

Solway Firth Partnership Conference February 2010

Pick 'n' Mix session 4

Irish Sea Marine Conservation Zones

Holly Deary: Irish Sea Marine Conservation Zone Liaison Officer

This is an overview of the presentation and questions and answers in this session, and represent the views of the presenter and audience; the views expressed here are not necessarily those of Solway Firth Partnership. Whilst every effort has been made to produce an accurate transcript of events, the Partnership cannot be held responsible for any errors made in the production of this account.

The Irish Sea Conservation Zones project has a staff team of 8 based in Merseyside, Lancashire, Cheshire, Wales and the Solway, and has been formed in response to a UK Government commitment to international agreements to establish a network of Marine Protected areas (MPAs) by 2012. Marine Conservation Zones are addressed in the Marine and Coastal Access Act and can take into account social and economic factors to maximise the benefits of conservation. MCZs aim to protect important marine wildlife, habitats, geology and geomorphology in English inshore and offshore waters.

Stakeholder groups are currently being established whose role will be to support sea users, ensure recommendations meet national ecological guidance and prepare impact assessments to identify social, environmental and economic implications of the MCZs. They will comprise members from industry, conservation organisations, science groups, local authorities etc, and will host workshops to establish a set of site specific recommendations for MCZs. Recommendations will be submitted to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Natural England (NE), who will also advise on the suitability of the network. Following a formal consultation, MCZs will then be designated.

It is thought preferable to select sites where there is least conflict, and sea users/interest groups will be involved in identifying sites. The aim is to ensure the long term sustainability of all marine resources and there are no hard targets. It is too early to comment on the level of protection for the designated sites but there is no presumption that any type of activity will be restricted, although some restrictions may apply. Different MCZs will have different management measures and some sea users may face negative effects. If stakeholder groups recommend no MCZs and the Government considers they are required, then JNCC and NE will identify them. Defra has asked that the process should be stakeholder led and it is the job of the ISCZ to ensure the process is followed and criteria met. MCZs are intended to be permanent but boundaries may change over time, although it is unlikely this will happen often. Enforcement will be by the new Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, the MMO and the Royal Navy.

Q: Are stakeholders drawn from outside of the area?

A: Each project will have its own stakeholder group; organisations such as RSPB will form part of a larger stakeholder group.

Q: Will demarcation lines be restricted to the English side only?

A: Scotland will be applying their own processes which may be less stakeholder led.

Q: Why the Irish Sea, and not the Atlantic as well?

A: The Irish Sea is a very busy area with many pressures.

Q: Solway Firth is already covered by many layers of conservation zones.

A: MCZs are trying to protect different aspects.

Q: Who is paying?

A: The JNCC and NE – ie the taxpayer.

Q: What about join up in dealing with conservation across different marine plan areas?

A: Unsure

Q: Are some larger fishery organisations to be included?

A: None in the Irish Sea so far – some have refused to be engaged but we will stress the importance of their involvement – we want to give everyone a voice.

Q: When is guidance available for ecological criteria?

A: Close, around 13th March 2010 hopefully.

Q: Will this be just for project areas?

A: Guidance will be at national scale for all 4 project areas.

Q: Who is going to supply you with scientific evidence?

A: NE and JNCC have large amounts of social, economic and scientific evidence.

Q: How will it fit in with Southern Ireland and Scotland networks?

A: Scotland has not yet established a process.

Q: The size of stakeholders will vary – is there funding to help smaller stakeholders to gather their evidence?

A: No more scientific evidence will be commissioned to help with any counter argument. The whole process is independently evaluated.