Proposed West Coast of Scotland *Nephrops* and North Sea *Nephrops* Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs)

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Introduction to Scottish Environment LINK

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 40 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Its member bodies represent a wide community of environmental interest, sharing the common goal of contributing to a more sustainable society. LINK provides a forum for these organisations, enabling informed debate, assisting co-operation within the voluntary sector, and acting as a strong voice for the environment. Acting at local, national and international levels, LINK aims to ensure that the environmental community participates in the development of policy and legislation affecting Scotland.

LINK works mainly through groups of members working together on topics of mutual interest, exploring the issues and developing advocacy to promote sustainable development, respecting environmental limits. This consultation response was written by LINK's Marine Group.

Q. 1 For the North Sea *Nephrops* FMP, do you agree with the proposed policies?

LINK partially agrees with the proposed policies for the *Nephrops* FMPs. However, many of the policies need to be more ambitious and we qualify our response as follows:

Policy 1 (Sustainable harvest):
While we support sustainable harvest as a policy goal, the framing of Policy 1 should be wider. MSY is a single-species metric that does not fully account for the food web function of *Nephrops* as a prey species for commercially and ecologically important Priority Marine Feature (PMF) fish. This is further undermined by the physical dynamic of certain types of trawling, which reduce average *Nephrops* size, alter burrow density and has knock-on effects on mud-associated faunal communities. The SNCB conservation advice is explicit that fishing can reduce average *Nephrops* size in ways that affect habitat integrity. Policy 1 should encompass both the population and ecosystem dimensions of sustainable harvest (tied into GES descriptor 4). For data-limited FUs in the north sea (and *Nephrops* outside the FUs), prioritising evidence improvement is also consistent with the precautionary objective of the UK Fisheries Act 2020.

Policy 2 (benthic impacts):
The SNCB conservation advice assesses a high risk rating to seafloor integrity under GES Descriptor 6 from mobile demersal fishing activities, which is the only high risk finding in the advice. We feel that this assessment is authoritative and that the treatment the FMPs accords to benthic impacts is insufficient in this context. The FMP should respond to this high risk rating with more concrete management actions, not further evidence gathering. The advice calls for the prioritised establishment of a strategic benthic impacts working group, and for targeted mitigation strategies. We feel another forum is not needed as the steps that need to be taken are already clear - ecosystem-based spatial management, deployment of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) across the fleet, and allocation of fishing opportunities based on environmental sustainability and capacity.

Actions that operationalise these mechanisms should be adopted as formal FMP actions with clear timelines, and it should be made sufficiently clear how this overlaps or relates to fisheries management measures within marine protected areas and for PMFs outside Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). It is important to include actions that both complement the MPA management process and that align with the objectives of the FMP, given the effectively separate but related/overlapping purposes for which both processes are being implemented (i.e. nature conservation and stock improvement).

Policy 3 (sensitive species bycatch):
UK Fisheries Act Objective states that bycatch should be minimised and where possible eliminated. The language within the draft FMPs leans more heavily on minimisation and we would like to see this strengthened. We would also like to see clearer, timebound targets to achieve this policy. The SNCB advice identifies the critically endangered flapper skate as being at particular bycatch risk due to their life history, slow growth and site fidelity, and notes that trawl gears take flapper skate as bycatch at all life history stages (including eggs) despite a prohibition on landings. The FMP must include specific spatial and gear-based measures to reduce flapper skate bycatch beyond the existing landing ban. For creels, the advice identifies entanglement in fleet ropes as the most frequently documented cause of non-natural minke whale mortality in Scottish waters [1], with basking shark, Risso's dolphin, humpback whale, fin whale and sperm whale also identified as being at risk of entanglement. The policy and actions should also recognise the full range of species at risk of entanglement, as described in recent research by the Scottish Entanglement Alliance [2] . As per our response to the Future Catching Policy selectivity consultation, we support the incentivised roll out of gear adaptation in the form of weighted lines, as well as spatial measures in areas of high risk (e.g. seasonal aggregations). The FMP risk assessment acknowledges limited evidence on impacts to marine mammals, seals and seabirds, with risk rated as 'moderate'. This uncertainty should be addressed through a precautionary approach. It is therefore essential that Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) is implemented to improve evidence on bycatch and support effective mitigation.

Policy 4 (discarding):
We support this policy in principle, but it fails to acknowledge the requirement of the UK Fisheries Act to reduce and where possible eliminate bycatch, focusing largely on reduction only. We reiterate that Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) with cameras, with a robust independent review system, must be treated as mandatory rather than aspirational. The SNCB advice repeatedly identifies REM as the appropriate tool for improving bycatch monitoring across both trawl and creel fisheries.

