

Annex A MCZ Tranche 3 Consultation

Nationally forty-one sites are proposed for designation in the third tranche including three within the NWIFCA District. Two others lie outside our boundaries but are likely to have some impact on NWIFCA stakeholders. T1 site Cumbria Coast MCZ has extensions to boundary and species proposed. Detail are provided below.

- i. Three estuarine sites have been taken forward for consultation. All sites would be designated for the recovery of smelt. No management measures are anticipated for fishery activities. However, improvements in water quality as a possible requirement following designation could assist fishery interests, such as bivalve shellfish in the Ribble, where poor water quality persistently affects the hygiene classification of the stocks there. Physical structures such as weirs in each of the rivers are also thought to create barriers to migration.

- a) Ribble Estuary (15 km²) – “Environment Agency survey data indicating species presence and persistent use of the estuary over a number of years between 2004 and 2015 with historical references dating back to 1977. Records of juvenile smelt (as small as 28 millimetres) provide evidence of local recruitment (2004-2005, 2011-2012 and 2014) supporting the presence of a local spawning population and the ecological significance of the estuary for smelt”. The site boundary has been extended to cover the full tidal extent of this river and now extends from the top of the tidal limit below the weir at Samlesbury to the mouth of the estuary.

There are no major concerns over any fishing activities. “Consideration should be given to the management of activities which may cause disturbance to smelt (e.g. piling, in-channel dredging, flood defence work), during the time of the spawning migration”.

- b) Solway Firth smelt (45km²) – “There are records of smelt in the Environment Agency database from 2008, 2009, 2012-2013 and 2015. Prior to this there are records of significant smelt populations in the Solway for over 100 hundred years. Maxwell (1897) discusses the smelt population being fished to the verge of extinction in the Solway Firth. The salmon haaf net fishery on the Solway has occurred regularly for decades, regularly reporting smelt by-catch between the 1960s and 1980s indicating a persistent population which may have been moving into the Eden to spawn. Declines in the reports of smelt by-catch from the haaf fishery in recent years are likely to be reflective of the significant decline of that fishery”.

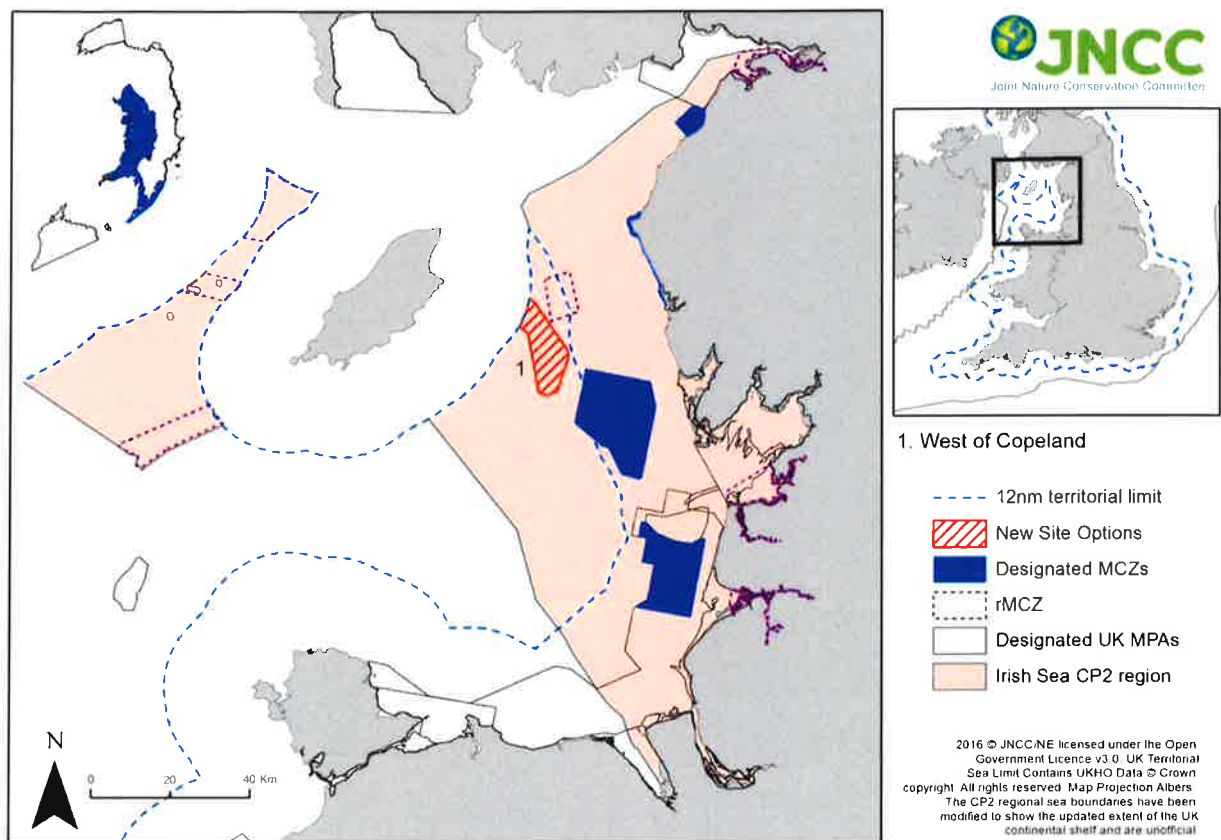
Commercial fishing and recreational activities are known to take place at this site but at their current levels of intensity the best available evidence indicates they are not likely to be damaging the features to be protected, and do not require management. It may be necessary to research shrimp trawling by-catch further to assess possible impact on smelt stocks. “There may be a need to consider the management of other future activities which could cause disturbance to smelt (e.g. piling, in-channel dredging, flood defence work), especially during the time of the spawning migration”;

