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2023 - 2028: Friese Front, Doggersbank and Klaverbank

Natura 2000 management plans on the EEZ: The North Sea

Photo © Dutch Maritime Productions

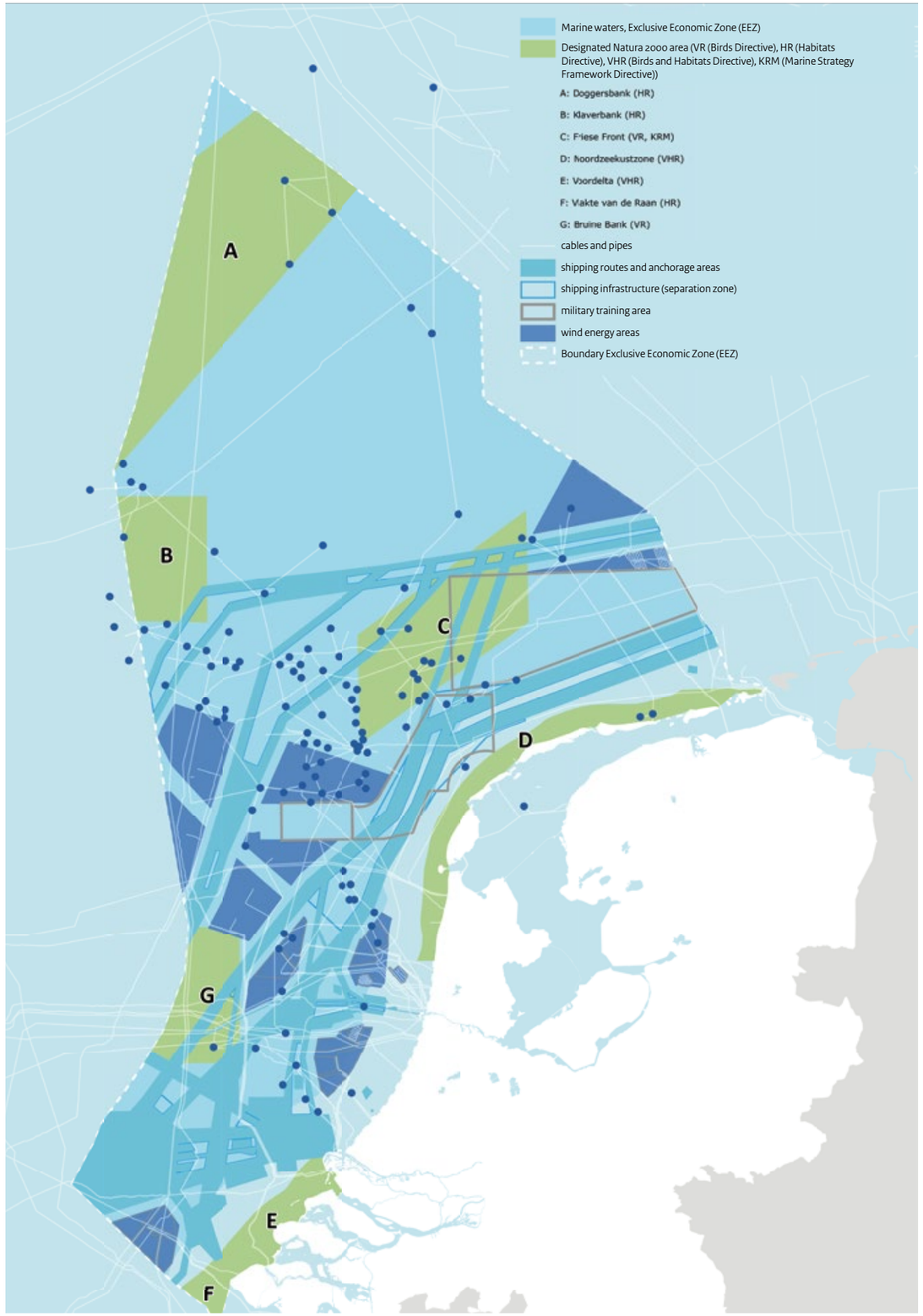
Reading guide

Friese Front, Doggersbank and Klaverbank are three unique habitats forming part of Natura 2000, a European network of special protection areas. Various European countries cooperate within this network to keep our nature diverse and healthy. Friese Front, Doggersbank and Klaverbank are located in the North Sea in the Dutch exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and all areas have unique qualities that deserve protection.

