



**Fisheries Management Options Paper:
POBIE BANK REEF SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION**

JNCC

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Please note that this Fisheries Options Paper was developed in April 2014 to feed into the management measure proposal development. Prior to publication in April 2023, the document has been checked and links updated.

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1. Management Options Summary

Table 1. Fisheries management options for mobile and static bottom contact fishing gears.

Fishing Activity	Management options
<p>Mobile bottom contact gears</p>	<p>No additional management: There is a significant risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef features.</p> <p>Reduce/limit pressures: This option would reduce the risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature. Appropriate management could include exclusion of mobile bottom contact gears over the main areas of bedrock and stony reef, allowing fishing to continue in fishable areas around the features. It is possible that these areas may include some areas where the distribution of reef is unknown or uncertain, and some very small areas of known Annex I reef and there would therefore be a risk of localised damage to the structure and function of reef communities in these areas. The location of areas to be covered by management restrictions would include a buffer zone to reduce any risk of accidental contact with the feature. The location of areas to be covered by management restrictions would be decided in consultation with fishers.</p> <p>Remove/avoid pressures: This option would reduce the risk not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature within the site boundary to the lowest possible levels. Restrictions would be required for all mobile bottom contact gears within the full extent of the site boundary. The site boundary already includes a buffer zone based on a ratio of 3:1 fishing warp length to depth around the known features to reduce any risk of accidental contact with the feature.</p>
<p>Static bottom contact gears</p>	<p>No additional management: This option is considered to be sufficient for bottom contacting static gear to achieve the conservation objectives for the reef feature. However, if monitoring showed evidence of detrimental effects as a result of static gear activity in the future, additional management may be required.</p> <p>Reduce/limit pressures: This option would further reduce the risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature. If fishing activity were to rise to levels at which damage was occurring, appropriate management could include partial closure of the feature and/or limits on the amount of gear that can be deployed.</p>

2. Introduction

The Pobie Bank Reef site (Figure 1) crosses the 12 nautical mile boundary; therefore, it lies partly in inshore and partly in offshore waters. The site is located in the North Sea, approximately 20km east of Unst, Fetlar and Whalsey in Shetland, and is separated from Shetland by the Unst Basin. The SAC is approximately 70km long (crest running NNE to SSW) and up to 21km wide, with depth ranges from 70m to over 100m; the average seabed depth within the site boundary is approximately 90m. The reef is located on a bank of metamorphic and sedimentary rocks covered by a patchy veneer of sediment, ranging from sandy gravels to slightly gravelly sands. The bank overlays a flat plain of sedimentary rock, known as the East of Shetland Platform.

In the central section of the reef, very large, rugged bedrocks outcrop from areas of sand and this represents the most topographically complex area. In most areas these outcrops are surrounded by large boulders and cobbles in a sandy matrix. Towards the north and south of the reef, bedrock outcrops are smoother and integrated with extensive areas of stony reef.

Pobie Bank reef's stony and bedrock reef provides a habitat to an extensive community of encrusting and robust sponges and bryozoans, which are found throughout the site (Figure 2). In the shallowest areas the bedrock and boulders also support encrusting coralline algae. Axinellid cup sponges (*Axinella infundibuliformis*) are common on the bedrock and stony reef at depth ranges of 70m to over 100m. The bryozoan *Omalosecosa ramulosa* is also common on these reefs, but this species is rare in inshore sites in the Northern North Sea regional sea. In the deepest areas (greater than 100m), low-lying silty bedrock is commonplace, supporting small erect sponges, cup corals (*Caryophyllia smithii*) and the brittlestar *Ophiura albida*.

