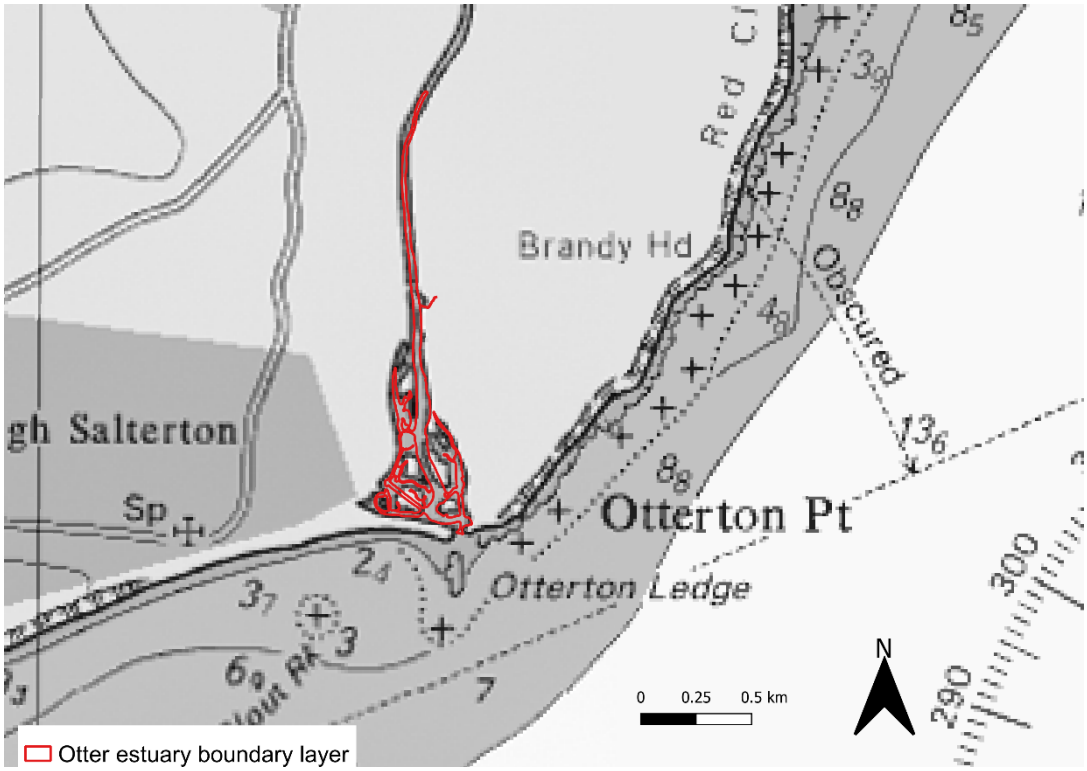
Fishing Activity Report- Otter Estuary MCZ



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Sarah Curtin	19/01/2022	First draft	0.1
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1. Introduction

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) has a responsibility to establish 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.

In order to aid the decision-making process, D&S IFCA have gathered information relating to the occurrence of the fishing activities within each of the Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) within the district. This report pools official and anecdotal information in order to define fishing activities occurring, and at what levels, in the Otter Estuary MCZ.

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.

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 (Defra, 2019)

This report should be thought of as a working document and will be updated if and when fishing activities within or close to the Otter Estuary MCZ change or develop. It is not a definitive list and only covers activities which are defined within the generic fishing matrix provided by Marine Management Organisation (MMO, 2014)*.*

2. Methodology

In the first instance, a thorough literature review was carried out in order to identify the fishing methods used in the Otter Estuary MCZ. This included information from the Otter Valley Association, the landowner and knowledge from IFCA officers. This was used to identify fishing activities for which more information was required. In order to provide data regarding bait digging and hand gathering, potting and seine netting in the MCZ, a request for information was sent to permit holders who were deemed local to the estuary (65 individuals) as well as the Otter Valley Association. This included a map of the MCZ with an overlaying grid in order for respondents to indicate the location (grid cell) of any fishing activities. The request for information was also published on D&S IFCA's website.

3. Fishing Activities

3.1. Intertidal Handwork

3.1.1 Hand working (access from vessel), Hand working (access from land)

Other than crab tiling and digging for bait with forks (covered in later sections), there is limited evidence of other hand working or shore-based activities occurring within the Otter Estuary MCZ. No responses were received from the request for information. However, there is no evidence that it is not occurring at a low, undetected level and therefore cannot be completely ruled out.