[1] https://www.int-res.com/articles/esr2022/49/n049p217.pdf
[2] https://www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-research-report-1268-scottish-entanglement-alliance-sea-understanding-scale-and-impacts

Q. 2: What are your views on the proposed actions for each policy in the North Sea *Nephrops* FMP?

LINK's concerns about the proposed actions are similar to those in our response to the draft demersal FMPs earlier in the year [3]. Common weaknesses include a lack of timelines, over-reliance on non-committal language and an emphasis on further information gathering rather than management intervention. In addition, the SNCB advice identifies specific gaps in the proposed actions that should be addressed.

- LINK members agree that spatial management is the primary action for benthic impacts. The FMP must include a committed, time-bound action to develop and implement a spatial management framework for North Sea *Nephrops* FUs. LINK has long advocated for this approach and is clear that the evidence base for it is already sufficient. The framework should identify core areas closed to mobile demersal gear to allow burrowed mud communities to recover, in recognition that many characteristic fauna are long-lived with poor recovery capacity; zones where trawling access is conditional on demonstrated sustainable use; and areas where preferential access for lower-impact gear such as creels is appropriate. This is a well-evidenced management response that the FMP should commit to delivering. The FMP should specify timelines for spatial management framework development and implementation, not defer the question to a future working group.
- Burrowed mud pressure management is needed and the FMP should include a specific action to define the maximum level of trawling disturbance consistent with maintaining burrowed mud in favourable condition across North Sea FUs. Spatial management is the mechanism for delivering this, but the FMP should set out the underlying objective clearly, i.e. the burrowed mud PMF must be maintained in favourable condition, and spatial zoning must be optimised to achieve this.
- The FMP should include a specific action to map the spatial overlap between North Sea *Nephrops* trawling activity and flapper skate habitat, and to develop spatial or gear-based measures to reduce incidental capture.
- The FMP must include a clear, time-bound action to mandate REM with cameras across the North Sea *Nephrops* fleet, with transparent public reporting of catch, discard and bycatch data.
- The FMP should include an action to assess *Nephrops*' role in the diets of PMF-listed predator species and to integrate food web considerations into harvest strategy advice under GES descriptor D4.
- The SNCB advice rates marine litter as a moderate risk under D10. The FMP should include a specific action and timeline for quantifying and reducing lost and abandoned gear from North Sea *Nephrops* fisheries.

[3] https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/2026-03-LINK-response-to-11-draft-demersal-FMPs-1.pdf

Q. 3 For the West Coast of Scotland *Nephrops* FMP, do you agree with the proposed policies?

As with question 1, LINK members partially agree with the proposed policies for the West Coast of Scotland *Nephrops* FMP and the same concerns expressed are relevant here. The ecological significance of burrowed mud as a PMF, and *Nephrops*' role in the food web, are as important on the West Coast. The inshore character of the FUs means proximity to sensitive habitats, MPA designations and coastal communities makes ecosystem-based management, and in particular spatial management, even more critical and more immediately deliverable.

LINK wishes to highlight the following specific concerns for the West Coast context:

- Policy 1 (Sustainable Harvest): The high dependency of remote island and coastal communities on West Coast *Nephrops* strengthens rather than weakens the case for a precautionary, ecosystem-based approach. The food web dimension of Policy 1, including *Nephrops* as prey for PMF species cod, whiting and haddock, is particularly relevant on the West Coast, where these predator-prey dynamics play out in inshore FUs already subject to multiple pressures. Cod in particular is a highly

depleted species with a zero Total Allowable Catch on west coast and North sea stocks. The successful management of *Nephrops* has a significant bearing on their capacity to recover.