As well as describing the various animal species and habitats, the Nature 2000 management plans also include conservation and quality objectives to safeguard both the areas' size and biodiversity.
The management plans aim to strike a good balance between nature and human activities by formulating rules, conducting ongoing research and carrying out enforcement where necessary.

This summary describes the unique qualities of the three areas and also includes an overview of the applicable conditions, measures and guidelines.

This is a summary of three individual management plans for the Friese Front, Doggersbank and Klaverbank areas. For more information on Natura 2000, Rijkswaterstaat's management role in this and the complete management plans (including a list of measures per activity), visit RWSnatura2000.nl.



Friese Front

The Friese Front is an open marine area and lies some 75 kilometres from the Dutch coast. Shallow sandy soils predominant in the Dutch North Sea's southern section gradually make way here for deeper silty soils found in the Dutch North Sea's northern section.

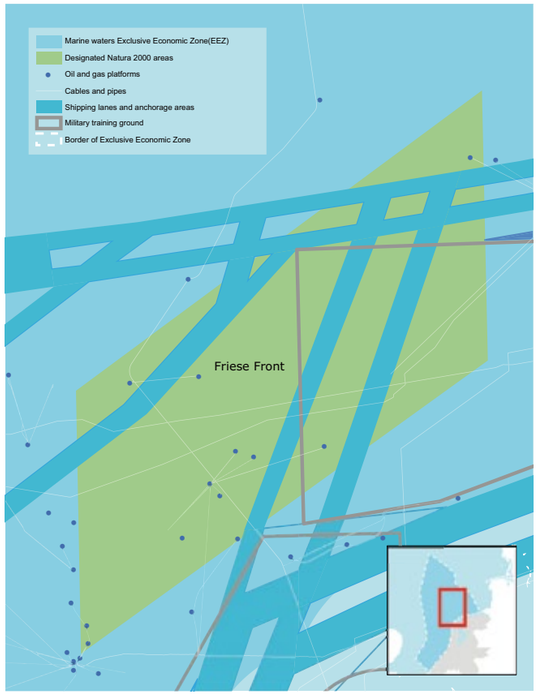
Sea currents converge in this transitional area, creating optimal conditions for algal growth. When these algae die, they sink to the seabed. This is known as algal rain. Many benthic species and fish feed on this algal rain, creating a delicious buffet for marine mammals and seabirds. The Friese Front therefore provides food for a wide range of marine life.

Protection for the guillemot

Friese Front is designated as a Natura 2000 area for the guillemot. Adult males and their young stay there in large numbers during their late summer moulting period. The males then lose their feathers, before growing new ones, while the young develop their first plumage here. As guillemots cannot fly when they are moulting and food is ample on the Friese Front, it forms the ideal habitat. Disturbance resulting from human activities should be avoided as far as possible during this vulnerable period.

Objectives for this area

The Natura 2000 objectives focus on retaining the size and quality of the Friese Front habitat for the guillemots' annual return.