Offshore Special Area of Conservation Site Map: Pobie Bank Reef

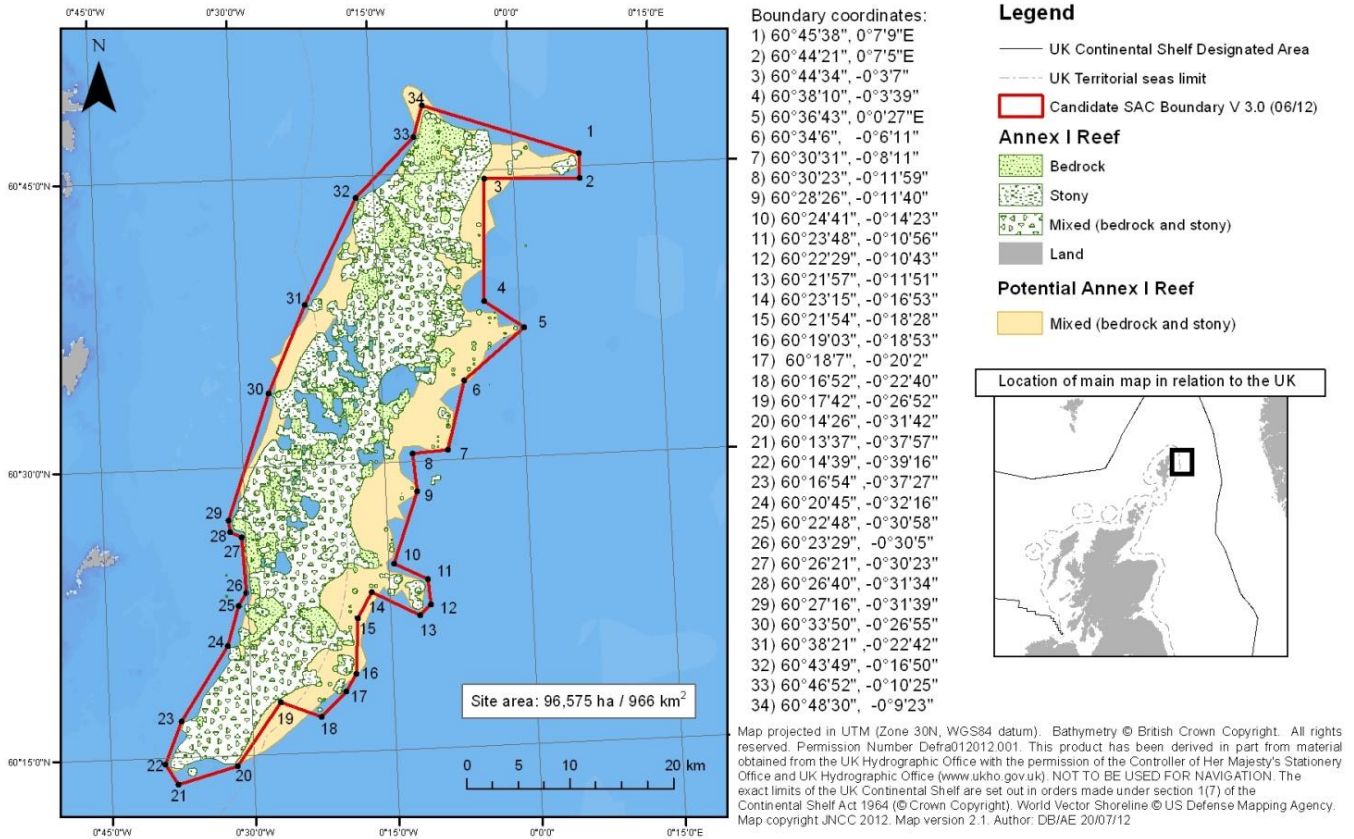


Figure 1. Pobie Bank Reef site map showing its location in relation to the UK, and the location of Annex I reefs within its site boundary. Please note that an updated map based on 2013 survey data may become available prior to the stakeholder workshop.

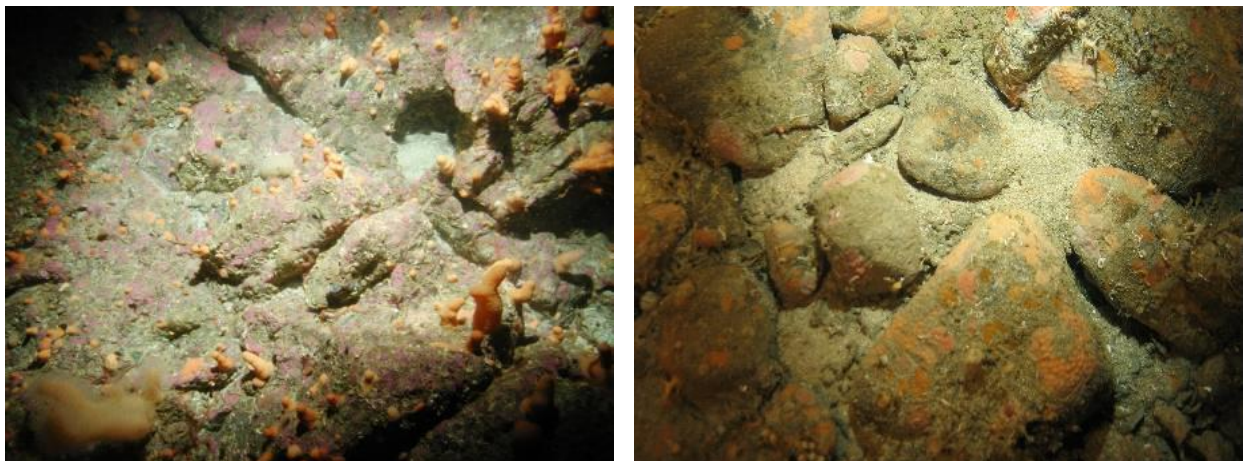


Figure 2. Examples of Annex I 'Reef' habitat within the Pobie Bank Reef SAC.
Left image: Annex I bedrock reef with encrusting coralline algae and bryozoans and abundant soft corals (*Alcyonium digitatum*) (©DTI, 2003).
Right image: Stony reef identified on the SEA SAC 2006 survey (©DTI, 2006).