- Policy 2 (Benthic Impacts): The SNCB high-risk finding on seafloor integrity applies to both FMPs. On the West Coast, the inshore character of the burrowed mud FUs (North Minch, South Minch and Firth of Clyde) and their particular susceptibility to disturbance makes the case for spatial management particularly strong. The West Coast presents an important opportunity, with the inshore geography, the existing MPA network, and the mix of trawl and creel activity creating conditions in which a coherent spatial management framework, with core recovery areas, MPA conservation zones, gear-preferential areas and demonstrably sustainable trawling zones, could be developed more readily than in the open North Sea. The FMP should treat this as a priority.
- Policy 3 (Bycatch): The SNCB advice is especially relevant to the West Coast creel fishery, which accounts for the majority of creeling activity across both FMPs. Entanglement in creel ropes is the most frequently documented cause of non-natural minke whale mortality in Scottish waters. The West Coast FMP must include specific, time-bound actions to address cetacean entanglement risk in the creel fishery, developed in coordination with the Scottish Entanglement Alliance. Basking shark entanglement in creel ropes is also documented, amongst a range of other species, and specific measures for this species should be included. Any transition to a higher proportion of creel fishing on the West Coast, which remains appropriate as a direction of travel within a spatial management framework, should include positive incentivisation of bycatch mitigation measures (i.e. adoption of sinking creel lines), a potential cap on numbers, and REM monitoring.
- The proposed FMP also does not adequately address bycatch of whitefish such as cod, which we know is a particular issue in relation to recovery of the Clyde population. The Future Catching Policy selectivity measures, consulted on earlier in 2026, also does not sufficiently address this issue (unless the FCP measures are significantly revised following on from the consultation). Our response to the FCP selectivity measures can be found here: https://www.scotlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/2026-05-LINK-full-response-to-FCP-selectivity-consultation-1.pdf (see in particularly our response to question 10). The bycatch measures in the draft *Nephrops* FMP need to be strengthened and should include a requirement for REM rollout across the fleet.
- Policy 3 should also cover the specific risk to flapper skate from demersal trawling on the West Coast, where important flapper skate habitat overlaps with *Nephrops* trawling areas, including waters around the Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura MPA.

Q. 4: What are your views on the proposed actions for each policy in the West Coast of Scotland FMP?

In line with the concerns set out for the North Sea FMP in question 2, LINK highlights the following West Coast-specific issues:

- The West Coast FMP should commit to developing and implementing a spatial management framework as the primary mechanism for managing benthic impacts. Given the inshore geography, the existing MPA network and prevalence of many geographically constrained PMFs (e.g. flame shell beds - Limaria hians), the West Coast offers a particularly strong opportunity for this approach. The framework should include core areas closed to mobile demersal gear, prioritised on the basis of burrowed mud sensitivity where appropriate, MPA conservation objectives and ecological connectivity; areas where access is preferential for lower-impact gear, such as creels, because the environmental evidence supports it; and defined areas where trawling access is retained subject to evidence of sustainable use and compliance with habitat condition objectives. This reflects LINK's

long-standing position on spatial management of fishing and is directly supported by the SNCB high-risk finding on seafloor integrity. The FMP should specify timelines for spatial framework development and implementation within the current review cycle.

- Following on from the above point, the spatial management framework must be built around the existing MPA network and the conservation objectives for burrowed mud habitats within those sites, extending the logic of MPA protection into adjacent areas through the preferential and conditional access zones described above. The FMP should acknowledge that the current delays to inshore MPA fisheries management measures leave important gaps that spatial management under the FMP can begin to address, and continue to complement going forwards.
- The FMP must include specific actions to address cetacean and elasmobranch entanglement in the *Nephrops* creel fishery. These should include mandatory reporting of all entanglement incidents, incentivising the adoption of sinking creel lines, and continued collaboration with the Scottish Entanglement Alliance to implement and monitor entanglement mitigation measures. These actions should have clear timelines and not be framed as exploratory. This is essential if the FMP is to treat increased creel activity as a positive development within the spatial management framework.
- The SNCB advice notes that fishing pressure can reduce average *Nephrops* size, increasing the density of smaller burrows and potentially affecting the associated faunal communities and overall habitat integrity. The FMP should include actions to monitor *Nephrops* size-at-catch across West Coast FUs and to assess whether current fishing pressure is affecting population size structure, findings which should directly inform the spatial management framework.

Q. 5 Do you have any comments on the specific sections in any of the proposed *Nephrops* FMPs? For example, on the:

- Stock assessment and MSY section which provides information on available stock assessments, MSY and stock biology for the individual stocks covered by the *Nephrops* FMPs.
- Fisheries management section which outlines proposals to maintain the sustainable management of *Nephrops* fisheries in UK waters for the long-term. It also covers the current technical measures, as well as monitoring, control and enforcement.
- Environmental considerations section which covers legal duties and requirements relating to the protection of the natural environment arising from legislation. It provides details of the conservation advice developed by the SNCBs which describes the risks arising from the *Nephrops* fisheries contained within the two *Nephrops* FMPs.
- Implementation and monitoring section which describes the process for implementation and states that the FMPs will be reviewed and improved over time as more evidence becomes available. The delivery of the policies and actions in the *Nephrops* FMPs will be monitored and assessed against a set of indicators to ensure the overarching outcomes and actions are effective in achieving the FMP policies and the requirements of the Act.

