

Skerries Bank Angling Zone Update and Recommendations

1. Purpose of the Report

To report to the Authority on the findings of the initial baseline research project to develop an area for sea angling interests, through the use of voluntary measures.

2. Background

Overview of the Development of the Skerries Bank Angling Zone

D&S IFCA's Angling Strategy (2014-2016) committed to the development of the RSA sector. Spatial management to protect important areas for sea angling from conflicts with other gears was highlighted as a potential way forward. Three sites were chosen after informal discussions with local anglers; the Skerries Bank, the Emmstrom wreck and Burnham, Berrow and Brean.

For the Skerries Bank, following a public consultation, a series of meetings were held with three user groups that regularly use the site (private anglers (shore and boat), charter boat operators and commercial fishermen). These meetings addressed each sector's fishing activities, their perceptions of other user group's use of the site and any conflicts or concerns about the implementation of an Angling Zone. The initial meetings also highlighted a number of shared concerns amongst the different user groups. The first of these was illegal trawling in the closed area. Secondly, whilst all user groups felt that the level of commercial activity was compatible with their use of the site, any increase in activity targeting plaice and rays would be detrimental to private and charter angling, as well as to existing commercial fishermen's catches. A voluntary code of conduct was therefore developed which aimed to balance the different sector's needs. This included a ban on commercial targeting of plaice, a 10m size limit for any vessels netting or longlining, a requirement for netting gear to be marked, and a bag limit for anglers of 10 plaice and 3 rays per day.

Monitoring plan findings

A monitoring plan was developed to collect as much data as possible on the use of the site, to ground-truth the anecdotal information. The plan included transect surveys recording vessels spatial and temporal use of the site, interviews of recreational anglers on the shore, and fishing diaries submitted by commercial fishermen. Whilst it was beyond the scope of the report to give a complete picture of the use of the site by different user groups, it does give an insight into the importance of the site to all three user groups. It was found that there is much overlap, both spatially, and temporally in their use of the site. The full Skerries Bank Angling Zone report will be published on the D&S IFCA's website shortly.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations for future work

From data-collection to publication this baseline report has taken five years to complete not only due to other pressures on officer time, but also on other matters important to the angling sector. These included the development of the netting permit byelaw, the

introduction of iVMS on mobile gear vessels, the commencement of bass research, and the introduction of research and management of the wrasse fishery that emerged in 2015.

Given the importance of the Skerries Bank to all three user groups included in this study and in the absence of detailed socio-economic analyses, the continued development of a co-management approach appears to be the most appropriate way forward. Crucially, the initial meetings also highlighted that an increase in commercial fishing effort could have a negative effect on all three user groups. This warrants further work to elucidate whether there have been changes in use of the site since the original data collection. The recommended next steps in the development of the Skerries Bank Angling Zone are therefore as follows:

- **To repeat the engagement work which took place in 2014 to compare each user groups perception about the current activity levels of different sectors against the baseline recorded in the Skerries Bank Angling Zone Report. This is the next phase of work by D&S IFCA.**
- **To consider further monitoring work to overcome some of the limitations of the data e.g. a more in-depth consideration of temporal differentiation in sectoral use of the site.**
- **To review the status of the key stocks (only possible over broad geographic scales) and local landings of the same species to understand the conflict on a broader spatial scale.**
- **To undertake a more in-depth review of the success of other spatial/ temporal management systems, introduced for the development of one or multiple user groups. This will aid decisions on the future management of the site.**
- **To complete an additional short report on the use of Hallsands and Beesands and adjacent waters by each sector.**

The findings of these recommendations and the continued development of the Skerries Bank Angling Zone should act as a springboard for a review of the Authority's RSA Strategy.