3.2. Static- Pots/Traps

3.2.1 Pots/Creels, Cuttle Pots, Fish Traps

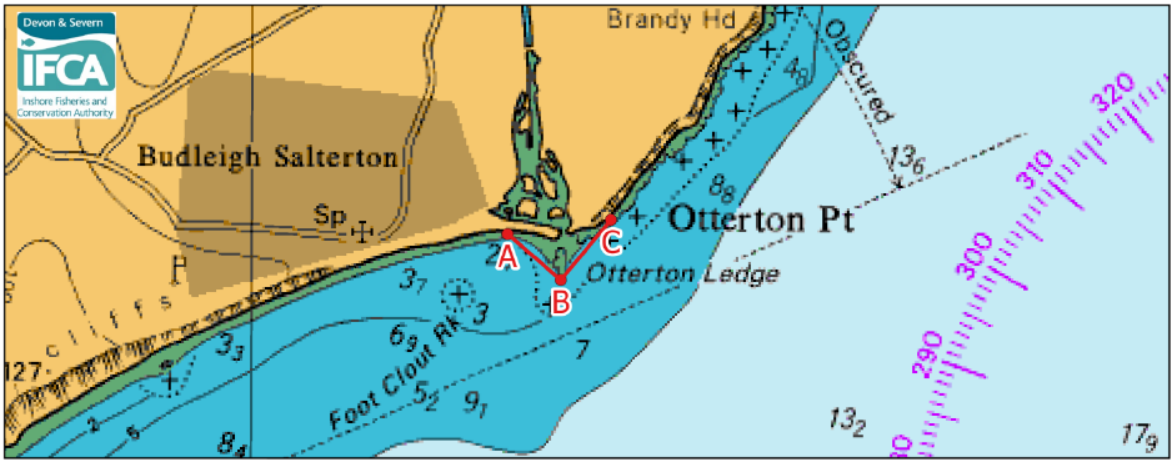
There are 17 vessels that have been issued with potting permits in the East of the district. The base ports include: Budleigh Salterton (5), Exmouth (9), Ladram Bay (1), and Sidmouth (2). The vessels have a total of 5,848 pots between them made up of 112 inkwells, 2,280 parlours/creels, 1,680 whelk pots, and 1,470 Cuttle pots and 306 prawn pots. The target species are brown crab, lobster, spiny lobster, cuttle, whelk, and prawns.

There are no records of this activity taking place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. However, there is no evidence that it is not occurring at a low, undetected level and therefore cannot be completely ruled out.

3.3. Static- Fixed Nets and Passive Nets

3.3.1 Gill Nets, Trammels, Entangling, and Drift Nets (Demersal)

This activity falls under the D&S IFCA Netting Permit Byelaw and is currently not permitted to take place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. In the estuary landward of the coordinates set out in Figure , 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.



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 1: River Otter closing line latitude and longitude. 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.

3.4 Lines

3.4.1 Longlines (Demersal)

There are no records of this activity taking place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. However, there is no evidence that it is not occurring at a low, undetected level and therefore cannot be completely ruled out.

3.5 Seine Nets & Others

3.5.1 Beach Seine

Seine netting in the Otter Estuary requires a netting permit under D&S IFCA's Netting Permit Byelaw. A permit holder or named representative may only use a seine net and providing that; a) the net measures no longer than 20 metres in length; b) all species caught other than sand eel are returned immediately to the water; and c) the size of mesh does not exceed 20mm. In addition, the permit holder or their named representative must a) remain in attendance with the net for the entire duration that the net is deployed in the water; and b) deploy and haul the net in one continuous action without pause or delay.

There are 17 vessels that have been issued with a netting permit in the East of the district. The base ports include: Budleigh Salterton (4), Exmouth (11), Ladram Bay (1), and Sidmouth (1). One vessel indicated on their permit application that they intend to use a seine net within an estuary. This activity may therefore be occurring at a very low level.

3.5.2 Shrimp Push-nets, Fyke & Stake nets, ring nets

This activity is currently not permitted to take place within the Otter Estuary MCZ as this activity falls under the D&S IFCA Netting Permit Byelaw. In the estuary landward of the coordinates set out in Figure above, a permit holder or named representative is not authorised to use any net other than a seine net.

It should be noted that the Netting Permit Byelaw does not include any net which when fully expanded does not exceed an area of more than four meters squared, where it is operated only manually and not in connection with any vessel or mechanical device.

3.6 Miscellaneous

3.6.2 Crab Tiling

Every four years, D&S IFCA undertakes surveys to determine the number and location of crab tiles in the intertidal zone of estuaries in the D&S IFCA's District. These surveys enable D&S IFCA to assess the potential for impacts from crab tiling on sensitive estuary environments, and to inform the development of appropriate management. Surveys were not undertaken on the River Otter in 2020 due to no tiles being present in previous years.

3.7 Bait Collection- Digging with Forks

D&S IFCA conducted bait digging surveys in summer and autumn of 2020. During these surveys no evidence was found of bait digging the Otter Estuary.

D&S IFCA circulated a request for information on bait digging to the local community and estuary forum members and landowners to gather evidence and better understand fishing activity within the site. No responses were received from the request for information to indicate that bait digging is occurring, and the estuary forum members and landowner advised that bait digging does not occur on the estuary. However, there is no evidence that it is not occurring at a low, undetected level and therefore cannot be completely ruled out.

3.8 Aquaculture

3.8.1. Shellfish aquaculture: bottom culture, Shellfish aquaculture: suspended rope/net culture, Shellfish aquaculture: trestle culture

There are no records of this activity taking place within the Otter Estuary MCZ. Currently, there are no classified shellfish harvesting areas within the MCZ. No evidence of aquaculture infrastructure (e.g., trestles) was observed during D&S IFCA's surveys of bait digging or crab tiling. However, there is no evidence that bottom culture is not occurring at a low, undetected level and therefore cannot be completely ruled out. It is very unlikely that this activity is occurring due to no area of the estuary having been classified for shellfish harvesting.

4. References

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.

Marine Management Organisation. (2014.). Fisheries in European marine sites: Matrix. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fisheries-in-european-marine-sites-matrix (Accessed 24 January 2022).