The MSY framework should be explicitly acknowledged as a floor, not a ceiling, for fisheries management. The SNCB advice identifies multiple ecological risks, including food web function, benthic impacts and the population structure effects of fishing pressure, that are not captured by single-species MSY assessments. The FMPs should include ecological indicators, such as burrowed mud habitat condition and *Nephrops* population size structure. The ecological role of *Nephrops* as prey for PMF-listed species (cod, whiting, haddock) should be included in the stock assessment section, with recognition that managing *Nephrops* purely to MSY does not account for this

food web function [4]. The FMPs should reference the requirement to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) for descriptor D4 (food webs) as a parallel management objective to MSY. For data-limited FUs in the North Sea, trigger points should be defined that would prompt a precautionary management response, including spatial management restrictions, if available indicators deteriorate. The stock assessment section should address how trawling pressure affects *Nephrops* population size structure and whether current harvest strategies adequately account for the demographic and habitat-level consequences of reducing average individual size.

The fisheries management section fails to respond adequately to the SNCB's high-risk finding on seafloor integrity (D6). The section should include a clear commitment to implementing spatial management of North Sea and West Coast *Nephrops* FUs, with timelines. The evidence base for spatial management is already sufficient and the FMPs should not defer this to further evidence gathering or working group processes. Spatial management, as described in our overarching comments, should be presented explicitly as the primary mechanism for managing benthic impacts on burrowed mud. The section should describe the framework, which we believe should include core recovery areas, MPAs and areas for PMF protection, preferential areas for lower-impact fishing methods, and demonstrably sustainable trawling zones. Trawling should only continue in areas where sustainable use can be evidenced and where habitat condition objectives can be met [5]. Technical measures on gear selectivity should be strengthened to address the flapper skate bycatch risk specifically identified by the SNCB advice. This includes spatial restrictions in areas of known flapper skate aggregation and connectivity/migration, and gear modifications to reduce contact with egg cases and juveniles. The section should acknowledge that trawling on burrowed mud constitutes fishing on a PMF, creating an obligation to manage fishing pressure in a way that maintains the PMF in favourable condition, not merely at levels that sustain the commercial stock. Mandatory REM with cameras must be included as a firm commitment with a clear timeline.

The SNCB advice identifies three findings that require clear management responses: high risk to seafloor integrity; moderate risk from bycatch of cetaceans, elasmobranchs and other species; and moderate risk from marine litter. Each should be linked to specific policies and actions. The high-risk finding on seafloor integrity should be met with a commitment to spatial management, not to further deliberation. The environmental considerations section should state clearly that the FMPs will respond to this finding through a spatial management framework, and set out the process and timeline for its development. The ecological significance of burrowed mud as both a PMF and the exclusive habitat of the target species must be given central prominence. Fishing on burrowed mud constitutes a direct interaction with a nationally significant habitat feature, creating management obligations that go beyond those arising from MSY stock management alone. The food web function of *Nephrops* under GES descriptor D4 is underweighted. The FMPs should include an assessment of how current harvest levels may affect the prey base for ecologically important predators. The treatment of MPA management should acknowledge current gaps in inshore MPA fisheries management and commit to using the spatial management framework to begin addressing those gaps, rather than waiting for a separate MPA process that may be subject to further delay.

The monitoring framework must include indicators for burrowed mud habitat condition, not only for *Nephrops* stock biomass. Indicators should include measures of benthic community composition and disturbance intensity in both managed zones and reference areas within the spatial management framework. The spatial management framework should be established as an early implementation priority, with clear milestones in the first review cycle. Monitoring of habitat condition across the spatial zones should begin from the point of implementation to establish baselines and detect change. Progress on bycatch monitoring, REM roll-out, creel

entanglement mitigation and marine litter reduction should be included as indicators with clear baselines and targets.