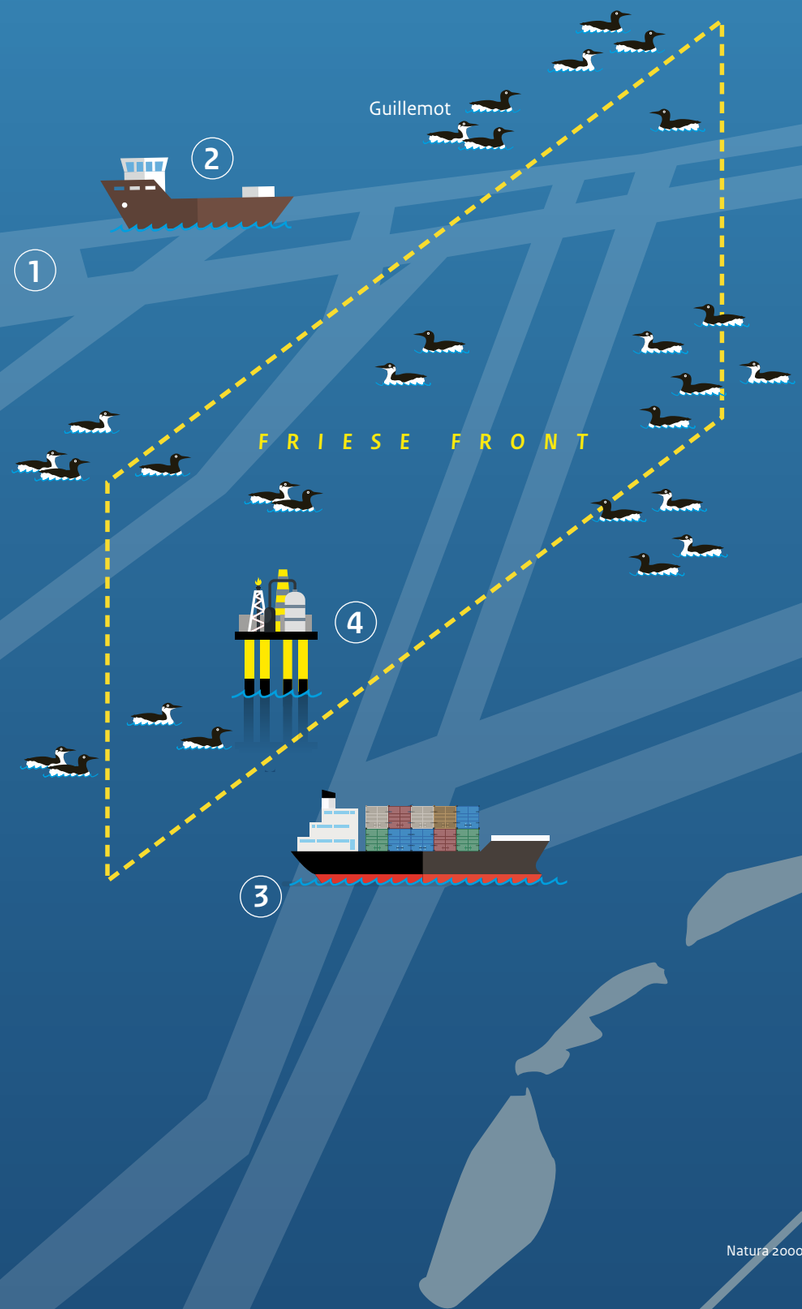


Guillemots on the colony (photo: Peter Heslenfeld)

Navigation in and around the Natura 2000 area

(measures apply from July to October)

Friese Front



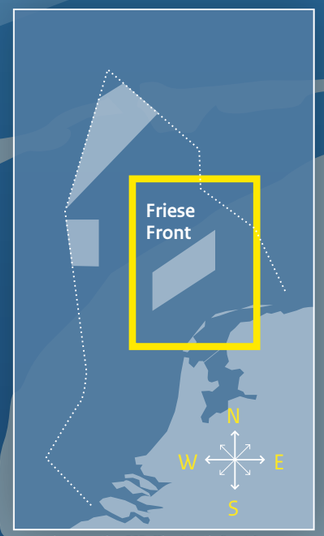
1
Shipping
- Remain in shipping lanes as far as possible
- Avoid the nature conservation area as far as possible
- Choose the shortest route (if sailing through the area is unavoi dable)
- Navigate around guillemot groups
- Vessel volumes and vessel move ments will be monitored

2
Information
Vessels will be informed about the presence of guillemots, how to recognise them and about the consequences of pollution

3
Leave nothing behind in the water
(including authorised discharges)

4
Work traffic
Work traffic should sail from and to the mining platforms outside the July to October period where possible.

