



UK National North Sea Cod Avoidance Plan (NCAP)

This UK plan seeks to address two key issues:

- to support recovery of the North Sea cod stock and,
- to support the fishing industry to manage their quota in line with the reduced TAC set in 2020.

Real Times Closures (RTCs) and Real Time Reporting (RTR) in particular will help manage quota issues for the fleet.

This plan mainly focuses on spatial measures to avoid catching an abundance of cod. Whilst spatial measures are difficult to quantify, our previous experience of using spatial measures such as RTCs (particularly during the Cod Recovery Plan) demonstrates that such measures can have an observable effect on cod mortality and biomass.

1. Spawning Closures - Amended 1 January 2026

Northern North Sea closures - The UK worked alongside EU Member States and Norway to establish a number of spawning closures which came into effect on the 1st January 2020 and remain in place. Further spawning closures and amendments to existing closures were agreed for 2026 and are operational from 1st January 2026.

Southern North Sea closures - Two spawning closures remain in place within the section of English waters. Additional sites can be considered as candidates for seasonal spawning closures in English waters, and any sites identified will be put in place and updated within this plan.

1.1 Features of the Spawning scheme

As per current closures detailed in section 6. In addition, refer to licence conditions.

2. Real Time Closures (RTCs) – Amended 1 January 2026

RTCs can be used to protect high abundances of recruited cod of all ages. In contrast with planned seasonal closures which assume a constant distribution over time, RTCs have the potential advantage of being responsive to changes in the actual distribution of fish.



2.1 Features of the RTC scheme:

- The application of RTCs for significant cod aggregations regardless of age class.
- RTCs should apply to all gear types excluding pelagic.
- RTCs are not to be established within 12nm of the coast.
- Each RTC should remain closed for 21 days, with an option to run consecutively.
- RTCs should be 15nm by 15nm in size
- The midpoint of tow will be used to establish the RTC, as agreed with Master of fishing vessel and then verified by track on plotter.
- Limit to 6 RTCs in place at any one time
- Haul by haul reporting
- In ICES subarea 4a RTCs will only be in operation when the main spawning closures are not. This means that RTCs will not be in operation from January to March.
- In ICES subareas 4b and 4c RTCs will be operational throughout the year. This means that RTCs may be triggered in January to April when spawning closures in the Southern North Sea are also in place.

2.2 Trigger mechanism:

- RTCs to be triggered by inspection at sea.
- At the Boarding officer's discretion, and in discussion with the Skipper, 5 boxes of catch (unsorted, preferably direct from the hopper) will be inspected to them to determine the catch composition (this is based on volumetrics only, no weighing at sea).
- If the cod present in the catch is 20% or more (i.e. 1 box) of the overall weight, then officers should conduct a count.
- Based on the entire haul, if the number of cod caught per hour, regardless of size, is 80 or more in ICES subarea 4a, or 60 or more in ICES subareas 4b and 4c, then the area should be closed.
- Trigger thresholds are to be developed with feedback mechanisms to allow for necessary adjustments.
- The Commanding Officer of the Marine Protection Vessel be designated with the overall responsibility of declaring an RTC.
- Information shall then be transmitted to UK FMC so that the RTC can be communicated to the whole fleet as soon as possible.

The UKFMC will issue an email notification to vessels, other FMCs (EU, 3rd Countries, EFCA) and vessels in the vicinity of the RTC will be contacted directly. An email notification will be issued to FMAC, who will be asked to pass it on to their members, and details will be put on the Marine Scotland website as quickly as possible. The efficacy of communications will be kept under review.



3. Real Time Reporting (RTR)

In addition to RTCs, we will put in place a system of RTR, to enable high abundance of cod to be reported, shared with vessels fishing in the affected area, and to support a system of move on.