[4] https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2018.10.024
[5] https://www.scotlink.org/files/documents/SEL_SeafloorIntegrity_Report_A4_March19-1.pdf

Q. 6 Do you have any other additional comments on the two proposed *Nephrops* FMPs

LINK members welcome the publication of the two *Nephrops* Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs). We recognise the economic and social significance of these fisheries in Scotland and their importance for coastal communities. We also acknowledge that both draft FMPs describe stocks that are currently assessed as being fished at or close to sustainable levels for the assessed Functional Units (FUs), which can be seen as a positive baseline. However, LINK members are keen to see these FMPs developed in a way that makes significant positive change for the management of *Nephrops* fisheries. There are opportunities through these plans for high ecological wins (ecosystem and habitat management), climate-smart actions (burrowed mud as a long-term store of carbon), and socio-economic gains (reduce gear conflict between creeling and trawling, enable more equitable access and greater environmental incentivisation for different fleet sectors). Currently the draft plans do not propose clear actions that could help achieve some of these wins.

Our overarching view is that in their current form these plans are primarily descriptive documents. They outline largely existing management arrangements rather than drive necessary improvements in ecosystem-based management, bycatch reduction and elimination, seabed protection and monitoring. The language throughout relies heavily on non-committal terms such as “consider”, “support” and “explore”, which provide insufficient assurance that actions will be delivered. FMPs must be operational tools, not descriptions of intent and must include timebound targets to deliver outcomes.

LINK's position is clear on how benthic impacts should be addressed. The primary delivery mechanism must be spatial management. We have long advocated for large-scale, holistic spatial management of fishing activity, comprising core areas closed to mobile demersal gear to allow ecological recovery, full implementation of marine protected area (MPA) conservation objectives, preferential access for lower-impact gear including creels in areas where burrowed mud habitats are particularly sensitive, and clearly defined areas where sustainable use by trawling can be demonstrated through evidence. The evidence base for spatial management is already substantial (e.g. [7]), including the SNCB's high-risk finding on seafloor integrity. What is required is political will and a clear commitment in the FMPs to implement it. LINK is therefore concerned that the SNCB conservation advice recommends prioritising the establishment of a new Benthic Impacts Working Group as the primary response to this high-risk finding. We do not consider that further deliberation through a working group is the appropriate or proportionate response at this stage. The mechanisms needed to improve the management of benthic impacts on burrowed mud are well understood. The FMPs should commit to implementing them, not to studying them further.

A key issue for the *Nephrops* FMPs is the ecological importance of the species’ habitat: burrowed mud is both a Priority Marine Feature (PMF) and a critical habitat for *Nephrops*. The target species is obligate to a single, nationally significant habitat feature, which means the fisheries cannot be managed sustainably without also managing for the long-term ecological integrity of burrowed mud. The fishery therefore operates exclusively on this habitat, which is critical to other sensitive component species such as sea pens. The conservation advice

from NatureScot and JNCC makes clear that burrowed mud communities occur in sheltered, deep waters with low natural disturbance rates, making them especially susceptible to the physical impacts of trawling, and that many of the characteristic fauna are relatively large and long-lived with poor recovery capacity, This ecological reality must be central to the FMPs framing with regards to the trawl fishery, not treated as one consideration among many. The relative impacts of trawl and creel fishing must also be treated as distinct and with levels of restriction appropriate to the higher physical impact of trawling. LINK's view is that the FMPs fundamentally need to be restructured around the understanding that sustainable harvest of *Nephrops* (Policy 1) and minimising benthic impacts (Policy 2) cannot be treated as separate, parallel policies. The habitat is integral to the stock and burrowed mud habitat condition should be treated as a co-equal management objective alongside *Nephrops* stock sustainability. Spatial management is the mechanism through which this dual objective is delivered, distinguishing areas where fishing continues under demonstrably sustainable conditions from areas where recovery must take precedence. The FMPs acknowledge the socio-economic importance of *Nephrops* fisheries to coastal communities and LINK supports this recognition. A spatial management framework should support the viability of *Nephrops* fishing communities if it is co-designed and with their long-term interests in mind, i.e. core recovery areas that protect the productive capacity of burrowed mud habitats in the long run, combined with preferential access for lower-impact methods in sensitive areas, can sustain livelihoods while reducing environmental harm. The FMP should enable a transition to greater opportunities for lower-impact fisheries such as creeling, but they must still operate within a framework that ensures the industry is ecologically sustainable and has appropriate mitigation and monitoring measures in place (e.g. entanglement mitigation, REM, spatial management, and potential effort caps, as outlined elsewhere in the response).

