

**Skerries Banks Angling Zone revised proposal (No.3)**

At the quarterly meeting in June 2014, after an initial period of consultation<sup>1</sup> the Authority requested officers to extend this process and to directly liaise with all interested sectors. Two rounds of further consultation have since been held. In July three meetings were hosted at the IFCA's Brixham offices as well as further face-to-face and telephone meetings with each of the three main sectors who fish the area of the proposed Angling Zone: The commercial sector (netting, longlining, potting and rod and line); charter boat skippers who will be referred to as RSA (charter boats) and individual and club anglers who will be referred to as RSA (individuals, clubs & private boats). Each sector was asked how important the area covered by the proposed Angling Zone is to their fishing activities, the spatial and temporal variations in how they use the site, the main risks to their fishing activities, their general attitude towards angling zones, and their general attitudes towards bag limits. From this first round of in-depth consultation revised proposals were compiled<sup>2</sup> and sent to interested parties. A second round of meetings was held in late August to give the sectors an opportunity to respond to the revised proposals before officers formulated a final proposal and recommendations for the Authority.

The meetings highlighted a great deal of consensus between the groups in the way management of an Angling Zone would improve their activities. The RSA (charter boat) sector felt that current static gear levels are not detrimental to their fishing activities. Although concern was voiced by the RSA sector (individuals, clubs & private boats) regarding current levels of netting, all three groups saw an increase in current levels of static gear as undesirable and potentially damaging. The meetings also highlighted the importance of the area primarily for plaice for the charter boats, although rays do add value to the area as a whole. Rays and plaice were equally important to the private boat sector. The commercial sector felt that they could agree to a complete ban on commercial targeting of plaice in the Skerries Bank Angling Zone area in order to acknowledge the importance of this species to recreational sea angling. The commercial sector was concerned about the removal of opportunities for ray fishing and longlining, as this would prove a significant risk to their business. The commercial sector also felt that their 'stewardship' of the area, with families fishing the area from small boats for generations should be recognised, this view was supported by the RSA (charter boats) sector.

The commercial sector felt that in order to acknowledge their compromise in giving up the potential for plaice fishing, they would like to see balance in management by the placing of sensible bag limit on recreational anglers, in order to remove the risk to their business of fish being caught by unlicensed vessels in the area being sold on the 'grey market'. The RSA sector (individuals, clubs & private boats) saw the introduction of a bag limit as acceptable, providing the numbers were not overly restrictive and agreed that the numbers detailed below would not reduce their enjoyment of fishing the Skerries and therefore perceived benefit of the Angling Zone. Opinions amongst the RSA sector (charter boats) towards bag limits were more mixed. Some skippers felt that a bag limit would pose a risk to their business, with people less likely to book a trip to the Skerries if there was a bag limit. However other charter boat operators consulted with were more receptive to the idea and suggested that a sensible bag limit would not affect business and would send a positive message to potential customers.

A consensus on an area free from all forms of netting could not be reached. The RSA sector (individuals, clubs & private boats) felt that this was an important part of the original proposal and therefore suggested the placement of smaller, more localised no-netting zones to

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<sup>1</sup> Skerries Bank proposed Angling Zone (No.1)

<sup>2</sup> Skerries Bank revised proposals (No.2)

benefit the shore angler. In the second round of consultations, an area off Beesands beach was therefore proposed as no-netting. The commercial sector strongly rejected this area and questioned the perception held by anglers that the current levels of commercial netting activity in the vicinity of Beesands is sufficient to be detrimental to shore-based angling activities. In the absence of evidence to guide decisions, the IFCA have therefore suggested a reporting scheme for licensed boats to record commercial fishing activity within the Angling Zone to guide future decisions. Differential marking of pots and nets to aid monitoring of the pilot Angling Zone and reduce misconceptions about the level of netting was also suggested as a possible management tool by the RSA (individuals, clubs & private boats) sector. Distinct marking of nets is likely to feature in the new netting byelaw and as such the level of success of this measure in the Skerries Bank pilot Angling Zone will help inform the wider discussion on marking of gear.

As a result of the discussions outlined briefly above, the following measures are suggested for the management of the Skerries Angling Zone:

1. No commercial targeted fishing for plaice by any method may take place within the entire area of the Skerries Angling Zone.
2. Vessels which exceed 10m in overall length are prohibited from engaging in any commercial or recreational netting or longlining activity within the entire area of the Skerries Angling Zone.
3. Greater enforcement effort of the no-trawl area partly, but not entirely through the impending introduction of Inshore Vessel Monitoring System (IVMS) to ALL vessels operating towed gear.
4. A bag limit for recreational sea anglers fishing within the Angling Zone from a private or charter boat of 10 plaice and 3 rays per angler per day.
5. A voluntary recording scheme will be put in place to assess the levels of use by the commercial sector, with particular reference to the areas close inshore which are of particular interest to both commercial fishing activities and shore anglers.
6. Boats which are angling in the pilot Angling Zone should not use marker buoys for mooring or anchoring under any circumstances.
7. All nets used within the pilot Angling Zone should be clearly marked using buoys with flags to aid efficient differentiation between pots and nets.\*

*\* Point 7 was suggested by the RSA sector at the last meeting of the final round of consultations in exchange for point 6. Therefore feasibility of gear marking has not yet been discussed directly with the commercial sector.*

The suggested management measures may not meet every individual's expectation but Officers believe that the proposals represent a significant step forward in recognising the importance of the RSA sector. The measures fully recognise the importance of the plaice fishery to the RSA sector and would minimise the risk of further commercial fishing pressure in the area by limiting access to the netting and longlining fisheries to vessel 10m and less. These new management measures, combined with improved monitoring and enforcement of towed gear vessels through the impending introduction of IVMS should lead to significant improvements in angling experiences within the Angling Zone area.