3. Protected features and conservation objectives

The Pobie Bank Reef SAC contains the Annex I habitat 'Reefs'.

Conservation objectives set out the desired quality of the protected features within each MPA. They are a set of site specific objectives to be met in order for a site to maximise its contribution to Favourable Conservation Status.

The conservation objective for the SAC is to, subject to natural change, maintain or restore the reef at/to favourable condition, such that the following are maintained or restored:

- the natural environmental quality and processes supporting the habitat;
- the extent of the habitat on site;
- the physical structure, community structure, function, diversity, and distribution of the habitat and typical species representative of the reef in the Northern North Sea regional sea.

Thereby ensuring the integrity of the site, and also making an appropriate contribution to favourable conservation status of the Annex 1 habitats.

4. Roles

The role of JNCC is to advise the Scottish Government on management options for the Pobie Bank Reef SAC. In doing this, JNCC's aim is to ensure the conservation objectives for the protected features are met.

Marine Scotland will lead discussions on management with stakeholders. They will consider JNCC's advice and will lead on the development of specific management measures. They will be responsible for making recommendations to Scottish Ministers on these measures.

Stakeholders can provide additional evidence to support the development of management measures, including local knowledge of the environment and activities. Discussions with stakeholders will be one way of highlighting the implications of any management measures to both JNCC and Scottish Government. This will contribute to the development of well-designed and effective management measures.

5. Effects of fishing on the feature

Whilst it is unlikely that mobile bottom contact gear can affect the long-term natural distribution of **bedrock and stony reef** features, there is evidence to indicate that the use of bottom contacting mobile gears can impact the structure and function of the habitat and the long term survival of its associated species.

The use of towed fishing gears is likely to cause damage or death of fragile, erect species, such as sponges and corals (Løkkeborg 2005, Freese *et al.* 1999). Other species such as hydroids, anemones, bryozoans, tunicates, and echinoderms may also be vulnerable (McConnaughey *et al.* 2000, Sewell and Hiscock 2005). Where fragile, slow growing

species occur, even low levels of fishing have the potential to change the structure and function of the habitats and may result in the loss of some characteristic species.

Mechanical impacts of static gear (e.g., weights and anchors hitting the seabed, hauling gear over seabed, rubbing/entangling effects of ropes) can damage some species (Eno *et al.* 1996). Other species appear to be resilient to individual fishing operations, but the effects of high fishing intensity are unknown (Eno *et al.* 2001). Recovery will be slow (Foden *et al.* 2010) resulting in significant reduction or even loss of characteristic species. The individual impact of a single fishing operation may be slight but cumulative damage may be significant (Eno *et al.* 2001; Foden *et al.* 2010).

6. Development of management options

Management options are being developed where we consider that some form of management may be necessary to achieve the conservation objectives for the feature. The approach to identifying management options for each activity will be risk-based, i.e., we are focusing on providing advice where we believe there is a risk to achieving the conservation objectives. To do this, we are using existing data and information on protected features and relevant activities, and also our understanding of the relationships between the feature and relevant activities.

We have identified risks to achieving the conservation objectives where there is an overlap between protected features and activities associated with pressures the features are sensitive to. Our identification of the risk has been refined using available information on the interaction between the features and activities where this is available (see section 5). We have recommended management options to manage this risk. The text focuses on interactions in terms of physical overlap but the assessment of risk in future should also take account of the intensity and frequency of activities within the SAC.

Specific details of the recommended management options for mobile bottom contact and static bottom contact gears are provided in Tables 3 & 4.

A gradient of management options has been considered to reduce the feature's exposure to pressures. These have been described under three potential management option categories:

- a) **No additional management** – where there are currently no site specific fisheries management measures in place, and these are not deemed necessary at this time to achieve the conservation objectives for the site.
- b) **Additional management to reduce pressures** – where fisheries managers may wish to consider a range of measures that could be used to reduce the risk to features by managing fishing activity. These could include:
 - Area restrictions (permanently closing some or all of the feature's area – note this option may be limited due to recent evidence on distribution of the feature.
 - Gear restrictions (e.g., restricting use of the more damaging gears)

Ideally, any measures would generally apply only to the part of the site where the feature is present. However, there may be some circumstances in which it could be desirable to extend management measures beyond the known area of feature distribution, for example, where conditions are suitable for a feature to exist but there are insufficient data to confirm its presence.

- c) **Additional management to remove pressures** – where fishing activities known to adversely affect the feature would be excluded. Such exclusion would generally apply only to the part of the site where the feature is present, although it may occasionally be necessary to apply them to a wider area.

