

The North Sea Advisory Council



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The Danish Agrifish Agency written consultation on

- **Proposal “Fisheries Management Measures for the protection of reefs structures (H1170) in Natura 2000 sites located in the Belt Sea and the Danish part of the Western Baltic Sea (Within 12 nautical miles)” and**
- **Proposal “Fisheries Management Measures for the protection of reefs structures (H1170 & H1180) in Natura 2000 sites located in the Danish part of the Kattegat (Within 12 nautical miles)”**

The North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC) would like to contribute the following comments to the two proposals:

European fishermen have through several generations built up considerable knowledge of the seabed in the waters around Europe. They have a particular focus on areas such as reefs where there is a danger that their gear will be damaged. These areas have therefore in most waters been mapped in detail in relation to the use of trawling gear, giving fisherman considerable knowledge about where trawling gear can be used.

Towed gear is often damaged if it is not designed to avoid contact with the specific habitat fished on. Therefore for many years fishermen have avoided areas that destroy their trawls, for example areas with many big stones. By so doing, fishermen

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have for a long time largely protected many European reefs and will therefore not be forced to displace their fishery if appropriate management is put in place.

Although relatively few fisheries measures for towed bottom gears have so far been introduced for Natura 2000 sites, we accept that the application of buffer zones is a common standard in the case of reef structures. However, problems may occur if individual Member States choose to introduce large buffer zones around reefs, prohibiting fishing with towed gear, in order to ensure that vessels will not be able to drag gear into the reefs.

Today, most fishing vessels have very precise navigation systems such that at any time their position can be determined to within a few meters. The fisherman is also capable of fishing precisely up against structures on the seabed, or in and around the various protected areas. There should be a management system that allows users of the marine environment to utilize sustainably what the area can provide. In order to avoid displacement of fleets, access to important fishing grounds should be retained.

Often the catch of a variety of species is better, the closer to hard bottom / reef structures the vessels can fish. Therefore it is not a very good estimate to use an average approach to calculate the value of the fishery in the area, where the numbers of VMS points are divided up into the total landing value for the fishing trip. At worst, this will underestimate by up to a factor of 10, compared to the actual value being fished in the area. Estimates should be used with caution and as a measure of the lowest value for the area.

Natura2000 areas are designated to protect a sufficient portion of the range of key habitats and species as listed at Annex I & II of the EU Habitats Directive. Via appropriate management, Member States are obliged to secure or achieve their favourable conservation status specifically in the area designated and in the immediate vicinity if an activity would indirectly be detrimental to the Natura 2000 area. In line with management already introduced in Natura 2000 sites covering reefs in Irish and Spanish waters, the Danish authorities propose to arrange for undisturbed buffer zones outside the actual Natura 2000 area as a general rule. However, requirements for obtaining favourable conservation status vs. fishing métiers still have to be intercalibrated between countries, as should the management put in place in the different countries.

Læsø Trindel & Tønneberg Banke

VMS data from 2010-2012 shows that there is little activity in the area from larger vessels of 12/15 meters. Also, several smaller vessels under 12 meters operate around Læsø Trindel. These vessels will be excluded from some of their most important fishing grounds, located close to the reef if the proposed 240-meter-wide buffer zone is implemented.

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DTU Aqua has advised the 240 meter buffer zone around the reef using 6 times the water depth of approx. 40 meters, the depth where most of the reefs in the Kattegat are situated. This should correspond to how much wire a vessel has out, while fishing in the areas. The argument is that by trawling around the "corners" of a reef it must not be possible to tow the trawl into the reef while the vessel is outside the Natura 2000 area. The 240 meters is in relation to the argument only currently required around corners, where vessels drag around and turn against the reef. For all other fishing situations against a reef, it will not be physically possible to pull the gear into the reef area without the vessel also entering the area.

Where a proposed buffer zones creates a potential problem for fishermen a detailed consultation should be undertaken. Fishermen should be given the opportunity to document their activities in these areas and propose the reduction of buffer zones if they can prove that the area is fished in a manner which prevents the gear being pulled into the area while the vessel at the same time stays outside the area, so this activity inside the area will not show on VMS data. It is crucial especially for smaller vessels and coastal fisheries that important fishing grounds are not closed. The small vessels do not have the ability to move their activities to other areas, as they have a very limited action radius. A limitation / closure of key fishing grounds will further pressure the coastal fleet of small vessels, threatening their existence. At the same time it has to be carefully evaluated that any displacement of such small vessels does not lead to overexploitation of other fishing grounds outside Natura 2000-sites.

Yours sincerely,



Niels Wichmann
Chairman, NSAC

