



Dredging (Byelaw 2) Consultation: A summary of response from the consultation

October 2019

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1. Aim of this report

This report has been prepared for members of the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (NIFCA) Technical and Scientific Sub-Committee. It will also be made available on the NIFCA website for all stakeholders to read.

The report aims to review the proposed measures and to document the findings of the consultation. All information from the consultation will be made available to ensure openness and transparency in the process.

The report is intended to assist in the decision-making process of members regarding potential changes to Byelaw 2: Dredging.

To make use of this report:

1. Members to examine the collated response information from the consultation in section 4 of the report;
2. Members to use report to consider next steps.

2. Background

The current IFCA byelaw package was confirmed at the end of 2015, coming into operation during 2016. The Authority undertakes a review of the byelaws in place at least once every three years, therefore the review falls in this calendar year. Byelaw 2: Dredging is a byelaw under consideration.

Under Byelaw 2, currently all vessels fishing using a dredge within the Northumberland IFCA district are required to have a permit issued by the Authority.

Dredging currently occurs at relatively low levels within the NIFCA district, but there is no management in place to prevent activity levels increasing in the future. The activity can cause abrasion and disturbance to the seabed, with the impacts of dredging more severe than the impacts of other mobile gear activity (such as demersal otter trawls). In summary, there is a potential risk from dredging having an adverse impact on the seabed and associated habitats found within the NIFCA district.

For more information on the dredge fishery and existing management, please refer to the consultation document which can be found on the 'Consultations' section of the NIFCA website.

Following discussions at the Technical and Scientific subcommittee, the following proposals have been made:

- (i) Prohibition on activity in the district:
 - a. Inner Area 0-3 nautical miles
 - b. Whole of the Authority's district
 - c. No further restrictions on dredging within the Authorities district
- (ii) Move permit fee from being a byelaw clause to a byelaw condition

3. The consultation process

This is the first time this method of consultation has been used by NIFCA. The process involved compiling all relevant information into a detailed document, respondents could review the information and choose the most convenient methods of responding. This was either through an online questionnaire, or a postal questionnaire. Respondents also had the option to phone up to speak to officers, and/or arrange a convenient time and location to respond face-to-face.

This process was chosen because:

- it gives respondents a variety of options to submit comments;
- it means comments can either be made anonymously, and/or without having to respond face to face meaning respondents can be more open;
- it can reach a wider range of people;
- respondents do not have to take time to travel and attend events to respond;
- it is less resource intensive.

The consultation was communicated to stakeholders through various means. All permit holders were directly notified through email or letter when the consultation commenced. Information about the consultation was also published on the NIFCA website, in the news section, and through social media channels (Facebook and Twitter). The consultation was open to all stakeholders regardless of their interest or fishing sector.

It is important to note that this is the first stage of a consultation process to understand stakeholder views. No management measures have been agreed or taken to any further stage.

4. Response from Stakeholders

A total of 45 responses were received while the Dredging (Byelaw 2) consultation was open which was open from 19th August - 14th October 2019. All NIFCA permit holders (106) were notified via post or email, 45 responses were received representing 43% of those notified. One response was also received from a non-permit holder. The majority of responses were received through the post, with one via a meeting with officers (Table 1) all from the fishing industry (Table 2). Most responses came in the form of a letter from each port. The content of the responses was varied, please see below for a detailed breakdown.

Table 1 Number of responses received through the available formats.

Response format	Number of responses
Email	0
Post	44
Face to face	1

Table 2 Number of responses group into sectors.

Response group	Number of responses
Fishing industry (broken down by NIFCA permit holder):	
Potting	44
Dredging	0
Trawling	0
Recreation	1
Environmental NGOs	0
Research/Education	0

5. Results

The majority of responses were received as a letter signed by potting permit holders throughout the district (Annex 1). There were 43 signatures to the letter in favour of 1b of the Authority's proposal: Prohibition of dredging activity in the whole of the Authority's district.

Two responses to the consultation questionnaire were received. One response was in support of the measures proposed with no further comment. One said they were not in

support of the measure as a prohibition could lead to a lack of opportunity to diversify. Further, displacement of vessels means fisheries concentrating on one or two stocks. See Annex 2 for a full breakdown of comments.

6. Conclusions

44 out of 45 responses were from commercial potting permit holders in the NIFCA district. All of the responses/correspondence received by the Authority from this sector were in support of a prohibition of dredging in the whole of the district.

Annex 1 Letter to Northumberland IFCA signed by 43 potting permit holders

Chairman
Northumberland Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority
8 Ennerdale Road
Blyth
Northumberland
NE24 4RT

Dear Sir,

RE: Dredging Byelaw consultation.

Please find attached the previous communication regarding the impact of scallop dredging, forwarded from Northumberland fishermen over five years ago.

By far the most important inshore fishery in the Nifca district remains potting for crab and lobster with over 90 commercial fishing vessels permitted. This fishery is the mainstay of local fishing communities at all active ports throughout Northumberland and generates millions of pounds for the regional economy. Sensible management and high rates of compliance have led to a resilient, profitable and sustainable fishery with most participants interested in maintaining healthy stocks and grounds.

In contrast, no local vessels applied for scallop dredging permits in 2018, all those registered being given to visiting vessels. These vessels are generally company owned, from as far away as Wales and the South Coast with no long-term investment in the sustainability of local grounds. Neither catch nor income benefit local communities.

It is scientifically accepted that sprung scallop dredges are the most damaging mobile gear type currently utilised in UK fisheries. The areas dredged within Nifca boundaries support large stocks of both crab and lobster and are important shellfish breeding grounds. Whilst continual dredging does not take place an area targeted will be entirely and intensively dredged until no longer viable and the vessel moves on. This can have a devastating impact on the grounds fished, shellfish stocks and general bio-diversity.

With regard to the above we urge the committee to seriously consider the prohibition of scallop dredging within the entire Nifca district.

Annex 2 Comments from respondents

Would these changes make you change the way you fish?

“lack of opportunities to diversify and swap to another fishery and if more boats came into area/fishery there would be more competition”

Would these changes affect you in any way? If so, how?

“Displacement of vessels. Fisheries concentrating on one or two stocks will end in tragedy in the long term.”

Do you have any concerns about dredging activity in the NIFCA district, and if so, what are they?

“Gear conflict. Big dredges do damage to bottom.”

Do you agree with the changes listed above? If no, please state your reasons.

“Prohibiting dredging could lead to displacement and lack of opportunity to diversify. Need to look at another way to classify boats to keep opportunities for fishers.”

Do you have any other comments you would like to make about these changes? Are there any other changes you would like to see made to the existing byelaw?

“Smaller boats have the least opportunity to diversify. Should give more allowance/opportunity to smaller vessels restricted by range rather than bigger vessels. Would this impact on proposed razor fishery at Brown's Well Smooth and potentially other areas?”