

Advice on operations guidance for offshore English Highly Protected Marine Areas

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This resource is available from JNCC's Resource Hub at

<https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/594b96d9-61c5-4f30-a028-606b86c09d08>

Purpose of this guidance

This guidance sets out the contents of the Advice on Operations workbooks for [offshore English Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HPMAs\)](#) and how they may be used to assess the impacts of an activity on the marine ecosystem feature of the HPMA.

This guidance and the advice available in a HPMA Advice on Operations workbook, is provided for use at an early stage of a plan or project when considering the potential impacts of an activity on the protected feature of an HPMA.

The advice in the Advice on Operations workbook for an HPMA identifies pressures associated with the most commonly occurring activities. It applies to activities within the HPMA boundary and any activities occurring outside of the site that are capable of impacting the HPMA where a pressure impact pathway exists. It uses our current understanding of the sensitivity of marine habitats and species to these pressures and provides an initial assessment of whether a proposed plan, project or ongoing activity is likely to hinder the conservation objective of an HPMA. This workbook provides advice on which activities:

- are likely to hinder the conservation objective of an HPMA and should be avoided, unless the Public Authorities' MCZ Assessment Process determines otherwise; &
- may not hinder the conservation objective of an HPMA but must be assessed to establish non-damaging levels.

To understand potential impacts of activities, the Advice on Operations would need to be used in conjunction with the specific details of a plan or project (e.g. indirect and/or additive impacts, activity duration, time of year, scale, etc.) and the [High-Level Conservation Advice for Public Authorities on Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HLCA\)](#) and the site-specific conservation advice document for the site detailing amongst other things the conservation objective for the site and a description of the site and the protected feature.

While the [Marine and Coastal Access Act \(2009\)](#) does not explicitly require consideration of in-combination or cumulative effects when assessing the impacts of licensable activities upon a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), JNCC advises in the [HLCA](#) that it is necessary to do this in order to fully understand the range of pressures potentially impacting an HPMA and that Public Authorities make best efforts to fully consider in-combination and cumulative effects, as much as this is possible, in order to be confident in the conclusions of assessments. This is particularly important in light of the high ambition for recovery set out in the HPMA conservation objective.

More detail on how to consider the information in this workbook is provided later in this guidance. If further information is required, it will need to be sought in consultation with JNCC.

Evidence

Each workbook draws together evidence available from various sources. It includes evidence about the pressures associated with a range of marine activities. The description of human activities, the supporting information underpinning the pressures associated with each and justifications provided in each workbook are taken from the Pressures Activities Database (PAD) available on [JNCC's website](#) ([Robson *et al.*, 2018](#)).

How to use the Advice on Operations workbook

A bespoke Advice on Operations (AoOps) workbook is available to download from each HPMA's Site Information Centre (SIC) accessible via JNCC's [English Highly Protected Areas webpage](#) and on [JNCC's Resource Hub](#). The worksheets included in the workbook are as follows:

Tab 1. Readme

In the 'readme' tab (Tab 1) you can find a link to this guidance note.

Tab 2. AoOps – Likely to hinder

Tab 2 lists in columns A to D respectively:

- category (operation) – high level broad activity category.
- Activity – sub-activity within a category (operation).
- Pressure – list of pressures associated with each activity.
- Justification – a number which is a reference to the evidence underpinning the link between each pressure and activity.

Tab 2 includes all the offshore activities associated with a marine operation that are set out in the [HLCA](#) as likely to hinder the conservation objective of an HPMA and the pressures which they can cause.

Tab 3. AoOps – May not hinder

Tab 3 lists the same information as Tab 2 but for offshore activities listed in the [HLCA](#) as those which may not hinder the conservation objective of an HPMA.

A user can search for information by applying a filter to any of the column headers. Doing so, you can select the activity that best suits your proposal or a range of activities to support an assessment of in-combination effects. Note that while best efforts have been made to list as many activities as possible in Tabs 2 and 3, the lists are not comprehensive and if you find that there are no activities listed which are

suitable to your proposal please check the [Pressures Activities Database](#) to see if it is listed there and if not please contact us at OffshoreMPAs@jncc.gov.uk.

Justifications are coded by number in column D (See 'Justification' tab for explanation of the justification codes) and available to view in Tab 5 as described further down in this guidance.

