

## Towed Demersal Gear & Scalloping – Case Study from the Fal & Helford

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# Background: F&H SAC Designation



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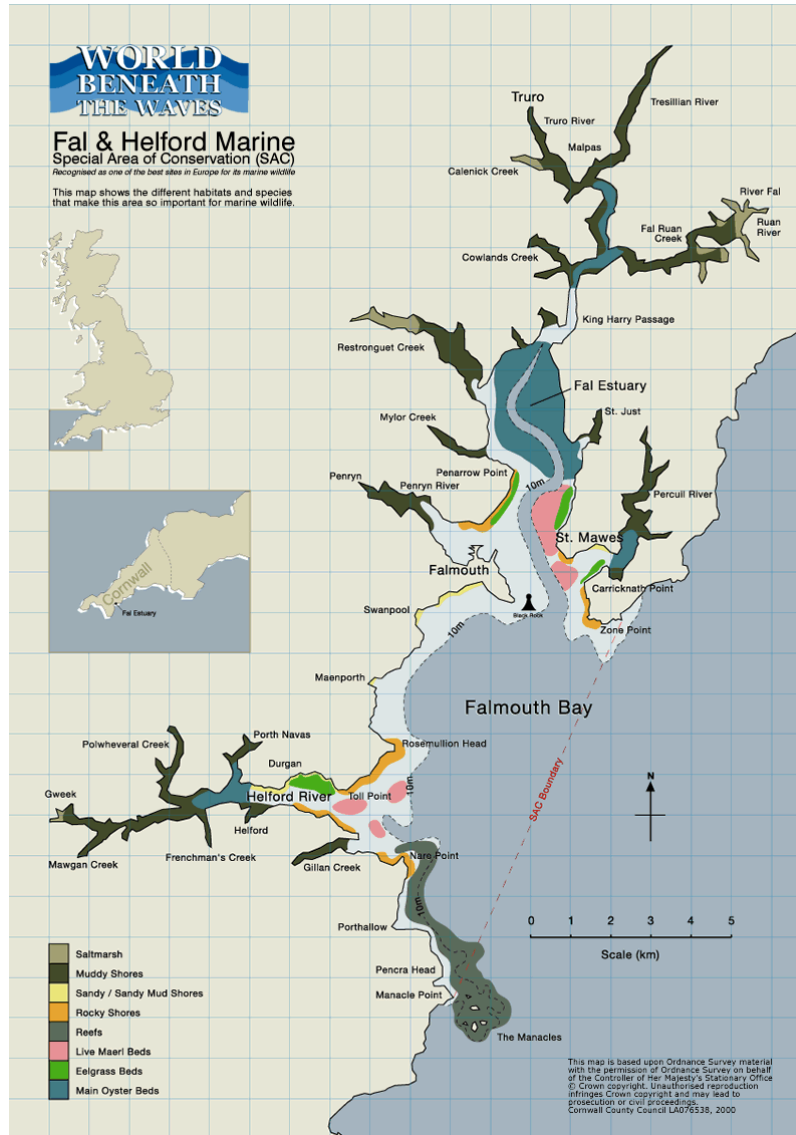
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- The Fal & Helford was identified as a cSAC in 1996 under the Habitats Directive
- Subsequently designated by the EC for a number of marine habitats and features
- These include:
  - subtidal sandbanks including maerl bed communities
  - large shallow inlets & bays
  - Reefs

# Fal & Helford SAC Boundaries

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## Historical Scalloping Activity within F&H SAC

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- Intermittently fished by scallop dredgers for over 35 years
- Historically, this was restricted to Falmouth Bay
- No recorded intrusions into the estuaries
- The general presumption at the time of designation was that existing activities within the SAC would be allowed to continue, unless they increased in intensity or demonstrably damaged the site

2003 - 2004

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- Local scallopers entered new, previously un-fished ground within the Fal Estuary
- Existing EA byelaw prohibited 'trawling' rather than 'dredging'
- SI – Emergency Stop Order introduced by Defra Oct '03 to prevent deterioration of and disturbance to features of SAC
- At that time there were no concerns raised, from a conservation perspective, regarding any expansion of the ban to include the entire SAC
- EA advertised and consulted on amended byelaw before it was introduced

