Marine Management Organisation

# Sensitivity of the under 12m fishing fleet to offshore wind development in the east marine plan areas (MMO1382)

## Aim

To understand the spatial distribution of fishing activity and fishery-specific sensitivity of the under 12metre (<12m) fleet to all stages of offshore wind farm (OWF) development in the east marine plan areas and discuss coexistence issues.

## Introduction and methodology

During the consenting process for offshore wind an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is undertaken. Part of the EIA reviews the impact of the development on commercial fisheries. This includes studying how the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the wind farm might affect fish habitats, migration patterns, and fishing activities.

Fishing activity data is not available in a consistent resolution for all vessel size classes. For <12m vessels, activity data is recorded at a low resolution through logbooks and catch recording documentation. Given the projected fivefold increase of OWFs in the east marine plan areas over the next decade, and the upcoming replacement of the East Marine Plans, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) commissioned a project to establish better evidence of <12m fishing activity data.

Through fisher-led participatory mapping, fishing grounds in the east marine plan areas were identified (grouped into three regions: (i) East Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire; (ii) the Wash and north Norfolk; and (iii) south Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex coasts). A sensitivity analysis for <12m fishing to OWF development was also undertaken and anecdotal information recorded.

## Results

- In **East Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire**, most participants were crab, lobster and/or whelk potters. Their main sensitivity is to the displacement of offshore fleets from OWF areas into inshore fishing areas. Participants reported increased concentration of effort in an already heavily fished area.
- The **Wash and North Norfolk**, represents a wider range of fishing gear including shrimp trawling and cockling. Potters reported similar challenges as potters further north. Trawlers particularly in the Wash reported problems with cable laying including overlying spoil and cables lifting. The loss of historic seed mussel beds to substrate change attributed to OWFs is a concern.
- A high level of contention among fishers and OWFs was described in the **south Norfolk, Essex and Suffolk area** attributable to the cumulative effects of various activities. Activities include four OWFs within the east marine plan areas, four further OWFs in the south (outside the plan areas), and pressure from shipping, capital dredging and aggregate extraction. The area includes grounds considered no longer productive or viable and declines of sole and rays were described, despite a perceived long-term decline in fishing pressure.
- **Demersal trawls** are particularly sensitive to all aspects of OWF construction and operation as they tend to favour the same type of ground (relatively shallow with an even, non-rocky substrate).

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- **Pots and traps** in the north of the area are largely outside of survey and construction activities and are therefore currently at low – medium sensitivity. Those further south, e.g. in the Wash and East Anglia seem to be much more sensitive, possibly due to the higher density of OWFs, as well as spatial squeeze from other marine activities.

- **Other passive gears e.g. static gillnets, longlines and drifting gear** found in the more congested southern region were found to be highly sensitive to OWF development, both because of the level of exclusion during survey and construction, as well as OWF operation.

## Conclusions and recommendation

The report provides high resolution fishing activity data for <12m vessels in the east marine plan areas which is important evidence for the replacement East Marine Plan. The evidence is also relevant for development consent orders (DCOs), environmental statements (ESs), and generally in spatial decisions that require consideration of all activities using the area.

Spatial squeeze remains a pertinent reality for many <12m fishers. Overall, the findings demonstrate that fisheries and OWF occur alongside or near each other in the same area or at the same time, but the reality is much more nuanced. The marine plan coexistence policy implementation in regard to the <12m fleet could be strengthened to include: the careful use of temporary safety zones that minimise economic impact on <12m fishers; a greater understanding and mitigation of electro-magnetic field (EMF) impacts and other environmental change; better consideration of how displacement and associated compensation affects smaller vessels.

## MMO comments

This evidence is intended for use by stakeholders to enable co-existence of fishing activities with OWFs. 20% of the <12m fishing fleet participated in workshops and as such, each of the maps presented in the report must be considered accordingly. The supporting narrative and discussion on limitations provides the necessary context for using the evidence.

The report provides evidence for the replacement of the East Marine Plans which will consider the evidence in the plan development process. The findings also inform MMO's work to achieve sustainable fisheries, per Goal 6 of its strategic goals which can be found here.

MMO acknowledges the participation of fishermen in the east marine plan areas in mapping workshops and is grateful for their contributions.

## Further information

Please direct any correspondence to the Evidence Team (evidence@marinemanagement.org.uk)