Marine Conservation Zone Assessment

Site name: Otter Estuary MCZ
UKMCZ0065

Protected feature(s):
Intertidal coarse sediment
Intertidal mud

Fishing activities assessed at this site:
Stage 1 Assessment
Passive nets: Drift nets (demersal)
Lines: Longlines (demersal)
Seine nets & other: Shrimp push nets, fyke & stakenets, ring nets

Devon & Severn IFCA
Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

D&S IFCA Reference
OTT-MCZ-004

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Version control history			
Author/ Reviewer	**Date**	**Comment**	**Version**
Sarah Curtin	October 2021	Draft assessment	0.1
Sarah Clark	January 2023	Final review	1.0

1. Introduction

This assessment has been undertaken by Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) in order to document and determine whether management measures are required to achieve the conservation objectives of marine conservation zones (MCZs). The IFCA's responsibilities in relation to management of MCZs are laid out in Sections 124 to 126, & 154 to 157 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

2. MCZ site name(s), and location

The Otter Estuary MCZ is a small inshore site covering an area of approximately 0.11km^2. The estuary is located on the south coast of Devon near the town Budleigh Salterton. The site extends from the mouth of the river up to the aqueduct near East Budleigh.

Although the Otter Estuary is small, it is an important ecosystem supporting a range of habitats and wildlife. It is an essential link from the sea to the River Otter where it acts as a migratory route for European eel, Atlantic salmon, Sea trout and Shad. The mouth of the estuary is dominated by a shingle bank of intertidal coarse sediment extending from the west coast of the river. The sheltered areas behind the bank consist of highly productive intertidal mudflats and saltmarshes.

The Otter Estuary is one of the most extensive saltmarsh networks in Devon, providing important foraging grounds for wading birds and wildfowl and a sheltered refuge from high tide. Several species of specialised salt and flood-tolerant flowering plants can be found within the saltmarshes as well as an abundance of worms, crustaceans, and tiny snails.

The intertidal muds are a highly productive habitat and support a diverse range of species including ragworms, mudshrimps and the commercially important cockle. At low tide these areas form vital feeding grounds for wading and migratory birds, while at high tide flatfish and others migrate to these areas to forage for food (Defra, 2019).

Further information regarding the MCZ and its protected features can be found in the Otter Estuary MCZ Factsheet.

3. Feature(s) / habitat(s) of conservation importance (FOCI/HOCI) and conservation objectives

Table 1 - Protected features relevant to this assessment

Feature	General management approach
Intertidal coarse sediment	Maintain in favourable condition
Intertidal mud	Maintain in favourable condition

The conservation objectives for these features are that they remain in favourable condition.

4. Gear/feature interaction in the MCZ categorised as 'red' risk and overview of management measure

None - There are no gear/feature interactions in the MCZ that are categorised as 'red' risk.

5. Activities under consideration

- Static fixed nets: Gill nets, trammels and entangling
- Passive nets: Drift nets (demersal)
- Seine nets & other: Shrimp push nets, fyke & stakenets, ring nets.

See Curtin (2021) for more information regarding fishing activities occurring in the Otter Estuary MCZ.

6. Is there a risk that activities are hindering the conservation objectives of the MCZ?

No,
Evidence:

These activities fall under the D&S IFCA Netting Permit Byelaw and are currently not permitted to take place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. In the estuary landward of the coordinates set out in set out in Annex 1; Figure 3, a permit holder or named representative is not authorised to use any net other than a seine net in accordance with paragraph 3.2 of the Netting Permit Conditions. Seine nets are considered in a separate assessment.

7. Can D&S IFCA exercise its functions to further the conservation objectives of the site?

Yes,
Evidence: Monitoring and Control Arrangements

- Enforcement of current byelaws
- Monitoring and review of current byelaws
- Monitoring of fishing activity in the Estuary
- Changes can be made to the permit conditions, via consultation, if the D&S IFCA deems it to be necessary. This could include limitations or spatial/temporal restrictions. The permitting system allows for adaptive management.

