



The fishermen and community of The Holy Island of Lindisfarne strongly oppose Defra's selection of the waters around the island as a proposed site for Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) designation

Environmental sustainability and stewardship are already high priorities for the Holy Island of Lindisfarne community, with its exceptional natural landscape and wildlife and strong commitment to remain a living and working community.

However, we are strongly opposed to DEFRA's selection of the waters around the island as a proposed site for Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) designation, announced in July, which would ban all fishing.

The community and, as word is spreading an increasing number of supporters including many experts, believe it is both misguided and inequitable based on the criteria DEFRA themselves have set. These are to make every effort to minimise social and economic impacts whilst maximising ecological gain.

The fishermen on Holy Island are also keen to emphasise that it shouldn't be positioned as 'fishing against environment'. They are small scale sustainable fishermen – in fact lobster and crab potters, no actual fish are caught commercially nowadays because of conservation - with a strong sense of environmental stewardship to protect the resource on which they and their families depend. Important allies not enemies in protecting the oceans.

There is shock and dismay at the short amount of time allowed to put forward their case including an understanding of the delicate ecosystem of the island - and to put the record straight on both the high social and economic impact and the very questionable benefits. Main points include:

- The Holy Island fishery is already **an exemplar of sustainable fishing** with a clear priority on conservation. Low impact potting for crab and lobster in small boats is the only commercial fishing activity remaining in the proposed HMPA waters near the island

- **Multiple layers of conservation byelaws** are already in place in the proposed HPMA area, agreed between the Northumberland Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Society (IFCA) and fishing communities over the years
- The benefits of sustainable fishing and effective conservation measures are already being experienced first-hand. A Holy Island skipper said,

“We’ve gone through various byelaws over the years with NIFCA, pot limitations, berried hen bans, tagging systems, v-notching, and we’ve benefitted 100% through better catches, fishing has never been better, we’re already reaping the benefits of conservation”.
- Academic research also supports **the low impact of potting fisheries on marine habitat**. A study by Plymouth University published last year in the journal *Nature* concluded that: *“commercial pot fisheries are likely to be compatible with marine conservation when managed correctly at low, sustainable levels.... offering long-term benefits to fishermen and the environment”*. Another recent study specific to the Northumberland coast found negligible impacts of potting on substrate and epifaunal communities.

Balanced against this questionable ecological benefit, the economic and social impact on the small island community is disproportionately large. As a long-term resident islander says, “this will rip the heart out of the island community and leave it seriously depleted, and for what gain?”.

- The fishery is the heart of the island and has been central to Holy Island’s economy and **culture** for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. It is a thriving, highly valued career and way of life on the island, with new generations actively taking up positions as crew and inheriting boats from their families.
- Fishing is closely interlinked with tourism, together the two core economic activities of the island, with many fishing family members providing essential on-island work in hotels, bed and breakfasts, pubs and restaurants. As the owner of a thriving local restaurant commented:

“My staff on the island are families of the fishermen. If the fishery closes, my business will suffer because I cannot get the staff from the mainland due to the tides...also eating fresh Holy Island crab is a major part of the tourist experience here...”
- Fishing families also populate the island’s **primary school**
- At least 3 fishing families on the island are award-winning fully trained **first responders** in emergencies and represent 50% of the **coastguard team**– critical for a tidal island cut off from the mainland for part of each day. Without the coastguard team Holy Island would not be able to provide a 999 statutory emergency service on the island, both for residents and for the 800,000 visitors which visit each year. Recruitment is very challenging due to many factors including housing issues, lack of employment and the challenges of the tides. As a spokesperson from HM Coast Guard says,

“Holy Island Coast Guard Rescue Team (CRT) forms part of the Coast guard Rescue Service (CRS) which is a declared facility operated by HM Coastguard. Holy Island CRT currently consists of 6 volunteer Coastguard Rescue Officers (CRO) who all live and work on Holy Island. Their families and work support them in allowing our volunteers to give their free and available time to train in rescue skills and respond to 999 emergency call outs. This has been unchanged on Holy Island for the last 200 years, whereby the volunteer CROs are employed in the main stay island economies such as fishing, farming and tourism”.

- On the **economic front**, the Holy Island fishery is particularly vulnerable because fishermen cannot move to nearby fishing grounds beyond the proposed HPMA which are already fully utilised by other boats harboured at Seahouses and Berwick. It would risk serious conflict with neighbouring fishing communities and, as fishermen themselves point out, unsustainable levels of potting on the HPMA border. Nor can they relocate further out to sea: stocks are fewer there with dangerous health and safety risks for small boat fishing.
- Relocating a boat without physically moving home is also not possible because the island is cut off from the mainland twice a day by the tides. This also makes finding alternative jobs and schools on the mainland, whilst still living on the island, extremely difficult
- The large size of the proposed Holy Island/Lindisfarne HPMA (129km²) exacerbates the significant social and economic impact beyond the island itself.

