

**NIFCA TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC
COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY**
(25 JUNE 2025)

COQUET TO ST MARY'S MCZ – TRAWL MANAGEMENT PLAN

- The issue with vessel tracking has been resolved, with 56 hours logged year-to-date – low activity likely due to seasonal patterns and low catches.
- A new research project using drop-down cameras and iVMS is underway to better understand spatial extent and impacts of trawling; outcomes will be reported in the Autumn meeting.
- Industry engagement scheduled for August. Previous forums highlighted concerns about access restrictions.
- It was noted that low recorded hours might influence eligibility for site access, but members questioned whether past track record should remain the sole determining factor.
- Officers will explore possibility of adjusting eligibility criteria while maintaining fishing effort hours.
- Members expressed a need to better reflect stakeholder perspectives and ensure these are documented and considered in decision-making.

BAIT DIGGING AT BOULMER

- Public/recreational angler concern raised about potential over-exploitation, particularly commercial collection.
- Awaiting responses from local councils regarding signage related to existing byelaws.
- Data suggests digging activity remains stable since a 2020 peak.
- MPA Assessments do not currently justify additional management.
- Officers reiterated that management restrictions would likely displace rather than reduce activity.
- Monitoring will continue, including patrols during peak winter months.
- A member highlighted the long-standing nature of this issue and questioned future accountability should ecological impacts arise under NIFCA's management role.
- Members agreed that further stakeholder input (especially qualitative data) would enhance the evidence base.
- Proposals included educational posters, animations, and social media campaigns to inform bait collectors about worm biology and sustainable practices.
- Ideas to collaborate with tackle shops to understand supply and encourage responsible practices were welcomed.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN (FMP) UPDATES

- **Crab & Lobster:** A delay to the NE lobster pilot is likely. The proposed Statutory Instrument to increase lobster MLS is expected to apply to both commercial and recreational fishers.
- **Nephrops:** Current FMP draft focuses only on the west coast. NIFCA has responded, requesting greater detail on Farne Deeps and North Sea coverage.
- Research funding may become available to address data gaps identified by Defra.

NETTING PERMIT BYELAW

- MMO feedback received on the draft byelaw and Impact Assessment; changes required do not affect substance of the byelaw.
- Final submission to follow once revisions are complete. Officers participated in a Defra-led MMO and IFCA Impact Assessment workshop to support byelaw making process.

NEPHROPS SURVEY & RESEARCH COLLABORATION

- To further understand the inshore nephrop stock status, officers are trialling an inshore survey aligned with offshore methods used by Cefas - plans to run this annually. Equipment standardisation and a dedicated sledge are in development.