8. Referenced supporting information to inform assessment

N/A

9. In-combination assessment

Table 2 - Relevant activities occurring in or close to the site

Plans and Projects		
Activity	**Description**	**Potential Pressure(s)**
No other plans or projects known to be occurring within Otter Estuary MCZ	The impact of future plans or projects will require assessment in their own right, including accounting for any in-combination effects, alongside existing activities.	N/A
Other activities being considered		
Activity	**Description**	**Potential Pressure(s)**
Crab tiling	There is no evidence that this activity is occurring. Additionally, as the activities	Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the

	assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect	surface of the seabed Removal of non-target species Removal of target species Changes in suspended solids (water clarity) Penetration and/or disturbance of the substratum below the surface of the seabed, including abrasion Smothering and siltation rate changes (Light) Genetic modification & translocation of indigenous species Introduction of microbial pathogens Introduction or spread of invasive non indigenous species
Bait digging	There is no evidence that this activity is occurring. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect	
Hand working (access from land/access from vessel)	There is no evidence that this activity is occurring. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect	
Static – pots/traps: Pots/creels, cuttlepots, fish traps	As there is little to no level of this activity in the Otter Estuary MCZ, no in-combination effect thought to be possible. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect.	
Lines: Longlines (demersal)	As there is little to no level of this activity in the Otter Estuary MCZ, no in-combination effect thought to be possible. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect.	
Beach seine netting	There is no evidence that this activity is currently occurring. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect.	
Aquaculture	There is no evidence that this activity is occurring. Additionally, as the activities assessed (section 5) are not occurring, it is thought there is no in-combination effect	

D&S IFCA concludes there is no likelihood of significant adverse effect on the interest features from in-combination effects addressed within Table 2**Error! Reference source not found.**.

10. NE consultation response

N/A Natural England has not been consulted at this stage.

11. Conclusion

The activities assessed fall under the D&S IFCA Netting Permit Byelaw and are currently not permitted to take place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. Therefore, D&S IFCA concludes that there is no significant risk of the activities hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives for Otter Estuary MCZ.

12. Summary table

Feature or habitat of Conservation interest	**Conservation objectives/ Target Attributes** (Natural England, 2021)	**Activity**	**Potential pressures from activity and sensitivity of habitats to pressures.** (Natural England, 2021)	**Potential exposure to pressures and mechanism of impact significance**	**Is there a risk that the activity could hinder the achievement of conservation objectives of the site?**	**Can D&S IFCA exercise its functions to further the conservation objectives of the site?** **If Yes, list management options**
Intertidal coarse sediment	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of intertidal coarse sediment communities Maintain the total extent and spatial distribution of intertidal coarse sediment [Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat Maintain the species	Commercial fishing; Static fixed nets: Gill nets Trammels Entangling Passive nets: Drift nets (demersal) Seine nets and other: Shrimp push nets Fyke & stakenets, ring nets	• Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed • Removal of non-target species	No exposure Activities not permitted to take place within the Otter Estuary MCZ as this activity falls under the D&S IFCA Netting Permit Byelaw	Activities not believed to be occurring D&S IFCA conclude that there is no significant risk of the activities hindering the achievement of the conservation objectives.	Yes, Management measures could include: • Enforcement of current byelaws • Monitoring and review of current byelaws • Monitoring of fishing activity in the Estuary • Changes can be made to the permit conditions, via consultation, if the D&S IFCA deems it to be necessary. This could include limitations or spatial/temporal restrictions. The permitting system allows for adaptive management.

	composition of component communities					
Intertidal mud	Maintain the presence and spatial distribution of intertidal mud communities Maintain the total extent and spatial distribution of intertidal mud [Maintain OR Recover OR Restore] the abundance of listed species to enable each of them to be a viable component of the habitat Maintain the species composition of	Commercial fishing; Static fixed nets: Gill nets Trammels Entangling Passive nets: Drift nets (demersal) Seine nets and other: Shrimp push nets Fyke & stakenets, ring nets	• Abrasion/disturbance of the substrate on the surface of the seabed • Removal of non-target species	See above	See above	See above

	component communities					

13. References

Curtin, S. (2021) Otter Estuary MCZ Fishing Activity Report. Devon and Severn IFCA Report.

