

Management of Scallop Dredge Gear in the Lundy SAC

In 2012, Defra announced a revised approach to the management of commercial fisheries in European Marine Sites. The objective of the approach is to ensure that all existing and potential commercial fishing activities are managed in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. Devon and Severn IFCA has a responsibility to assess all activity/feature interactions in EMS sites within the district to determine whether management of an activity is required to conserve site features. This has been done by completing Habitat Regulation Assessments (HRA).

This report focusses on the conclusions of a HRA, which was undertaken for scallop dredging on the subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal sand sub-features of the Lundy SAC. The conservation objectives for these features is to maintain:

- the extent and distribution of qualifying natural habitats and habitats of the qualifying species
- the structure and function (including typical species) of qualifying natural habitats
- the structure and function of the habitats of qualifying species
- the supporting processes on which qualifying natural habitats and the habitats of qualifying species rely

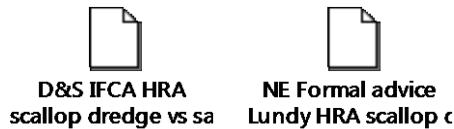
Scallop dredges could potentially exert the following pressures on the subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal sand sub-features:

- Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed
- Penetration and/or disturbance of the substrate below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion
- Removal of target species
- Removal of non-target species.

A copy of the assessment is attached below along with the formal advice received by Natural England in response to the HRA. The assessment considered peer reviewed scientific studies, officer knowledge of the site, and fishing activity data to provide evidence of the likely impacts of the gear on the features. Due to the Devon and Severn IFCA Mobile Fishing Permit Byelaw, permitted vessels have limited access to the Lundy SAC and are restricted to the North East of the Island. Although there is currently access for scallop dredging, there are no known confirmed reports of the activity taking place within the SAC. This area includes the subtidal coarse sediment and subtidal sand sub-features. Dredging for scallops was found to have a number of impacts on benthic systems, including a reduced seabed habitat complexity and heterogeneity, shifts in community structure and trophic interactions, alterations to the physical structure of the sea floor, and an impact on by-catch species. However, the severity and recovery time from these impacts depend on a number of factors including; intensity of activity, and environmental influences. The evidence suggests that less stable, mobile sediments such as the subtidal sand feature of the SAC are more resilient to the effects of dredging than stable sediments such as the subtidal coarse sediment feature.

The HRA concluded that because the activity wasn't currently occurring there was no likely significant effect on the sub-features. Natural England's formal response disagreed with this conclusion due to the possibility that the SAC could be targeted by scallop dredges in the future, and if this were to occur there could be a negative impact on the more stable subtidal coarse sediment sub-feature.

Taking into consideration the comments made by NE, it has been concluded that further management of the scallop dredge activity on the subtidal coarse sediment sub-feature is required to protect the feature. However, management is not currently required for the more mobile sediment of the subtidal sand sub-feature as this is more resilient to scallop dredging impacts.



The recommendations for management as a result of the HRA and NE formal advice are:

D&S IFCA proposes to prohibit scallop dredging on the subtidal coarse sediment sub-feature of the Lundy SAC as shown in the map below.

An alternative proposal, which might be considered, is to prohibit scallop dredging across the whole of the sand feature including the subtidal mobile sand sub-feature and subtidal coarse sediment sub-feature (which coincides with the area currently open to this gear type) as the fishery does not currently exist in this area.

Recommendation:

The Byelaw and Permitting sub-committee consider whether a consultation is undertaken to review the conditions of Mobile Fishing Permit to introduce further management of the demersal towed gear in Lundy SAC, as described above. The consultation would aim to gather information on the impact of the management proposals to the fishing industry, as part of an impact assessment.