This is further reinforced by Environmental Standards Scotland's recently published technical report "How much could Marine Protected Areas contribute to Good Environmental Status? Development of a practical assessment approach" [8]. It emphasises that application of spatial protection measures (assuming full closures) leads to a significant reduction in disturbance scores for mud habitats. For example, in the Northern Celtic Seas, the proportion of habitats (including mud) achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) under the UK Marine Strategy Regulations increases markedly after protection measures are simulated. The tool also shows that, under these scenarios, a majority of mud habitats can achieve GES, indicating improved seafloor integrity (see Table 6 and Table 7 in the document). However, the tool also highlights that the effectiveness of MPAs is regionally variable. In some North Sea sub-regions, even after protection, disturbance remains above GES thresholds, suggesting that additional measures may be needed. For burrowed mud, which is particularly vulnerable to trawling and other bottom-contacting gear, the tool provides a quantitative basis for demonstrating the potential of MPAs and other potential spatial measures to restore or maintain seafloor integrity. With 13 of 15 indicators of Good Environmental Status not achieved under the most recent UK Marine Strategy Part 1 Assessment, the situation for benthic habitats (amongst other indicators) requires priority actions to restore them.

We also note that *Nephrops* plays an ecological role beyond its commercial value. PMF-listed fish species, including cod, whiting and haddock, prey on *Nephrops*, and it also has an important role as a bioturbator of burrowed mud [9]. *Nephrops* stocks must be managed to Maximum Sustainable Yield and with regard to its ecological function, and the ecological consequences of reductions in *Nephrops* population size and structure, to be consistent with the UK Fisheries Act 2020 objectives and the UK Marine Strategy Regulations.

In the draft FMPs, there is insufficient assessment and acknowledgement of the potential for different management scenarios to deliver greater social and economic benefits to coastal communities. There is clear evidence of the greater economic value of creel vs trawl caught *Nephrops*, acknowledged in the consultation paper, and a redistribution of opportunities that provides preferential access to creeling should be developed

and assessed. Creeling has a lower impact on the seabed than trawling and, assuming other impacts are managed appropriately (e.g. incentivisation to adopt sinking groundlines to reduce entanglements of marine mammals and sharks), such outcomes should have environmental and socio-economic benefits.

[7] DOI: 10.3389/feart.2023.1233163
[8] https://environmentalstandards.scot/our-work/our-analytical-work/how-much-could-marine-protected-areas-contribute-to-good-environmental-status-development-of-a-practical-assessment-approach/
[9] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9953252/

Q. 7 Do you have any comments on the partial Business Regulatory Impact Assessment (BRIA)?

LINK members acknowledge that the BRIA focuses primarily on negative impacts on fishing, while mentioning, but not assessing, potential positive environmental effects. For example, it identifies the market failure impacts but makes no attempt to value ecosystem services, habitat condition or the productive capacity of burrowed mud. This is a significant gap given our argument that the habitat is integral to the stock and the BRIA should model the long-term economic cost to the *Nephrops* fishery of burrowed mud degradation.
The BRIA also acknowledges that burrowed mud habitats are more vulnerable to climate change than *Nephrops* as a species itself, that established populations have limited ability to relocate once suitable habitat is lost, and that when combined with fishing pressure, these stressors have the potential to reduce habitat quality and lead to degradation or loss of suitable mud habitat. This directly reinforces the case for spatial management as a climate adaptation measure, as protecting burrowed mud from trawling pressure is also protecting it from the compounding effects of climate stress. The BRIA raises this but draws no management conclusion from it.

Finally we note the limited scope of the BRIA, appraising the options of publishing the FMPs or doing nothing. No alternative scenarios are assessed, e.g. spatial management scenarios, which makes it challenging for respondents to consider what other options could be explored. The consultation paper highlights clear evidence of the higher value per tonne of creel caught *Nephrops* than trawl caught. An ecosystem-based spatial management approach with support for diversification and one that allows preferential access for creeling as a lower impact fishing method would suggest greater economic potential, regionally if not nationally, as well as improved sustainability. Such alternative scenarios are not presented and compared in the BRIA.

Q. 8 Do you have any comments on the assessment of the environmental effects of the North Sea *Nephrops* FMP and the West Coast of Scotland *Nephrops* FMP, as set out in the environmental report?

The SEA summary concludes that the assessment of likely negative effects "did not identify any negative effects that posed a significant risk to the environment." This is inconsistent with the SNCB's explicit high risk rating for seafloor integrity under GES descriptor D6. Does the SEA use a different significance threshold that is not aligned with the SNCB risk framework, or it has not adequately engaged with the SNCB's findings? The SEA's "no significant risk" finding undermines the case for further action (e.g. spatial management) by suggesting the current trajectory is environmentally acceptable.

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