Defra. 2019. Otter Estuary Marine Conservation Zone factsheet. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/915660/mcz-otter-estuary-2019.pdf

Natural England (2021) Draft Conservation Advice for Otter Estuary Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)

Annex 1: Site Map(s)

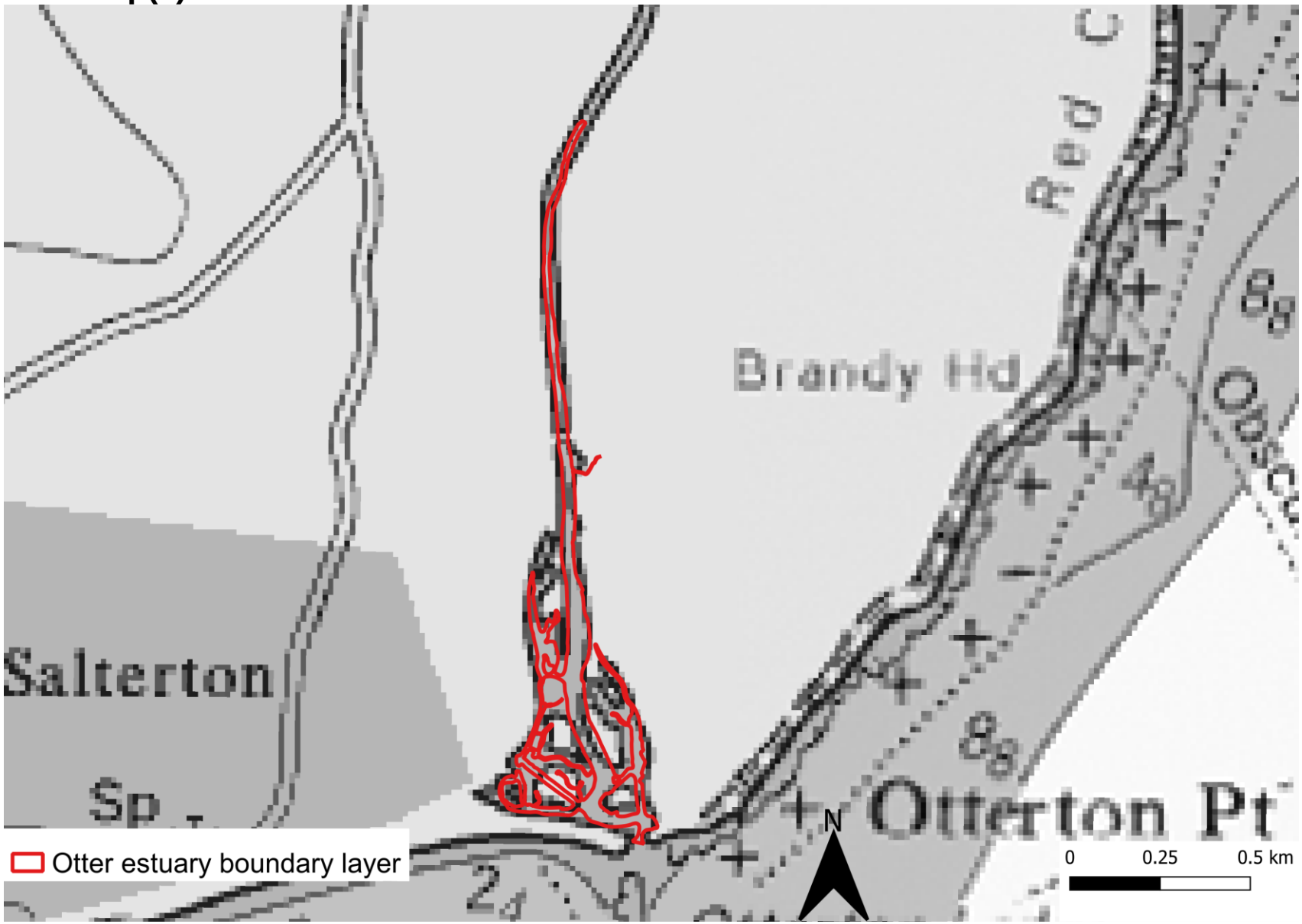


Figure 1 – Otter Estuary MCZ

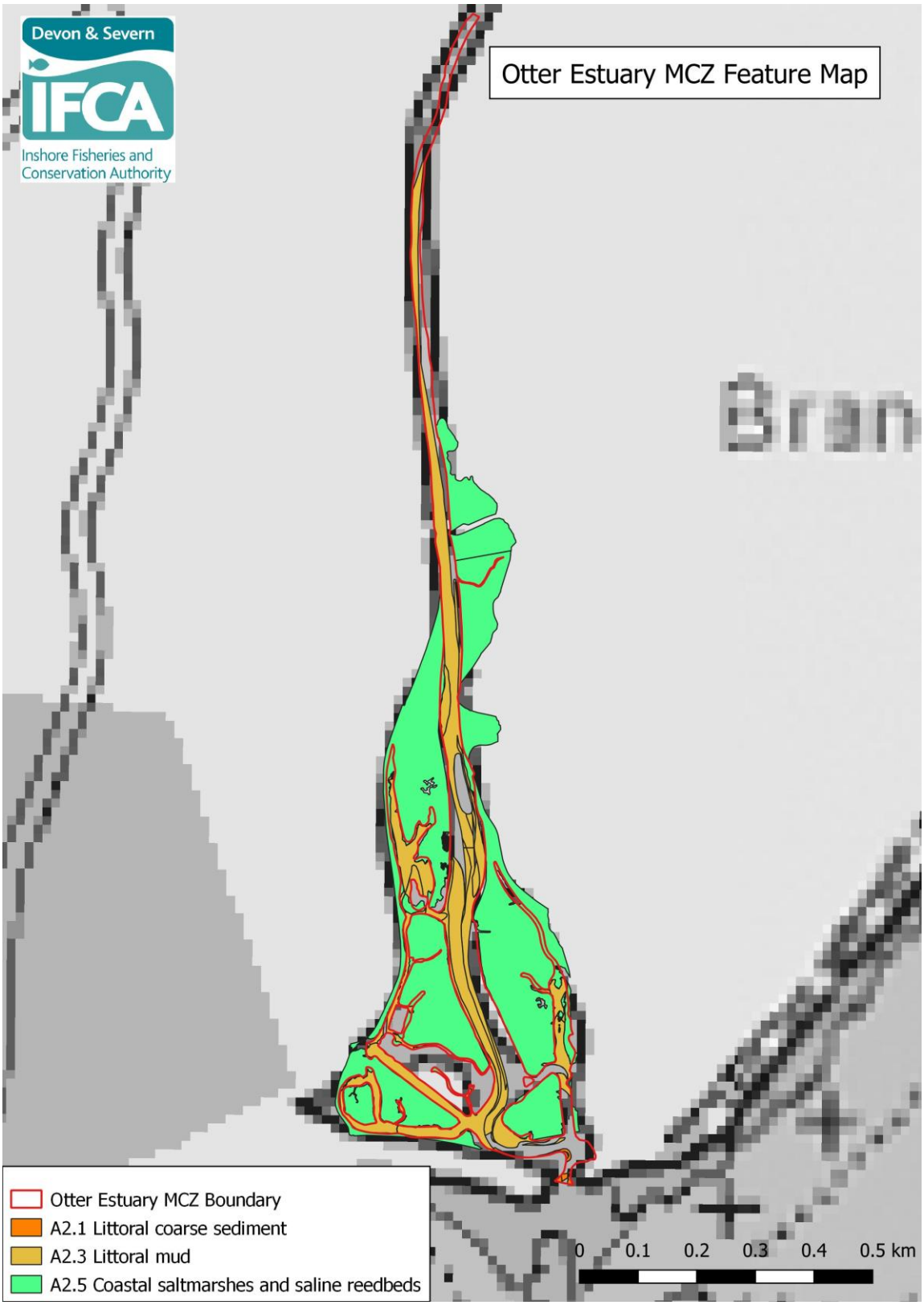
