is undertaken.

### 31. A) Do you support the fisheries management measures proposed for Wyville-Thomson Ridge SAC under Option 1 (zonal) or Option 2 (full site)?

- Option 1 (zonal)
- **Option 2 (full site)**
- Neither

### B) Do you have any comments on the zonal fisheries management measures proposed under Option 1 in Wyville-Thomson Ridge SAC?

No

### C) Do you have any comments on the full site fisheries management measures proposed under Option 2 in Wyville-Thomson Ridge SAC?

No

## Part 2: Amendment of the West of Scotland MPA site boundary

### 32. What are your views on the proposed amended boundary for West of Scotland MPA?

#### Support

Neutral

Oppose

We support this proposal in order to give the Scottish Government full control over conservation management and designations within the new boundary of the MPA, as it amounts to only 2.14% reduction in area.

### 33. Do you have any comments on the revised Business Regulatory Impact Assessment for the boundary amendment for West of Scotland MPA?

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The BRIA states that “it is JNCC’s scientific opinion that this will not adversely affect the ecological integrity of the West of Scotland MPA, due primarily to the relatively small scale in site size reduction and the relative sparseness of feature records in the area” which influences our decision to support.

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