We recognise that stakeholders can provide local environmental knowledge and more detailed information on activities, including distribution and intensity of effort, frequency of activity, and fishing methods employed. This additional information will help us to develop more specific management options, focussed on interactions between features and activities.

7. Overview of activities

Table 2 below lists fishing activities which take place within or close to the Pobie Bank Reef SAC. Further discussions with those who use the area will improve our understanding of these activities (distribution and intensity etc). Those fishing activities which the protected features are sensitive to are explored in greater detail in the next section. Fishing activities which the protected features are not thought to be sensitive to (i.e., any connection between the activity and the features is considered to be minimal) will not be considered further within this document. New or other fishing activities not identified within the table would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Table 2. Overview of existing fishing activities believed to take place within or close to the Pobie Bank Reef SAC (UK gear types only). *Only the specific examples of activities listed in the table have been excluded, rather than the broad activity types.

Activities considered capable of affecting the integrity of the SAC	Activities <i>not</i> considered capable of affecting the integrity of the SAC*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dredging • Demersal otter trawling and twin otter trawling • Demersal pair trawling • Seine netting • Set gillnetting • Set longlining • Potting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-water otter trawling • Mid-water pair trawling • Purse seining

Non-UK nationalities with interest in the relevant ICES rectangles:

- Norway;
- The Netherlands;
- France;
- Ireland;
- German;
- Denmark;
- Sweden;
- Poland.

8. Management options

Table 3. Management options for mobile bottom contact gear.

Management option	
No additional management:	There is a significant risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef features.
Reduce/limit pressures:	This option would reduce the risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature. Appropriate management could include exclusion of mobile bottom contact gears over the main areas of bedrock and stony reef , allowing fishing to continue in fishable areas around the features. It is possible that these areas may include some areas where the distribution of reef is unknown or uncertain, and some very small areas of known Annex I reef and there would therefore be a risk of localised damage to the structure and function of reef communities in these areas. The location of areas to be covered by management restrictions would include a buffer zone to reduce any risk of accidental contact with the feature. The location of areas to be covered by management restrictions would be decided in consultation with fishers.
Remove/avoid pressures:	This option would reduce the risk not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature within the site boundary to the lowest possible levels. Restrictions would be required for all mobile bottom contact gears within the full extent of the site boundary. The site boundary already includes a buffer zone based on a ratio of 3:1 fishing warp length to depth around the known features to reduce any risk of accidental contact with the feature.

Table 4. Management options for static bottom contact gear.

Management option	
No additional management:	This option is considered to be sufficient for bottom contacting static gear to achieve the conservation objectives for the reef feature. However, if monitoring showed evidence of detrimental effects as a result of static gear activity in the future, additional management may be required.
Reduce/limit pressures:	This option would further reduce the risk of not achieving the conservation objectives for the reef feature. If fishing activity were to rise to levels at which damage was occurring, appropriate management could include partial closure of the feature and/or limits on the amount of gear that can be deployed.

9. Conclusions and further recommendations

Fisheries management measures for the Pobie Bank Reef site will be developed through discussion with stakeholders. Discussions will focus on our understanding of the features and the likely risks to the designated features where there are interactions with fishing activities. Based on the options presented here, it is hoped that a preferred set of management options will be recommended.

10. Further information

The following documents about the Pobie Bank Reef SAC are available:

[Pobie Bank SAC Selection Assessment document, Version 5 \(October 2012\)](#)

[Pobie Bank Conservation Objectives and Advice on Operations, Version 3 \(March 2013\)](#)

11. References

Eno, N.C., MacDonald, D., & Amos, S.C., 1996. A study on the effects of fish (Crustacea/Molluscs) traps on benthic habitats and species. Final report to the European Commission. *Study Contract, no. 94/076*.

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Foden, J., Rogers, S.I. & Jones, A.P. 2010. Recovery of UK seabed habitats from benthic fishing and aggregate extraction- towards a cumulative impact assessment. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, **411**: 259–270.

Freese, L., Auster, P.J., Heifetz, J. & Wing, B.L. 1999. Effects of trawling on seafloor habitat and associated invertebrate taxa in the Gulf of Alaska. *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, **182**: 119–126.

Løkkeborg, S., 2005. Impacts of trawling and scallop dredging on benthic habitats and communities. *FAO Fisheries Technical Paper. No. 472*. Rome, FAO. 58pp.

McConnaughey, R.A., Mier, K., & Dew, C.B., 2000. An examination of chronic trawling effects on soft-bottom benthos of the eastern Bering Sea. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, **57**: 1377-1388.

Sewell, J., & Hiscock, K., 2005. Effects of fishing within UK European Marine Sites: guidance for nature conservation agencies. *Report to the Countryside Council for Wales*.