Officers believe that the proposals represent a balanced approach to management in an area that is important to both the RSA and commercial catching sector. The pilot angling zone and the range of management measures will, through the designed monitoring programme, help inform the Authority's future decisions on RSA development.

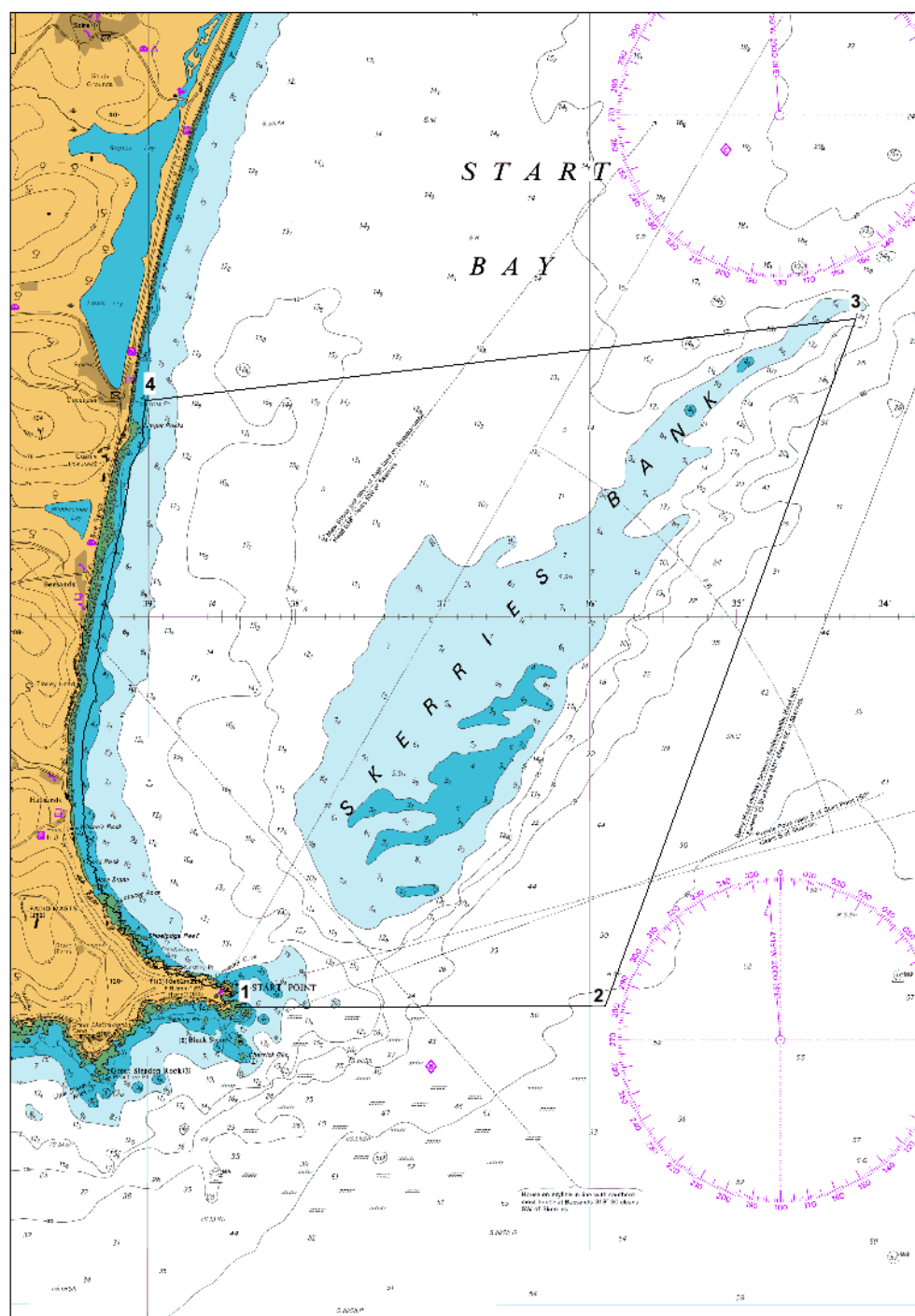
## **Recommendation**

**That the Authority agrees to the establishment of a voluntary code of conduct for the Skerries Bank Angling Zone as set out above.**

## Annex 1. Position of the proposed Skerries Angling Zone

Table 1. Co-ordinates of the corners of the proposed Skerries Angling Zone

| Point Number | Latitude    | Longitude    |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1            | 50° 13.34'N | 003° 38.54'W |
| 2            | 50° 13.34'N | 003° 35.94'W |
| 3            | 50° 16.28'N | 003° 34.18'W |
| 4            | 50° 15.95'N | 003° 39.11'W |



**Figure 1.** The position of the proposed Skerries Angling Zone