The fishermen and all parts of the community are taking an active part in the consultative process which ends on 28th September, but the gravity of concern and issues at stake have prompted us to set out the facts and promote the importance and benefits of small-scale sustainable fishing in communities like Holy Island.

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NOTES and FURTHER INFORMATION

1. **The Holy Island of Lindisfarne**, usually referred to as Holy Island by the locals, is small tidal island situated on the North Northumberland coast near Berwick on Tweed. It has a population of some 150 permanent residents including children.

It has unique cultural, spiritual, and heritage assets with international significance as the Cradle of Northern English Christianity as well as exceptional natural landscape and wildlife. As a result, it has become an iconic tourist destination and a valuable gem in the region's heritage and visitor economy.

Holy Island 2050 is a community led initiative including the HI Parish Council, HI Community Development Trust, and St. Mary's Church, has been formed to lead and coordinate to develop a **vision and long-term strategy**.

We have been working on this for 2 years now, and central to the project is a community led approach encouraging involvement and participation through open meetings, workshops, and voluntary work groups. A 'HI 2050' group, including the HI Parish Council, HI Community Development Trust, and St. Mary's Church, has been formed to lead and coordinate.

There is a high level of consensus on Holy Island that **the main priority for Holy Island (HI) is to be a thriving community in the coming years, and for future generations**. The vision statement summarises the aspiration for Holy Island in the coming decades and provides the guiding light for further community work on strategy development, priorities, and projects.

HOLY ISLAND 2050 – The Vision

By 2050, Holy Island will be a thriving and resilient living and working community and a beacon of sustainable tourism.

Its approach will balance the needs of the island's natural environment, its community and visitors. It will benefit the island and all island residents, and at the same time preserve and celebrate its essence and unique character.

Fishing forms one of the vital components of the islands future and is a major employer on the island. The Holy Island vision for the future includes:

- ❖ A living island: with a school, homes, services, and facilities for local people
- ❖ An active and strengthened community
- ❖ A more resilient, diversified, and thriving island economy
- ❖ To support and protect existing HI businesses in all sectors – particularly sustainable fishing as well as farming and tourism related enterprises – maximising their contribution to the local economy, culture and the tourism experience
- ❖ To preserve and celebrate the uniqueness of Holy Island and the island's essence: its rich history; fishing heritage; natural, cultural, and spiritual assets
- ❖ A sustainable and strategic approach to visitors and tourism, balancing a world class experience for visitors with the perspective of the island community
- ❖ Investment for the benefit of the whole island and its residents
- ❖ Environmental sustainability

- 2. Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs):** In July 2022 DEFRA launched a 12-week public consultation to pilot five candidate Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in English waters. HPMAs are a highly restrictive conservation design, which prohibits all 'extractive, depositional and damaging use' to allow the ecosystem to recover to a mature 'rewilded' state.
- 3. The proposed Lindisfarne HMPA:** A large inshore site has been proposed at Lindisfarne, Holy Island, covering an area of 129 km².
- 4. Academic research on sustainable small-scale fisheries includes:**

Ferse, S.C., et al 2010. **Allies, not aliens:** increasing the role of local communities in marine protected area implementation. *Environmental Conservation*, 37(1), pp.23-34.

¹ Rees, A., et al 2021. Optimal fishing effort benefits fisheries and conservation. *Scientific reports, Nature*, 1(1), pp.1-15.

Stephenson, F. et al 2017. Experimental potting impacts on common UK reef habitats in areas of high and low fishing pressure. *ICES Journal of Marine Science*, 74(6), pp.1648-1659

6. Holy Island Coastguard Rescue Team is a busy station and they have responded to the following 999 call outs:

2022: 32 incidents (to date)

2021: 45 incidents

2020: 37 incidents

2019: 70 incidents

7. Conservation byelaws already in place in the proposed HPMA area/zone/site at Holy Island include:

- a ban on all mobile fishing, including trawling and dredging, in the entire North Northumberland Berwickshire Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- potting permit limitations which cap fishing efforts for commercial and recreational fishermen
- crustacean conservation byelaws and national legislation for v-notching,
- size limitation
- a ban on landing soft shelled or berried (with eggs) lobsters and brown crab
- most recently, adoption of a new byelaw prohibiting scallop dredging in the entire Northumberland IFCA district (which extends from the River Tyne to the Scottish border and out to 6 nautical miles).

8. Evidence of exploding populations of seals on the island (a sign of a thriving ecosystem) summarised in a Guardian article (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/dec/02/it-is-phenomenal-farne-islands-seal-numbers-expected-to-reach-new-high>). The figures were verified by the National Trust who have predicted a record year for seal numbers in the area.