Overview



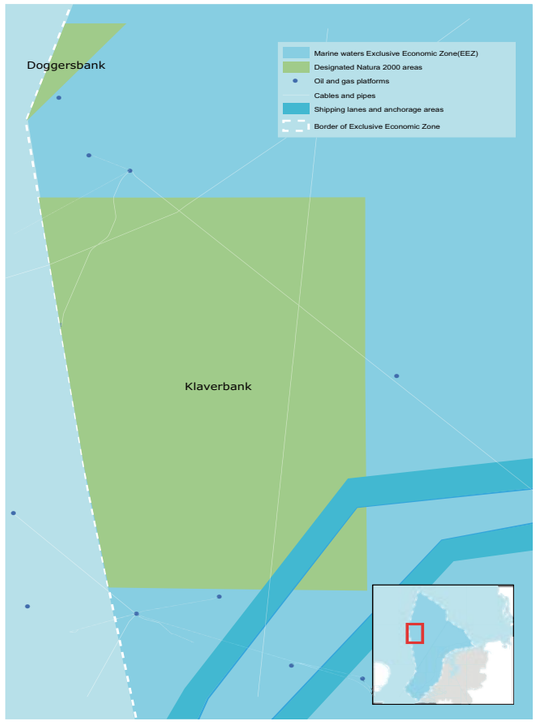
Doggersbank

Doggersbank, another Natura 2000 site, is located at the extreme north-western tip of the Dutch North Sea, around 275 kilometres northwest of Den Helder. The Dutch section of Doggersbank is part of a 300-kilometre-long sandbank stretching across a total area of around 25,000 square kilometres. So it's huge. The sandbank is located in the EEZ areas of the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. The Dutch Natura 2000 area therefore lies on the border of the Doggersbank nature conservation areas of the United Kingdom and Germany.

A special feature of Doggersbank is that, although the sandy bottom is always underwater, it is very shallow in many places; a combination that results in remarkable biodiversity. Plaice, whiting and cod, for instance, prefer to lay their eggs here, while for birds, including puffins and gannets, it's an area in which they search for food. Sharks, rays and marine mammals including porpoises, white-beaked dolphins, minke whales and common and grey seals feed here too. Quahogs also inhabit this area. This clam can live for hundreds of years.

Objectives for this area

The Natura 2000 objectives for Doggersbank focus on improving this permanently submerged sandbank's entire habitat quality. For porpoises, common seals and grey seals, the management plan focus is on conserving habitat size and quality. It also aims to conserve population size, i.e. their numbers in the area.

