

Monitoring of the Commercial Scallop Dive Fishery 2022

Officers' Recommendation

That Members note the contents of this paper, and

That the Category One Diving Permit Conditions remain unchanged.

Background

On 9th June 2022 D&S IFCA's Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee (B&PSC) agreed a series of changes to the commercial (Category One) Diving Permit Conditions to reflect the differences in the sector compared to demersal towed gear and allow greater access to removal of scallops during July, August, and September. From 1st July 2022 Commercial Diving Permit Holders had access in the months of July, August, and September for the removal of scallops from specified sites (which are based on Marine Protected Areas), subject to additional restrictions:

- A Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 110mm for scallop within the District in the months of July, August and September.
- A catch limit of 2400 scallops per vessel, per calendar day within the District during the months of July, August and September.
- A requirement for a fully functioning Remotely Accessed Electronic Monitoring Device (iVMS/VMS) to be fitted to vessels and with additional requirements if the device fails to transmit the required information.
- A catch restriction that's means when diving for scallops in the District in the months of July, August and September, no fishing outside of the District can take place on that fishing trip.

D&S IFCA Officers have been monitoring the commercial scallop dive fishery throughout July August and September 2022 and have produced a report on the outputs in particular in relation to the additional restrictions imposed by D&S IFCA. The full report (Agenda Item 10 - Annex A) has been provided as a supporting document to this paper.

Summary of the Monitoring Report on the Commercial Scallop Dive Fishery

In 2022 there were 18 vessels with Category One Diving Permits. Eleven vessels had iVMS units fitted to be able to dive for scallops in July, August and September as per the permit conditions. However, from iVMS and landings/catch app data, only six vessels actively fished during these months. In 2021 analysis of several years' landings data identified a maximum of seven vessels fishing in any one year. Therefore, there was no identified increase in vessels wishing to take advantage of the opening of July, August and September to the commercial divers.

iVMS data allowed the identification of three areas the commercial diving vessels operated in – Lyme Bay, Torbay and Start Bay. Six vessel entered the areas for 213 days over the three-month period, 139 days were spent by the three vessels working in Lyme Bay, 40 days in Torbay and 34 days in the Start Bay area. iVMS also identified preferred sites within these areas. iVMS was a key tool in identifying the days fished and areas worked.

Landings (based on sales notes) and Catch app data were obtained for the vessels with Category One Diving Permits in 2022 for the period 1st January – 7th December. The six

vessels landed a total of 95.491 tonnes of scallops (*Pecten maximus*) during 1st January – 7th December 2022, averaging 15.9 tonnes per vessel (ranging between 1.8 and 44.3 tonnes per vessel for the year). On average, landings were higher between April – October, and highest between May – August. Of the 95.491 tonnes landed during 2022, 34.2 tonnes were landed during the July – September 2022. During this summer access period, vessels landed an average of 6.8 tonnes each, ranging between 0.27 and 18.3 tonnes per vessel for the three-month period. Officers, using weight data collected from 200 scallops landed on Brixham market, were able to convert the landings weights to an approximate number of scallops per trip. Landings by divers into D&S IFCA's District during July to September 2022 (inclusive) appeared to be in compliance with the bag limit of 2400 scallops per vessel per day.

The analysis also looked at the value of the additional access between July and September for the vessels assessed and demonstrated high additional income during these months.

Landings from the commercial dive fishery between 1st January and 7th December 2022 were compared to the landings from the scallop dredge fleet landings in 2019 and found to be approximately 5% of the dredged scallop landings.

D&S IFCA undertook a 'have your say' survey requesting responses from Category One Divers on their opinions on the changes in management introduced in 2022. Three fishers responded to the survey that included questions about the Permit Conditions that were introduced:

1. **Summer season access:** Fishers supported the greater access and stated the positive impact it had on their businesses. They pointed out that the bad weather conditions from October onwards in 2022 limited their diving, and that the summer season had been key to their businesses.
2. **2400 scallop per vessel per day limit:** Two fishers agreed with the limit. One diver suggested there should be a limit of 1200 per diver instead of per vessel.
3. **Restrictions on diving within D&S IFCA District on each fishing trip.** Two out of the three respondents were happy with this measure. One suggested it would be beneficial to dive in Dorset on a separate trip on the same day.
4. **MCRS of 110mm:** All divers were supportive of this, and indicated they would be sticking to this limit or larger throughout the year. One suggested it would be good if it was applied to scallop dredging fleet too.

The opening of July, August and September to the commercial diving sector (to remove scallop subject to a range of restrictions) has been received very positively by the divers and has not resulted in an influx of new diving permit applications nor a full take up of the opportunity to prosecute the fishery during these months (via the fitting of IVMS). Enforcement patrols have seen compliance with the regulations. Three fishers actively engaged with the scallop spawning research (Agenda Item 9.).

Background Papers:

- B&PSC meeting 23rd Feb 2023 - Agenda Item 10 (Annex A) – Monitoring of the Commercial Scallop Dive Fishery 2022 Report (15th February 2023)
- Minutes from B&PSC meetings (D&S IFCA Website Resource Library)