- c) Wyre – Lune (92 km²) - is located in the southern part of Morecambe Bay. “Smelt have been recorded in the Wyre-Lune rMCZ in Environment Agency surveys since 2004 with historical reference to populations dating back to 1981. Records of juvenile smelt (as small as 33 millimetres) indicate local recruitment (2005 and 2006) supporting the presence of a local spawning population and the ecological significance of the estuary for smelt”.

The site boundary has been modified from that proposed by the Regional Project in order to better capture potential smelt spawning habitat. It now extends up to the tidal limit of each estuary at St Michael's on Wyre and Lancaster (Skerton weir). Commercial fishing, such as salmon and trout haaf net fishing and drift netting and the sprat fishery, and recreational activities are known to take place at this site but at their current levels of intensity the best available evidence indicates they are not likely to be damaging the features to be protected. Ports and harbours may need appropriate management. "Entrainment on intake screens of nuclear power stations (Heysham 1 and 2), which occur on the edge of the rMCZ boundary is known to occur. A range of options may be considered to limit entrainment of fish into intake structures. Potential threats may also exist from the proposal for a tidal hydro-energy plant across the Wyre Estuary between Fleetwood and Knott End; however no formal project proposals have been submitted".

- ii. Queenie Corner mud habitat – recover (146km²). Recommended by Northern Irish fishing interests and lies in the western Irish Sea beyond the 12 nm boundary. It is understood this is an alternative site to Mud Hole which was in the original proposals for designation. Bottom trawling and gill netting known to occur within the site. According to the factsheet produced as part of the Defra consultation the best cost estimate to UK bottom trawling is £7000, plus unquantified non-UK commercial fishing;
- iii. West of Copeland (158 km²) – offshore – beyond 12nm - Subtidal coarse sediment, subtidal sand and subtidal mixed sediments. The range of habitats supports a variety of species including bivalves, sea urchins, anemones, starfish and sea mats. Recover to favourable condition. This is a new site not known to the NWIFCA. According to Natural England's pre-consultation advice to Defra on Tranche 3 MCZs (June 2018) Annex 3, Advice on New site options:

"JNCC's network analysis (2016) identified a shortfall in the protection of Subtidal coarse sediment in the Irish Sea region; Table 10 provides an overview of the shortfalls. One offshore New Site Option has been developed by JNCC to address this shortfall. The West of Copeland New Site Option could contribute ~10% of the Subtidal coarse sediment protected in the region. No inshore New Site Options have been proposed for this region".



Commercial UK fishing bottom trawl and dredge plus non-UK commercial fishing takes place in the site. Best estimate cost to UK fishing is £2000 with non-UK costs unquantified. Aggregate dredging and renewable energy developments may be affected.

- iv. The site boundary of Cumbria Coast MCZ, designated in 2013, has been extended increasing the MCZ by around 4 km² and razorbills (fish eating birds that nest in summer on St Bees cliffs) have been added. This species has a recover objective. In 2018 razorbills and other nesting birds at St Bees have been protected from any risk of entanglement in fishing nets through the Voluntary Code of Practice, which should now be implemented each year.

The consultation documents are available along with the response portal at: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/marine/consultation-on-the-third-tranche-of-marine-conser/>