3.1 Features of the RTR scheme:

- The RTR scheme will run concurrently to the RTC scheme.
- The UKFMC will be the contact point for Skippers who want to make a report of abundance.
 - Abundance and Location (latitude and longitude) to be reported to UK FMC.
 - “Move on” to a minimum of 15 nm radius once notified.
- Information shall be transmitted to UK FMC so “move on” can be communicated to the whole fleet as soon as possible. The UKFMC will issue an email notification to vessels, other FMCs (EU, 3rd Countries, EFCA) and vessels in the vicinity of the RTR will be contacted directly. An email notification will be issued to FMAC, who will be asked to pass it on to their members, and details will be put on the Marine Scotland website as quickly as possible. The efficacy of communications will be kept under review.
- Skippers will be able to make a judgement on whether they are able to continue in the area without catching cod.
- Details of the RTR / move on advice will remain on the Marine Scotland website for 21 days.

Fisheries Monitoring Centre (UKFMC).

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4. Selectivity – Measures currently apply to Scottish waters only.

4.1 Feature of the fish and mud areas:

- Use a minimum gear size of 120mm in fish areas
- Using a gear size of less than 120mm in mud areas will be permitted on the basis that mud areas are primarily *Nephrops* grounds.

Note: For English vessels the provision in section 4 will only apply in Scottish waters of area 4. A downloadable version of the mud areas chart (for illustrative purposes) and coordinates are available at:

gov.scot - [National Cod Avoidance Plan – Mud Areas](#)

4.2 Additional selectivity:

At this point the use of selectivity devices will not be mandated (in addition to those already in place). However, vessels are reminded that there are a range of selective gears available, in particular those developed recently in response to previous Cod avoidance plans which can be used.

Of particular use may be:

- Orkney trawl
- 600mm belly panel
- 135mm cod end
- 300mm SMP

It should be noted that the fish / mud area proposal will increase the mesh size being used when targeting fish to 120mm baseline, which supports increased selectivity outside of *Nephrops* grounds.

5. Review

Marine Scotland has committed to keep the NCAP and its communications under review and engage with FMAC.



6. SPAWNING CLOSURES (amended 1 January 2026)

6.1 Northern North Sea closures:

The following seasonal closures apply during the period detailed below each year and closed for all gears excluding pelagic gears (purse seine and trawl):

Time Limited Closures				
No	Area Name	Coordinates	Time period	Additional Comment
1	Stanhope ground	60° 25N - 001° 45E 60° 25N - 002° 00E 60° 10N - 002° 00E 60° 10N - 001° 45E	01 January to 30 April	
2	Long Hole	59° 07.35N - 0° 31.04W 59° 03.60N - 0° 22.25W 58° 59.35N - 0° 17.85W 58° 56.00N - 0° 11.01W 58° 56.60N - 0° 08.85W 58° 59.86N - 0° 15.65W 59° 03.50N - 0° 20.00W 59° 08.15N - 0° 29.07W	01 January to 31 March	
3	Coral edge	58° 51.70N - 03° 26.70E 58° 40.66N - 03° 34.60E 58° 24 00N - 03° 12.40E 58° 24 00N - 02° 55.00E 58° 35 65N - 02° 56.30E	01 December to 28 February	
4	Papa Bank	59° 56N - 03° 08W 59° 56N - 02° 45W 59° 35N - 03° 15W 59° 35N - 03° 35W	01 January to 15 March	
5a	Foula Deep	60° 17.5N - 01° 45W 60° 11.0N - 01° 45W 60° 11.0N - 02° 10W 60° 20.0N - 02° 00W 60° 20.0N - 01° 50W	01 November to 31 December	
5b	Foula Deep	60° 21 N 02° 05W 60° 22N 02° 27W 60° 06N 02° 27W 60° 06N 02° 05W	01 January to 15 March	



