

Added value of a Dogger Bank fisheries management plan for the NSRAC

Background

The FIMPAS project (Fisheries Measures in Marine Protected Areas) aims to propose fisheries measures for three Natura 2000 sites in the Dutch Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by the end of 2011: Frisian Front, Cleaver Bank and Dogger Bank. In the latter case, it was agreed at the 3rd FIMPAS workshop (Jan 2011) to include Germany and the United Kingdom in the Dutch-led process in order to achieve a coherent and integrated approach to managing fisheries across their respective national SACs which adjoin on the Dogger Bank.

The NSRAC accepted an invitation from FIMPAS to produce a NSRAC position paper proposing a fisheries management plan in relation to nature conservation on the Dogger Bank. The NSRAC aims to present its plan at the FIMPAS 4 meeting on September 26th, 2011.

The NSRAC's work, undertaken by its Spatial Planning Working Group, will be facilitated by the Centre for Marine Policy (Wageningen) as part of their EU-funded MASPNOSE Project (EU Preparatory Action on **Marine Spatial Planning in the North Sea**), of which NSRAC is an official partner. The MASPNOSE project focuses on trans-boundary maritime spatial planning and has a particular role in bridging across stakeholders representing different marine activities.

Value for the NSRAC

As the trans-boundary, stakeholder body advising the Commission on CFP-related issues in the North Sea, the NSRAC can benefit in several ways from its unique role in this prestigious and pioneering project:

- 1) Since the inauguration of the NSRAC SPWG in 2005, a major concern has been the need to arrive at common fisheries management measures for contiguous Natura 2000 sites in the North Sea. The NSRAC has regularly challenged the authorities to take up this issue and to show a lead. Now that FIMPAS has taken up this challenge, it is an excellent opportunity for the NSRAC to play a key role in delivering integrated management across the Dogger Bank.
- 2) All NSRAC stakeholders have a vested interest in seeing coherent management of the Dogger Bank. For the fishing sector, it has high economic and therefore social value, including the most important sandeel fishing grounds in the North Sea. The e-NGOs, on the other hand, want to ensure management of the area that maintains and, as appropriate, restores favourable conservation of the site under the Habitats Directive.
- 3) This is a ground-breaking project, the first attempt to achieve consensus on a set of fisheries management measures for a mosaic of adjoining offshore Natura 2000 sites. Few fisheries management measures have been proposed thus far for any offshore Natura 2000 sites in EU waters, far less for a complex area like the Dogger Bank. It is

therefore a key opportunity for the NSRAC to be central to this pioneering and challenging initiative.

- 4) The NSRAC is aware that a proposed plan which has the agreement of all its stakeholders will represent compelling advice to the European Commission, which they will find hard to over-rule. The NSRAC can therefore exert considerable influence on the ultimate management outcomes.
- 5) Despite the related processes and parties (National Governments, FIMPAS, MASPNOSE, ICES) involved, it is clear that NSRAC is the lead party which gives it major 'bottom-up', stakeholder-led influence in this process.
- 6) Despite recent advances with the windfarm industry, the NSRAC has had limited capacity and expertise to make the necessary linkages between fisheries and the other users of the Dogger Bank, such as the oil & gas, and aggregate industries. The NSRAC has always recognized the need to engage with such stakeholders, especially given potential fisheries displacement issues, but has not hitherto had a forum to do so. The assistance offered by MASPNOSE, especially through their planned workshops, fills this gap for the NSRAC.
- 7) The Dogger Bank management plan is also a pioneering initiative in terms of maritime spatial planning (MSP), not just in the North Sea, but in any regional sea in the EU. It fulfils a number of key principles for MSP established by the European Commission, not least the call for cooperation between Member States. A successful fisheries management plan, which takes into account the other human activities on the Dogger Bank, can set a major precedent for MSP in the EU, and may even influence the Commission's thinking on whether to propose a Directive on MSP in the foreseeable future.
- 8) The management plan will also be an early test of the need propose fisheries management measures which make the necessary linkages between the objectives of the CFP, Natura 2000, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. As such, it will also be an important demonstration of an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.
- 9) The lessons learned from this process will, if taken to a successful conclusion (plan proposal), strengthen the NSRAC and its stakeholder coalition, and will also set a valuable precedent for other RACs to follow in a decade which will increasingly challenge the RACs to engage with spatial planning issues.