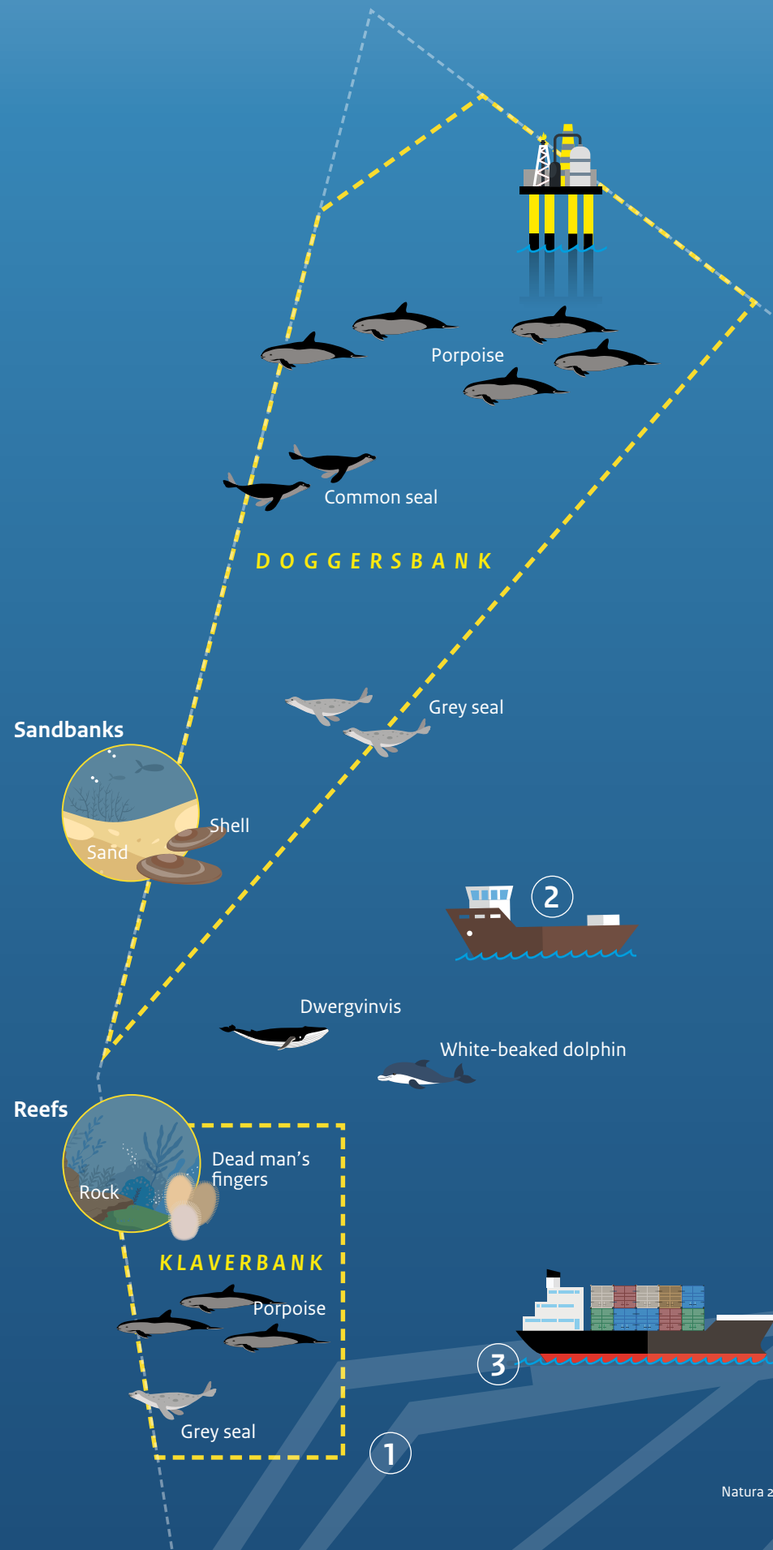


Porpoise (photo: Jeroen Kwakkel)

Navigation in and around the Natura 2000 area

(measures apply throughout the year)

Klaverbank and Doggersbank



1

- Remain in shipping lanes as far as possible
- Avoid the nature conservation area as far as possible
- Choose the shortest route (if sailing through the area is unavoidable)
- Vessel volumes and vessel move ments will be monitored

2

Informatie

Vessels will be informed about the presence of marine mammals, how to recognise them and about the consequences of pollution

3

Leave nothing behind in the water

(including authorised discharges)

Overview

Tubeworm (photo: Udo van Dongen)

Klaverbank

The various seabed types make Klaverbank unique. It is home to many benthic species that do not inhabit the largely sandy bed in the rest of our North Sea. It is also an important area for marine animals, including porpoises and seals. The area is located some 160 kilometres northwest of Den Helder.

