

The North Sea Regional Advisory Council

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NSRAC

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North Sea RAC opens discussions on Dogger Bank

The Demersal Working Group of the North Sea Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC) met recently and discussed designation of the Dogger Bank as a Marine Protected Area (MPA).

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), the body tasked by the UK to identify candidate areas for MPA status under European Natura 2000 legislation, presented its pre-consultation proposals, in which a 15,000 square kms area of the Dogger Bank would be designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The UK area would be contiguous with similar although smaller, restricted areas in the German and Dutch sectors of the North Sea.

Once designated, national authorities would have an obligation to control activities in the area to ensure that the features for which it has been designated are not degraded.

The Dogger will be designated with SAC status because it is a sandbank slightly covered with water all the time.

Members of the RAC met at the European Parliament in Brussels and raised a large number of issues including:

- the huge size of the area earmarked for designation and whether the feature could be protected by a much smaller area
- what management measures were likely to apply to the area
- how the impact of diverted fishing effort on biodiversity and fish stocks would be assessed if fishing was excluded in the area
- the socio-economic consequences of a closed area of this magnitude
- how the level and impact of fishing on the bank would be estimated
- how wind-farms and aggregate dredging could be permitted in the area if it had SAC status
- Natura 2000 legislation is flawed in many respects, not least that it does not allow for socio-economic considerations during the process of site selection

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NSRAC is a company limited by guarantee, registered in Scotland No 273169
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In particular, it was emphasised that the Dogger provides an important area where low-discard fishing for flatfish can be carried out.

Members of the working group believe denying it to fishermen will force fishing effort onto grounds which will generate much higher discard rates.

They say protecting one area with the effect of a higher overall environmental impact on another would not make good sense.

The NSRAC will develop a formal position on the Dogger when the 12 week consultation period begins.

The NSRAC Demersal Working Group held a minute's silence in tribute to long-standing member Flemming Kristensen, Chairman of the Danish Fishermen's Association, who died suddenly recently. Their thoughts are with his family.

The NSRAC is the formal channel for stakeholders to provide suggestions and advice to the EC and the Council of Ministers on fishing in the North Sea.

The Regional Advisory Councils, of which there are six operational, are a key element of the 2002 reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

They aim for better engagement of the people the policy affects and for more regionally-focused fisheries management.

-Ends-

Notes to editors:

Countries involved in the NSRAC are: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

These stakeholder-led forums give fishermen and other interested parties, including environmental organisations and consumer groups, a say in the way the CFP operates. They are the formal channel through which stakeholders can give suggestions and advice to the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.

endsnotes

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