

Working with the Marine Industry

Marine aggregates and the historic environment

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A partnership between the marine aggregate industry and English Heritage has produced a world-leading guidance document.

The origins of sand and gravel extraction from the sea can be traced back to the 1700s, when material was removed from sand banks at low water to be used as ballast in un-laden sailing ships. Today, the UK marine aggregate industry produces over 22 million tonnes a year from 70 production licence areas located around the coastline of England and Wales.

The contribution of land-based quarrying to our understanding of the historic environment is well documented, and in recent years some of the most important finds have been associated with sand and gravel extraction. As the marine aggregate industry targets similar deposits of sand and gravel, located in over 20 metres of water, there exists the potential for items of archaeological significance to be present. This has brought some unique challenges to industry, regulators and curators.

Through the extraction of sand and gravel, dredging activity inevitably disturbs the seabed. The potential therefore exists for features of archaeological interest that may be present (drowned landscapes, shipwrecks and artefacts) to be similarly disturbed. Acknowledging this fact, the industry has worked to address these issues by becoming an integral part of the solution rather than part of the problem: by developing an archaeological guidance note in partnership with English Heritage. *Marine Aggregate Dredging and the Historic Environment: Guidance Note*¹ contains a comprehensive review of the issues; it provides advice and procedures to ensure that marine archaeology can be considered at every stage throughout the offshore development process – from accessing new licence areas, to mitigating and monitoring

sensitive sites and evaluating finds recovered during production.

Furthermore, the broad guiding principles that have been established could equally be applied to other marine sectors, as the marine aggregate industry is far from unique in its potential to disturb the marine historic environment. In recognition of the groundbreaking nature of this work, the guidance note was awarded a certificate of commendation in the 2004 British Archaeology Awards as a project that demonstrated a commitment to professional standards and ethics in archaeology.

From a marine developer's perspective, a greater level of understanding, knowledge and context allows a more confident assessment of significance to be made. This in turn allows us to manage, mitigate and monitor our operations more effectively, and therefore to minimise the potential for adverse effects. In this respect, the partnership between the marine aggregate industry and English Heritage represents an excellent example of sustainable development in practice.

1 BMAPA and English Heritage 2003 *Marine Aggregate Dredging and the Historic Environment: Guidance Note*. London: British Marine Aggregate Producers Association and English Heritage (available from www.english-heritage.org.uk and www.bmapa.org)