In Klaverbank, coarse gravel and rocks alternate with a sandy seabed, and the deep, silty Botney Cut traverses the area to the southwest. This diversity attracts many benthic species. In the entire Dutch North Sea, the highest number of benthic species per hectare live in and on the Klaverbank seabed. The clear water also attracts unusual benthic species such as dead man's finger, a soft coral species, as well as the whelk, the North Sea's largest sea snail species. Fish, including the Norway bullhead and shore clingfish also live among the coarse gravel and rocks.

A popular buffet

Klaverbank is a breeding ground for herring, several ray species and cod. They lay their eggs here. Various seabirds visit the area throughout the year, including great skua, gannet, razorbill and guillemot, while marine mammals including porpoise, seal and minke whale, visit Klaverbank to search for food.

Objectives for this area

The Natura 2000 objective for Klaverbank is to conserve its size and improve the quality of this 'reef in the open sea' habitat. For animal species including porpoises, common seals and grey seals, the objective is to conserve both their habitat size and quality, as well as conserve their population size.

Suckerfish (photo: Udo van Dongen)

North Sea nature conservation

Conditions, measures and guidelines

We must be diligent with our North Sea. The conditions and measures in these management plans therefore focus on optimising tranquillity in these areas. However, we also aim to continue offering space for human activities.

11 | Rijkswaterstaat

Several sectors, including shipping and fishing, are active in the North Sea areas covered by these management plans. Gas is also extracted and the Navy and Air Force occasionally conduct air or water-based exercises in Friese Front. Seabed cables and pipelines also require maintenance. The following paragraphs explain the situations where permits are and are not mandatory and the activities for which exemptions are granted.

The Dutch Nature Conservation Act (Wet natuurbescherming) is used to determine the impact of activities on these areas' protected natural environment. Not all activities require a permit under this act, which is why different rules apply in the areas.

No permit required

There are activities at sea that do not require a permit. Examples include commercial shipping and disaster management. However, this does not mean that these activities have no impact on the environmental objectives. These activities can, for example, result in disturbance or pollution, which is why measures have been developed for these activities. The management plans include guidelines for shipping to ensure that vessels take the protected natural environment into account as far as possible. This includes remaining in shipping lanes and not discharging wastewater in these areas.

Permit required

If we are unable to rule out the negative impact of activities on the objectives, permits according to the Dutch Nature Conservation Act remain mandatory.

Permit requirement exemptions

Some activities require a permit according to the Dutch Nature Conservation Act but are exempted in the management plans. Some of these activities must first meet certain conditions as stated in the management plans. These conditions aim to optimise tranquillity and safeguard environmental goals in the areas, while still leaving space for these activities.

Fishing

Separate rules apply to fishing outside the 12-mile zone. The CFP (the European Common Fisheries Policy) is responsible for licences.

The management plans refer only to these international measures, which are monitored in the Netherlands by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The ministry also takes the objectives of these management plans into account. Certain sections of the areas will be closed to international fishing to help achieve the environmental objectives.

Permits and activities

This overview lists all permitted activities whether or not a permit is required. Some activities are exempt from the permit requirement under certain conditions.

Permit required
- Seismic surveys
- New drilling for mining operations
- Mineral extraction
- Air Force shooting operations
- Installation and removal of cables and pipelines
- Project-based research and monitoring

Permit not required
- Shipping and leisure marine activities
- Disaster management
- Incident management

Exemption from permit requirement under conditions
- Standard mining operations
- Navy shooting operations
- Clearance of explosives
- Ultrasonic surveys
- Military use of sonar systems
- Maintenance of markings, cables and pipelines
- Standard research and monitoring

