

NWIFCA's MMO Stage 3 MPA Consultation Response – Irish Sea Regional Comments

Please note, all views herein are of the Executive arm of North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NWIFCA). The Authority's members, who represent various stakeholders' interests, from marine conservation to commercial fishing, are likely to have differing views on the proposals, and have therefore been invited to submit their consultation responses individually.

NWIFCA are generally supportive of the MMO's proposal to prohibit all forms of bottom-towed gear in the West of Copeland MCZ and West of Walney MCZ. However, we are not in support of the same proposals for the Shell Flat and Lune Deep SAC or the Fylde MCZ.

For West of Copeland MCZ, the MMO has clarified to us, via VMS data, that the MCZ does not cover the southern extent of the Eastern Irish Sea's prime Nephrops grounds, known locally to the North West's Cumbria-based fleet as the 'Mud Hole'. It has been demonstrated to us that the majority of VMS tracks for these grounds are outside of the MCZ and therefore the proposed prohibition on bottom-towed gear within West of Copeland MCZ will have little impact on the local and visiting otter trawl fleet who fish Nephrops in the Eastern Irish Sea.

With respect to the West of Walney MCZ, the vast majority of this MPA is already covered under a pre-existing bottom-towed gear prohibition, and the proposed new Irish Sea MPA Fishing Gear Byelaw 2024 will extend this prohibition to the small proportion of the MCZ which sits outside the 12 nautical mile limit and which is not covered by the pre-existing byelaw. NWIFCA has no objections to extending this prohibition to include this small area.

NWIFCA's objections to the proposed prohibitions on all bottom-towed gears in the Shell Flat and Lune Deep SAC and the Fylde MCZ are set out in the two separate respective individual consultation response sections provided for.

North Western IFCA, September 2025