## 2006 to Present Day

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- Winter '06 – reports from public highlighting increased levels of scalloping within Falmouth Bay
- Jan '07 – NGO letter to Defra re concerns of scallop dredging within the SAC & detailing their intention of writing to the EC in Feb '07
- CSFC organised meetings at a very early stage and worked with local scallopers to produce a Voluntary Agreement limiting but not halting dredging
- Defra were not minded to limit the number of scalloping vessels working within the site through their licensing powers. NE recommended that Defra carry out an Appropriate Assessment
- CSFC did not issue any permits for this activity, therefore it was of the opinion that it was not their responsibility to produce an Appropriate Assessment
- NE recommended voluntary cessation or failing that a Ministerial Stop Order, followed by a CSFC Byelaw

# Voluntary Agreement

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- Local scallop fishermen agreed not to fish in the SAC for 10 months of the year. In November and December they would be able to fish for 15 days each a month
- This agreement was reached after considerable efforts by the SFC and scallop fishermen who engaged constructively to find a voluntary solution to a difficult problem
- Basic survey work was carried out in 2007 reinforced Natural England's advice (2007) to Defra
- This was new Natural England advice

# Reasons behind NE Advice to Defra

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- NE support of the voluntary agreement proposal and certainty beyond reasonable scientific doubt...
- Effects of scallop dredging on marine benthos
  - breaking down habitat structure
  - killing and injuring non-target marine benthos
  - altering the composition of marine communities in dredged areas
- Live and dead maerl (*Phymatolithon calcareum* and *Lithothamnion corallioides*)
- Natural England advised that the proposed scallop fishery would damage the features of conservation interest and therefore the fishery within the site should be closed
- A key question that needs to be asked is...why wasn't this advice given in 1996 & 2004?



## What could have been done differently?

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- Clearer guidance / advice / consistency from NE on damaging activities
- Increased monitoring by EN/NE and Relevant Authorities
- Clarification (from Defra) of the responsibility of the relevant and competent authorities for undertaking Appropriate Assessments for fisheries
- Increased resources much earlier on in the designation process of SACs
- Increased resources for all relevant authorities to assist them in carrying out their duties under the Habs Regs

# Experimental MPA: CSFC & Cefas (1)

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- Opportunity for CSFC to consider additional steps that will contribute to the management of scallop stocks within the SAC and the adjacent area
- CSFC is exploring the benefits of turning the majority of the outer SAC area into an experimental Marine Protected Area (MPA)
- Studies will look at changes in the scallop stocks in the SAC, and spill-over effects

## Experimental MPA: CSFC & Cefas (2)

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- CSFC & CEFAS survey of the SAC area - gather baseline data
- Prohibition of scallop extraction in the experimental MPA by any method, including by diving
- Members of the Committee have drafted a byelaw for this purpose
- Zoning
- The closure of the SAC to scallop dredging by Statutory Instrument provides protection to the SAC features designated under the Habitats Directive
- The experimental MPA is purely for fisheries management purposes and is not related to the features the site was designated for

## Future MPAs : 0-12 SACs / MCZs

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- Natural England has a responsibility to be open and honest in its consultation regarding all aspects of future MPAs, particularly the 0-12 SAC designations
- NE needs to be transparent, upfront and consistent in its advice
- Clarification is required on the responsibility for undertaking Appropriate Assessments for fisheries
- Bi / Annual national meetings between for national overview of policy changes

## And finally... Displacement Issues

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- Scalloping is a growth sector. Stocks appear to be in good health. They are a non-quota species
- As such scalloping is an activity that is not likely to decline and these vessels are very mobile
- Under current EU regulations, large scallopers are allowed to work between the 6-12mile limit which creates displacement of smaller vessels into the 0-6mile area
- Introducing more closed areas can result in more intensity in other areas
- This is a piecemeal approach to a national issue
- National scalloping strategy - being developed

Thank-you for your  
attention

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Any questions?

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