

**Coquet to St Marys:
Management Plan Development Timeline**

March 2024 – Initial Assessment and Committee Review

NIFCA’s Technical & Scientific (T&S) Sub-Committee reviewed the MCZ assessment. At the time, trawl exemptions were granted without limits on permit numbers or activity levels. The committee concluded that further management was needed and agreed to form a working group.

May 2024 – Working Group Deliberations

The group included industry representatives, researchers, and experts in trawling impact modelling (using the Benthic Impacts Tool). They concluded:

- Current trawling may be undermining conservation objectives.
- BIT results suggest ~50% of the mud habitat is significantly degraded.
- Concerns were raised about impacts on sensitive species like seapens.

The group recommended further evidence collection, adaptive management, and a trial of semi-pelagic otter boards.

June 2024 – Options and Recommendations

Three options were considered:

Option	Summary	Recommendation
1. Do nothing	Maintain current management	Not preferred; lacks control over activity levels or number of exemptions
2. Adaptive management	Introduce permit conditions such as caps, thresholds, and spatial restrictions	Preferred ; allows for balanced, flexible management
3. Prohibition	Ban all mobile gear	Not preferred; disproportionate if objectives can be met through other means

The T&S Committee recommended a modified Option 2, including:

- Annual activity cap (monitored via vessel tracking system and gear sensors)
- Spatial restrictions for sensitive species
- Consideration of permit caps and a flexible sunset clause

However, members opposed a fixed sunset clause due to concerns about future access.

July 2024 – Authority Decision

The full Authority agreed to pursue Option 2 without a sunset clause.

Legal Advice

In October 2024, legal advice confirmed:

- Exemptions under the byelaw are discretionary.
 - Conditions can be applied to exemptions, including gear tracking requirements.
 - Exemptions may be revoked if necessary to meet statutory duties.
-

Stakeholder Engagement

All relevant trawl permit holders ($\leq 12\text{m}$ vessels) were emailed with details. Three responses were received with the following concerns:

- General reduced catch rates.
- Questioned the need for new management and the 2022 reference year.
- Concerns about new entrant exclusion, tracking costs, and evidence of feature damage.

All feedback led to follow-up meetings, and concerns were shared with members for consideration.

December 2024 – Final Committee Review

The T&S Committee finalised the plan, including:

1. **Vessel Tracking:** Agreement on tracking system and additional gear sensors (costs covered by NIFCA)
2. **Exemptions:** Track record (2022) required for eligibility
3. **Activity Threshold:** Based on 2022 as the best evidence year

A sunset clause and spatial restrictions were not taken forward at this stage due to legal limitations.

January 2025 – Final Approval

The full Authority approved the management plan with the following provisions:

Exemption Criteria

- Valid NIFCA trawl permit (vessel $\leq 12\text{m}$)
- Proven track record in 2022 (exemption returns or iVMS)
- Functional vessel tracking system with gear sensors

Activity Cap

Based on 2022 data (1104 trawling hours), a cap of **1000 hours** is set for 2025.

Full management plan available [here](#)

Monitoring & Control Plan (M&C Plan)

To be developed with Natural England, the M&C Plan will:

- Monitor annual trawling hours and spatial intensity
- Compare 2025 activity to the 2022 baseline
- Support additional evidence gathering, including the semi-pelagic otter board trial

Results may inform future management changes. Semi-pelagic doors, which reduce seabed contact, are pending manufacture. Their trial could significantly influence future mitigation measures.

Review

This plan is valid for one year and will be reviewed for 2026. NIFCA will use new activity data, impact research, and industry input to determine if adjustments are needed to meet conservation objectives.

Feedback from the fishing industry is encouraged.