

7.6 Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone SAC

Officers' Recommendation

To allow demersal towed fishing gear access into the previously closed area in the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone SAC, as shown in green in Figure 1.

Background

In the B&PSC meeting of 15th August 2019, Officers presented the options for allowing access to demersal fishing gear vessels that had been removed, under precaution, in response to Defra's Revised Approach to commercial fishing on or close to sensitive habitats in European Marine Sites. D&S IFCA has always indicated its intention to review access to areas closed under the Precautionary Principle once the ability to accurately monitor vessels' locations through IVMS/VMS was in place. An area South of Salcombe (top of Zone 2 of the Inshore Potting Agreement Area and Part of Annex 5a of the Mobile Fishing Permit Conditions) within the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone (SPPSE) SAC was closed in 2014 to demersal mobile fishing under precaution and has remained closed for the past eight years.

A decision was made, at the meeting in 2019, to defer any vote on options on access for demersal mobile fishing gear within the SPPSE SAC until the outcome of the [Habitats Regulations assessment \(HRA\)](#) and Formal Advice from NE were forthcoming.

[Formal advice](#) was received from NE on the three options for opening access detailed in the HRA. NE raised concerns which included:

- *'Reservations about this management approach' (sic) - opening up access into an area which has been closed for eight years and will have demonstrated recover.*
- *'Amending the current management of the site as proposed in the options provided will potentially complicate and may possibly compromise protection of the site, and the ability to effectively control trawling throughout the SAC'.*
- *'There are current discussions within Defra to move away from a "feature-based" approach to site protection, and towards a "whole-site" approach to protection in sites of highest biodiversity value. Furthermore, there is a commitment from Defra to do so within the 25 Year Environment Plan. In that potential future scenario, relatively fine-scale amendments to management of particular gears between features within such sites would no longer be appropriate'.*
- *'There would be an increased impact on areas of circalittoral coarse sediment within the site, which is not a protected feature of the SAC'.*

However, NE concluded that Option 2 and Option 3 (Figure 1) would ensure no significant adverse effect on the designated feature (reef) of the site. NE stated, *'the key to the proposals for amending the current spatial restrictions on towed gear within the site is the ability to use iVMS and VMS to monitor the activity of demersal gear vessels operating in the area, and to have the ability to ensure compliance with the areas of reef closed to demersal gear'.* However, there was a caveat to Option 3 that NE would need to quality assure the ground truthed habitat video data collected by D&S IFCA Officers on SV BlackJack, and if these data met the data standards, they could supersede the original reef layers. The data layers have been submitted to NE and are still under consideration. Therefore Option 2, as indicated in Figure 1 in bright green, is the only option being considered in this paper.

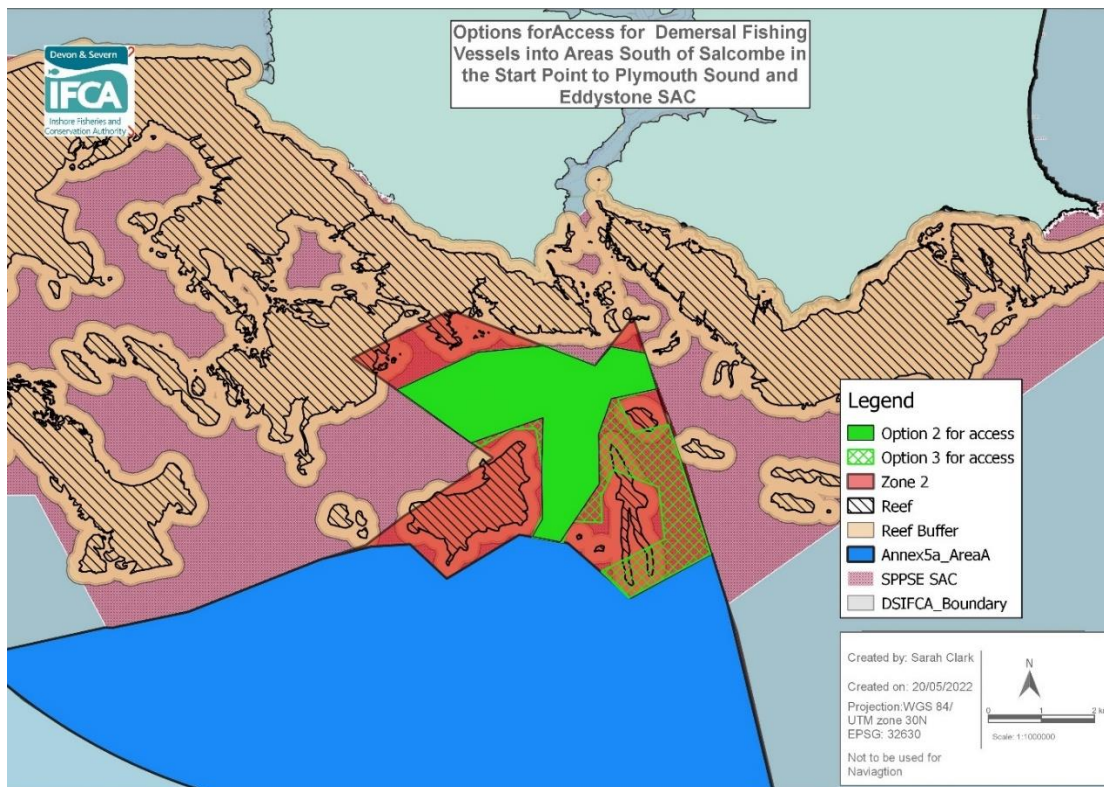


Figure 1- Option for access to demersal fishing vessels in the Start Point to Plymouth Sound and Eddystone SAC

Officers' Comments and Rationale for Recommendation:

- *D&S IFCA had always indicated its intention to review access to areas closed in 2014 under the precautionary principle once the ability to monitor vessels' location through IVMS/VMS was in place.*
- *IVMS/VMS was introduced to all Mobile Fishing vessels (at sea) over 6.99m in D&S IFCA's District since 2018.*
- *Whilst Option 3 would have allowed greater access, Option 2 allows access away from the originally identified reef features and associated buffer zones.*
- *The recommendation is consistent with the current feature-based approach to management of commercial fishing activities in MPAs.*

Background Papers & Hyperlinks

[B&PSC minutes 19th August 2019](#)

[Habitats Regulations assessment \(HRA\) Towed Demersal Gear 2019](#)

[Natural England's Formal Advice 2020](#)