

Update on the Live Wrasse Fishery

A Live Wrasse Fishery emerged in D&S IFCA's District in 2015, and has been subject to robust, evidence-based management since 2017. As outlined in the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) Report, management measures for the Live Wrasse Fishery were most recently revised in August 2021 to implement a change in the conservation reference size (CRS) range for ballan wrasse (*Labrus bergylta*). Officer papers submitted to the February 2021 B&PSC meeting also highlighted evidence supporting a potential removal of the prohibition against landing rock cook wrasse (*Centrolabrus exoletus*). Following discussion at the February 2021 B&PSC meeting, this particular change in management was not supported or taken forward for public consultation.

The Live Wrasse Fishery opened on 16th July 2021, but no fishing for live wrasse has taken place this season due to mechanical problems with one of the permitted vessels. Though the second permitted vessel had no such problems, this fisher recognised that wrasse should not be held in storage areas for extended periods, and therefore decided not to fish as he would not be able to catch enough wrasse in a short timeframe to warrant booking a transport to Scottish salmon farms.

Wrasse fishers in D&S IFCA's District have supplied wrasse to the same Salmon Farm Agent since 2017. Via e-mails and phone calls with Officers in mid-August 2021, this Agent confirmed his intention to stop sourcing wrasse from D&S IFCA's District, with immediate effect. The Agent cited the mechanical issues highlighted above as an underlying element in this decision, but also indicated that the continued prohibition on removing rock cook wrasse from the fishery was a determining factor. Officers understand that the Agent will also stop receiving live wrasse caught in the Cornish side of Plymouth Sound.

As there is no longer a viable market for those who would otherwise target live wrasse in D&S IFCA's District, Officers have requested that the fishers in question return the identification tags used to mark wrasse pots. The use of unmarked pots for the capture of live wrasse would be in contravention of the Potting Permit Byelaw Conditions. Enforcement patrol by D&S IFCA will monitor potting in the Plymouth Sound. The future of the Live Wrasse Fishery in D&S IFCA's District therefore remains uncertain and will likely be partly shaped by the ability of culture facilities and other Live Wrasse Fisheries to meet demand from salmon farms. Though the Salmon Farm Agent indicated no clear intention to begin sourcing wrasse from Devon in future years, he also suggested that the production of wrasse in aquaculture facilities (an alternative to live capture of wrasse) is slow and somewhat unreliable, and that the cleaning efficacy of cultured wrasse remains untested.