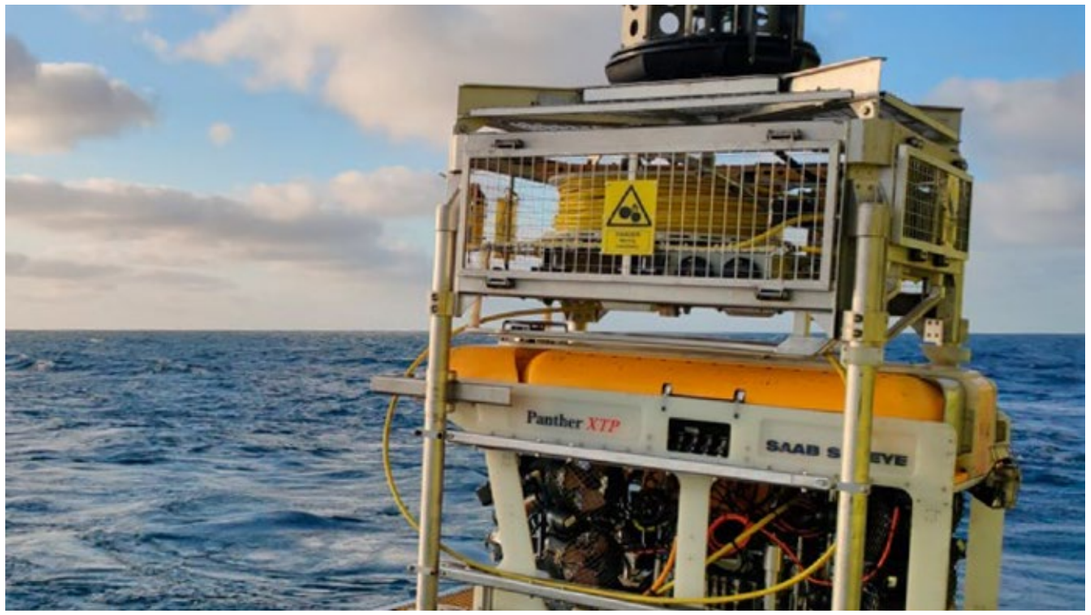
North Sea crab, octopus and dead man's thumb (photo: Udo van Dongen)

Communications and support

The Natura 2000 areas in the North Sea are located far from the coast. Supervision and enforcement of conditions, measures and guidelines is therefore complex. We rely on people taking their own responsibility for complying with the rules and to help them do this, we need good information and communication.

Good information is also necessary for broad user support. People will understand the imposition of restrictions in these areas more if they are familiar with the reasons behind the restrictions, which is why Rijkswaterstaat engages actively with user organisations. As well as sharing the conditions and measures for activities in the area, they also develop agreements on compliance. This creates clarity and understanding on both sides.

Regulators and competent authorities will only resort to enforcement if they later determine that conditions have not been met. Communication, supervision and enforcement are further detailed in the communications implementation plan and in the supervision and enforcement plans.



Research and monitoring

We need good research and monitoring to determine whether the objectives have been achieved. Collecting as much data as possible will clarify whether (and to what extent) the conditions and measures for use contribute to a healthy, tranquil habitat for animal species and the conservation of protected natural environments.

Further work to clarify the development and quality of protected species and habitats and the impact of various activities on them will take place in the coming years. The extent to which the measures deliver a positive contribution to achieving the objectives will also be identified. It is expected that, by the end of the management plan period, we will have more clarity as to whether all objectives for the three areas have been achieved. The impact of the measures on seabed ecosystems will only become apparent after a longer period. The development, quality and importance of the habitats for porpoises, common seals and grey seals is also still unclear. It is expected that improved monitoring and analysis will create more clarity about this in the next management plan period.

Monitoring

All protected animal species and habitat types in these areas will be monitored. This also applies to the implementation of measures. These data will be used to evaluate whether and to what extent the conditions and measures contribute to achieving the objectives. Shipping, oil and gas extraction, and fishing activities will also be monitored. The monitoring implementation plan details the monitoring activities and surveys. This plan may be supplemented or changed if necessary during the management plan period.

Stakeholders

The management plans were developed in coordination with representatives from the mining sector, shipping, leisure marine activities, nature organisations, fisheries and relevant authorities. These stakeholder contributions proved invaluable both in terms of the management plan content as well as for the support required for measures and supervision. This created a broad perspective with space for both nature as well as economic and other activities.