6	Egersund Bank	58° 07.40N - 04° 33.0E 57° 53.00N - 05° 12.0E 57° 40.00N - 05° 10.9E 57° 57.90N - 04° 31.9E	01 December to 31 March	(10 x 25 nm)
7	East of Fair Isle	59° 40N - 01° 23W 59° 40N - 01° 13W 59° 30N - 01° 20W 59° 00N 01° 20W 59° 00N 01° 40W 59° 10N - 01° 40W 59° 10N - 01° 28W 59° 30N - 01° 28W 59° 40N 01° 23W	01 January to 15 March	
8	West Bank	57° 15N - 05° 01E 56° 56N - 05° 00E 56° 56N - 06° 20E 57° 15N - 06° 20E	01 January to 15 March	(18 x 4 nm)
9	Revet	57° 28.43N - 08° 05.66E 57° 27.44N - 08° 07.20E 57° 51.77N - 09° 26.33E 57° 52.88N - 09° 25.00E	01 January to 15 March	(1.5 x 49 nm)
10	Rabarberen	57° 47.00N - 11° 04.00E 57° 43.00N - 11° 04.00E 57° 43.00N - 11° 09.00E 57° 47.00N - 11° 09.00E	01 January to 15 March	East of Skagen (2.7x4 nm)
11	Krogbund	56°56N - 006°25E 56°47N - 006°25E 56°47N - 006°55E 56°56N - 006°55E	1 January to 31 March	
12	Lille Fiskerbanke	56°50N - 006°08E 56°50N - 005°52E 56°38N - 005°52E 56°38N - 006°08E	1 January to 31 March	

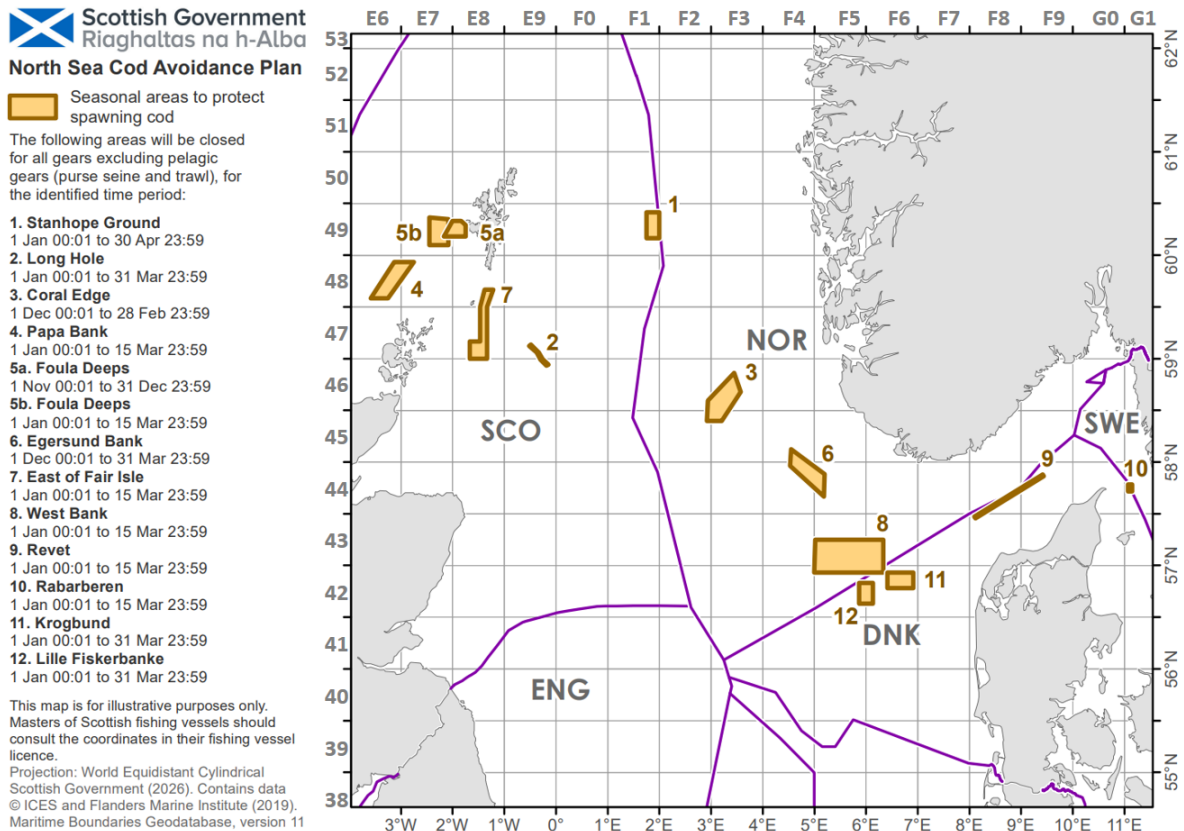


Figure 1: Northern North Sea closures - courtesy of Scottish Government

6.2 Southern North Sea closures:

In English waters, the following seasonal closures apply during the periods detailed below:

Southern North Sea Seasonal Closures	Coordinates	Closure period
Closure 1	UK section taken from the radius of 10 nautical miles from; 52° 41.000'N 003° 18.000'E	1 st January – 30 th April
Closure 2	UK section taken from the radius of 10 nautical miles from; 52° 10.500'N 002° 50.750'E	1 st January – 30 th April

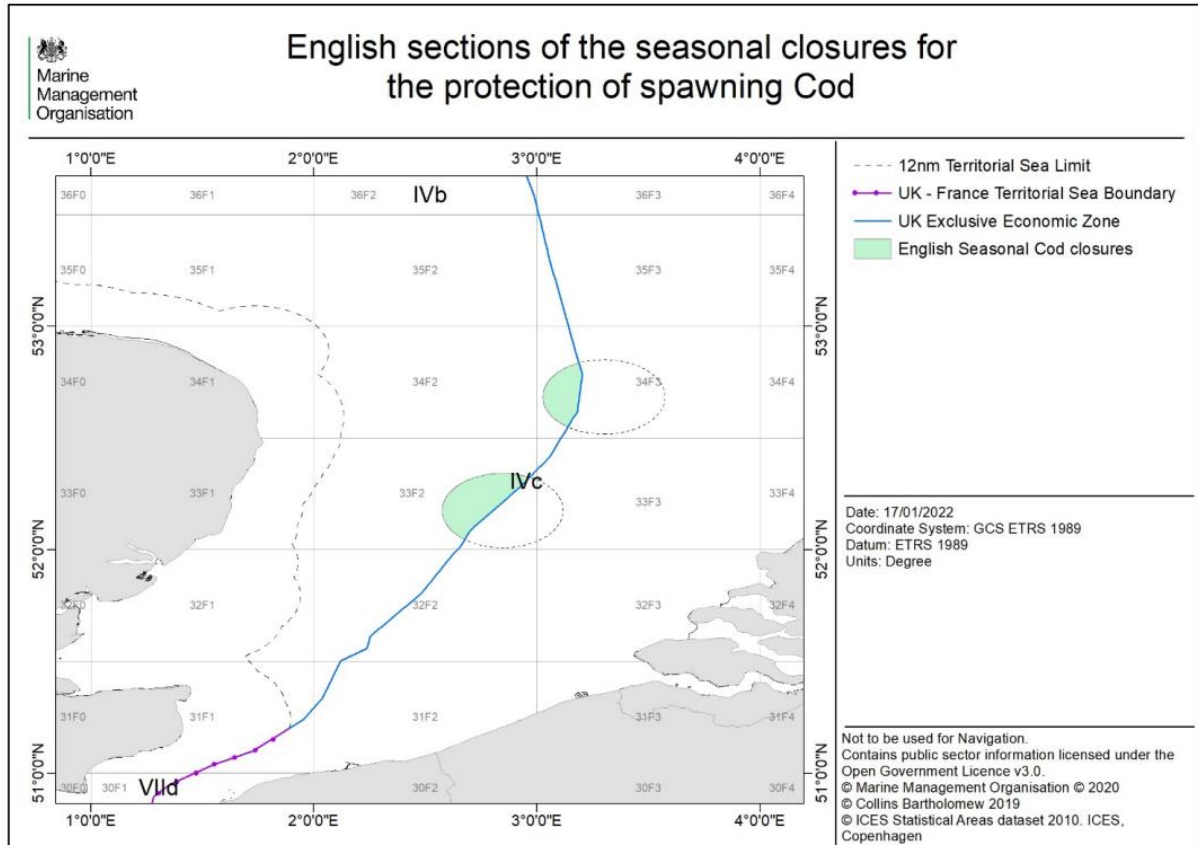


Figure 2: English Southern North Sea spawning cod seasonal closures

7. Licensing

The technical measures and sea area exemptions will be incorporated into fishing licences with effect from 1 January 2021.

Document end.