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SWSFC is local manager of sea fisheries & the marine environment, charged with obtaining a balance between conservation and socio – economic matters. This provides a unique perspective.

Main points:

1. Location?

Vessels fishing outside of 6 miles include foreign (EU) vessels over which Governments no control without the permission of the Commission under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This means either areas of NTZ will likely be inside of 6 miles, or else those outside will be at the whim of EU actions. The EU do not have a good track record for collective responsibility or action. Therefore if there are to be any NTZs they will likely fall to UK government(s) to establish where it has sole control ie inside of 6 miles. The inshore areas have diverse habitat and support high numbers of juvenile fish, so this might make some sense. On the other hand, it means another constraint upon inshore fishermen (99% of the Welsh fleet), who are already constrained by a range of developments and controls. It is also the area of most human activity (vessel traffic for a range of purposes); directly the opposite of where a NTZ might be ideally positioned if it is to have minimal social impact and to be enforceable! If all habitat were equally, offshore NTZs would be preferred.

2. Rationale?

The purpose of any zone must be clear from the outset.

If it is for fish conservation / fishery enhancement, then other fishery management tools may have the capability to deliver more “bucks for your money” eg effort control or broodstock protection . NTZ are but one tool in the fishery managers tool box, and can add benefit in particular way.

If it is for research, then the objectives must be laid down and monitoring programmes established & fully funded.

If it is for recreational benefit, then for whom? Divers, for instance may be excluded from research or HPMR areas. Allowing eg only put-and-take sea angling would have implication for sectoral exclusion, do they have lesser impact for example than other fishers? Excluding everyone without exception offers greater fairness and avoids making social judgements, but also creates more potential objectors!

If it is to make more “natural” habitat available then why, where and how much? National Nature Reserves on land occupy 8% of the land area. Should the sea have more or less set aside? On what basis? For that matter ought the figure have been more than 8% on land? How does that relate to calls for 20 – 30% of sea area? How are these areas to be distributed as “Oases” connected by corridors?

3. Social impact

It is clear that NTZs will impact most severely upon inshore commercial fishermen. This is largely a sustainable industry operating in a difficult and

changing world. Why should they bear the brunt of such action? Can the industry remain viable against other pressures?

Where else are people expected to lose their jobs – without any form of compensation and possibly only with limited planning? Especially, on the expectation that a decision be taken that society “needs” such marine “no – go” areas – you know it makes sense?

What right do the people supporting such initiatives have to make such judgements? Especially when the actions do not personally affect them and they themselves know that they should be doing more for the wider conservation of the environment (more reserves on land, lower carbon footprint etc etc). It is so much easier to offer suggestions as to the merits of limiting someone else's activities!

4. Skomer MNR proposed byelaw (June 2005)

The SWSFC entered into debate in 2005 on a proposed byelaw to prevent fishery exploitation in the MNR. Fishing using dredges and trawls, vessel size and the taking of scallop etc was already restricted. A voluntary netting restriction was also adhered to. After consideration of concessions, the proposal amounted to an action to stop lobster potting around the island waters only, as diving and angling would / could not be prevented on practical grounds.

The detail of the debate is recorded on www.swsfc.org.uk – consultations – closed

In the end, the SWSFC decided not to progress such a closure at that time absent any compensation to fishermen, and in consideration of the debate as to the relative significance of sea bed disturbance by potting, angling or diving; and in the absence of a clear and funded research & monitoring strategy by CCW . The reasons were not simple and several aspects became inter-twinned. (More on the SWSFC website)

Perhaps the proposal was ahead of its time, and in different circumstances the result might have been different. It is important that the difficulties implicit in taking that decision are fully taken into account if in the future NTZs are to gain acceptance, but there are as yet few signs that the lessons are being learned.