



Scoping the opportunities and challenges to using a 'core grounds' approach to develop a spatial marine plan policy for fishing

Aim

The aim of this project was to explore with industry, managers and relevant experts the opportunities and challenges of using a 'core fishing grounds'¹ approach to develop spatially explicit marine plan policies for fishing activity.

The project also aimed to identify the next steps required to take forward the approach in a way that will support and benefit both the fishing industry and other users of the marine area, as well as ensuring sustainable management of the marine environment.

Introduction and methodology

MMO was established to make a significant contribution to sustainable development in the marine area as set out in the government's High Level Marine Objectives and Marine Policy Statement.

Marine planning aims to improve integrated management of marine activities to achieve sustainable development in the marine area. This can be done by identifying important areas for activities and writing appropriate marine plan policies that support the sustainability of those areas for those activities where appropriate. Such areas would then need to be taken into account in future decision-making. Fishing is one of the few sectors detailed in the Marine Policy Statement that does not currently have agreed areas of importance that can be presented spatially.

Marine spatial plans published internationally generally have not implemented spatially explicit policies for fisheries through the wide scale identification and defining of important 'core fishing grounds'. This is due to the way fishing activity moves around in pursuit of different catches at different times of the year and between years.

¹ For the purposes of this project 'core fishing grounds' means areas of importance for fishing activity.

Spatially explicit policies are one of a number of ways marine planning can support sectors. Some spatial plans provide support to the fisheries sector through robust but non-spatially-explicit policies that aim to ensure that the fishing industry is taken into account in decision-making.

The East Inshore and Offshore Marine Plans have a policy to protect areas of fishing activity (FISH1) which applies to the entire plan areas rather than distinguishing fishing grounds of greater or lesser value. The plans also contain policies related to other users that are relevant for fishing, and policies that offer more general social or economic themes that are relevant for the fishing industry.

The project methodology used a review of marine spatial plans and relevant academic research. This was complemented by a workshop to discuss the pros and cons of such an approach and scope whether there is a need and/or support for it to be taken forward in marine planning. The workshop was attended by representatives of the fishing and other industries, government departments and agencies, devolved administrations and academics.

Results

This work has found that it may be possible to identify 'core fishing grounds' through the marine planning process if improved datasets that are standardised and quality assured are available and stakeholders in a plan area are interested in taking forward the approach.

A spatially explicit marine plan policy would need to work within the framework of national and international fishing legislation. Fisheries can span different plan and country jurisdictions and administrations. In these cases, alignment and coordination should take place where possible and appropriate. If this approach was taken forward, the areas would potentially be referred to as 'fishery interest areas' for clarity.



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The availability of fishing activity data in the inshore waters has been and will continue to be a limiting factor in demonstrating the importance of different fishing grounds. The report highlights the importance of fisheries data covering activity, socio-economics and the interaction between the two to support planning and management.

Key considerations for implementing a 'core grounds' approach to writing marine plan policies for fishing are:

- The implementation of the policy should reduce conflict and increase compatibility.
- Stakeholder representatives from government departments and agencies, fishing and other industries should agree to identify the areas of interest using metrics.
- The metrics could cover environmental, social and economic aspects.
- Data should be quality assured and standardised and where possible have been collected over a long time.
- Different maps for different types of fishing are likely to be required (applying the approach is likely to be more challenging for some fishing practices).
- Areas of importance would need to be regularly assessed and updated in line with plan revisions where necessary to account for dynamics in the industry.
- A general displacement policy should be maintained in marine plans.

Conclusions and recommendations

Difficulties in identifying core fishing grounds have prevented international spatial plans from developing spatially explicit marine plan policies. However, some plans still have robust protection for the fishing industry and English marine plans should continue to contribute to the objective of supporting a sustainable fishing industry through marine planning.

Currently a number of issues with data coverage of fishing activity including for the

inshore fleets and spatio-temporal variability prevent the identification of specific areas of importance to the fishing industry. It is therefore recommended to develop a data strategy.

Recommendations from the report are to:

- Develop a data strategy for fisheries to address the limitations in fishing activity data. This should lead to standardised and consistent data sets to describe fishing for marine planning.
- Carry out a pilot of the approach.
- Consider taking the approach forward in marine planning based on outcomes from pilot work (working in collaboration with stakeholder to identify suitable metrics).

MMO comments

MMO is grateful to those stakeholders that have contributed to the project at the workshop and draft report review stage. This input is vital to scoping this type of approach to writing marine plan policies. If further work on this topic is taking forward MMO intends to continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders to explore this approach.

Further work is required to develop the data that can be used to identify areas of interest and importance to the fishing industry. More work is also required to explore with a wide range of stakeholders the metrics that could be used to identify areas of interest/importance for the fishing industry. This will be carried out prior to the approach being used to inform the writing of marine plan policies.

Further information

Please direct any correspondence to the Evidence Team by emailing evidence@marinemanagement.org.uk

The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations have written a blog about this work that can be read at:

<https://marinedevelopments.blog.gov.uk/>