Tab 4. Activity descriptions

The worksheet in Tab 4 provides 'Activity descriptions' for the operations and activities presented in Tabs 2 and 3. This information is useful if you are not sure which category an activity may come under. The worksheet contains the operation (column A), activity (column B) and the description of the activity (column C). The activities listed in the workbook are not exhaustive and will be subject to change should new evidence become available. Please note that some of the activities listed are very broad categories with several activities within each category and the activity descriptions provided are taken from the [Pressures Activities Database](#) and Natural England's Advice on Operations Database, to provide further clarity on what these include. The descriptions provided are general and can include a range of 'sub-activities' which can exert similar pressures, however the descriptions may not include every possible sub-activity.

Tab 5. Justifications

As mentioned previously, a justification number is provided in Tabs 2 and 3 which is a reference to evidence provided in Tab 5 underpinning the link between activities and pressures listed.

The worksheet in Tab 5 contains from column A to G respectively:

- A. Justification – a number referring to evidence specific to a pressure associated with an activity;
- B. Category – high-level broad activity category (also known as an operation);
- C. Activity – sub-activity within a category;

- D. Pressure – biological, chemical and physical pressures associated with each activity;
- E. Activity-Pressure Justification text – a summary of the evidence available linking a pressure to an activity;
- F. Risk Profiling of Pressures (RPP) score – a score ranking pressures by the risk they pose to the environment under normal conditions; and
- G. Risk factor description – where the RPP is scored as low, supporting text is provided that highlights the factors under which the risk can increase.

To search for a specific justification listed in Tab 2 or 3, take note of the number. A filter can then be applied to column A for the specific reference number. To search for activities associated with a specific pressure or pressures, a filter can be applied to column D. To search for pressures associated with an activity or activities, a filter can be applied to column C.

Literature used to support the linkage between a pressure and an activity is cited in the justification text (column E). To locate the references used, take a note of the relevant reference code (e.g. [3111; 3149]) and navigate to the 'References' worksheet to find the relevant citation. As before, use the filter toggle over column A of this work sheet (Activity-Pressure justification comment ID) and select the reference ID(s) that relate to your query.

The Risk Profiling of Pressures (RPP) is shown in column F and provided to support the application of the conservation advice to an assessment of the potential impacts of an activity on the protected feature of the HPMA, usually as part of the screening stage of an assessment.

The RPP ranks pressures by the general risk they pose to the environment under normal conditions but not to be taken as a 'one size fits all' approach. The risk associated to the pressure will be situation specific. The RPP does not constitute a risk assessment and therefore should not be used as such. It should only be used to inform such assessments in conjunction with all available site-specific information. The RPP is given as either a "low Risk" or "Medium-High Risk" score (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Risk profile of pressure scores.

Risk Profile of Pressure	Recommendation
Medium-high Risk	Pressure is commonly induced by activity at a level that needs to be considered further as part of an assessment
Low Risk	Unless there are evidence-based or case-specific factors that increase the risk, or uncertainty on the level of pressure on a receptor, this pressure generally does not occur at a level of concern and should not require consideration as part of an assessment.

All pressures assessed as generically posing low risk to the protected feature of an HPMA are accompanied by supporting text (the Risk Factor Description) in column G that highlights factors under which the risk can increase. This text should always be read in conjunction with the associated Activity-Pressure justification. This supporting information should be considered in light of knowledge/evidence relating to the activity and/or site to determine whether the pressure should be given any further consideration in a site-based assessment. It is important to note that there may be additional factors, not mentioned in the Risk Factor Description, that might result in re-consideration of the risk posed to the feature by the activity, as a result of the pressure. Some low-risk pressures may become medium-high risk pressures as a consequence of these additional site-specific factors and users should seek further advice from JNCC in these instances.

Conversely, in specific cases pressures assessed as generically posing medium to high risk to the feature of an HPMA may be screened out as part of an assessment on the basis of activity and/or site-specific knowledge/evidence.

Tab 6. References

In the worksheet in Tab 6 you can find the list of references which underpin the evidence used in the Advice on Operations by matching the code supplied in the justification text (i.e. column E of 'Justification' worksheet).

References cited in workbook guidance

Robson, L.M., Fincham, J., Peckett, F.J., Frost, N., Jackson, C., Carter, A.J. & Matear, L. 2018. UK Marine Pressures-Activities Database “PAD”: Methods Report, JNCC Report No. 624, JNCC, Peterborough. Available from <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/16506231-f499-408f-bdc8-ea9a6dfbf8b5>