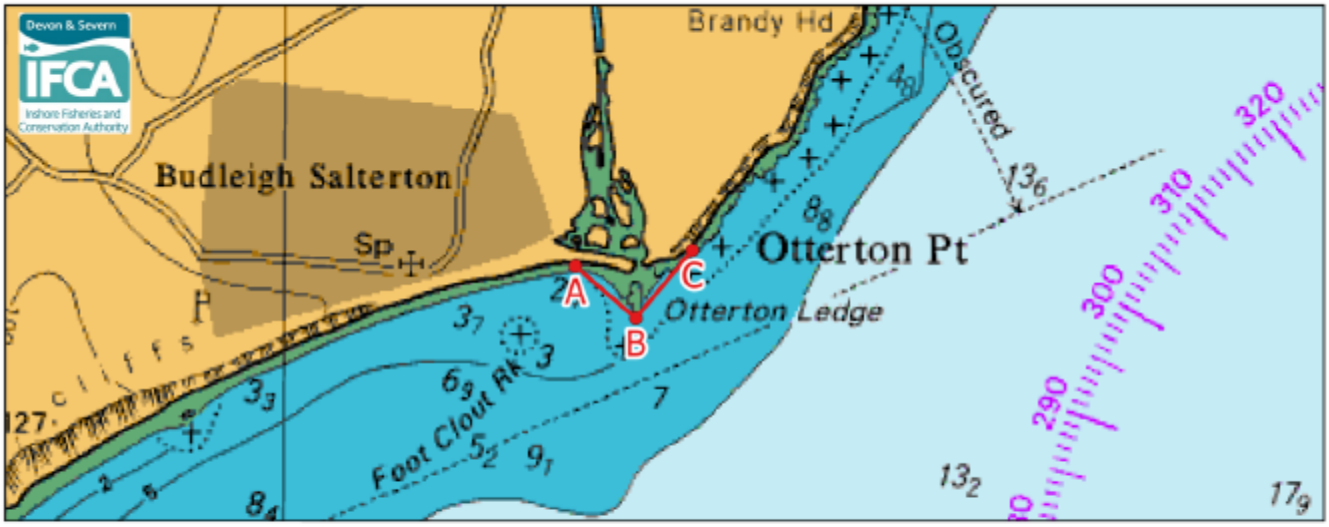


Figure 2: Extent of features, intertidal coarse, intertidal mud, and coastal saltmarshes and saline reedbeds) designated in the Otter Estuary MCZ

Annex 2 Chart of River Otter closing line - No access for the use of nets other than a seine net in accordance with paragraph 3.2 of the Netting Permit Conditions



River Otter closing line latitude and longitude positions:

Point	Latitude	Longitude
A	50° 37.791'N	003° 18.676'W
B (Otterton Ledge)	50° 37.626'N	003° 18.399'W
C (Otterton Point)	50° 37.821'N	003° 18.143'W

Figure 3: River Otter closing line latitude and longitude, from Annex 2 to the Netting Permit Byelaw. No access landward of the line to the use of nets other than a seine net in accordance with paragraph 3.2 of the Netting Permit Conditions.