

Report on the pressures and risks to the static gear fisheries in D&S IFCA's District

Officers' Recommendations

- a) That Members consider the issues raised by the South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen
- b) That the B&PSC determine whether Officers should focus their work on matters raised in this paper, and consequently delay other workstreams

Background

The South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen (SD&CS) is a cooperative association made of over 80 shellfish fishing vessels (potters/crabbers), shellfish merchants, exporters processors and shellfish businesses. Their Executive Officer has approached D&S IFCA and raised concerns on behalf of the SD&CS about the potential displacement impacts within D&S IFCA's District which may come as a result of application of the fisheries Non-Quota Species (NQS) aspects of the trade and cooperation agreement (TCA). The TCA is a piece of post EU-exit legislation that sets out what species and how much EU and UK vessels can catch in each other's waters now the UK has left the EU, and sets out a reference period of 2012 - 2016, meaning that catches of NQS in the future will be capped at the level of catches during 2012-2016. The NQS tonnage allowance outlined in the TCA is for 12,365 tonnes for all species (both shellfish and finfish) each year, which will be inadequate generally, as landings of NQS, across all species in 2019 was 15,005.84 tonnes.

Nationally the potting fleet has expanded significantly since 2016 on the back of increased landings and markets worldwide, including exports into China. This significant expansion in vessel numbers prosecuting species wholly in EU waters includes a crab fishery that exists in the German Bight. During the reference period there were around three UK registered vessels targeting crab in the German Bight, and now there are eleven, and there is knowledge of five more vessels having been commissioned to join that fishery. These vessels are specifically built to operate in offshore waters, have the efficiency and capacity to haul large number of pots (5,000-8,000 pots per vessel) and hold their catches in large vivier tanks in the hold of the vessels extending the time at sea to weeks rather than days. Many of these vessels are under 15m (14.99m) in overall length and unlike the inshore vessel operating in D&S IFCA's District, do not stop due to increment weather and tides.

Since the introduction of the Fisheries Act in 2020 and the Government's Joint Fisheries Statement, Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) are being developed. Five frontrunner FMPs will be published in 2023. These frontrunners include plans for the Crab & Lobster, Whelk, Scallop, Bass, the Channel NQS and the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel mixed flatfish. D&S IFCA sits on the crab and lobster FMP, as well as the Channel NQS. These plans are at the stage where the objectives of the plans have been developed and stakeholder engagement is taking place.

D&S IFCA is also aware that under the Project UK Fisheries Improvement Plan for Crab and Lobster in the South West, stakeholder engagement workshops have taken place in Devon and Cornwall to understand what harvest control rules – or management- fishers catching crab and lobster think would be effective and appropriate to manage the stocks. The report of the outputs from the workshop is still in draft but those involved raised concerns about the pressure on the stocks and the potential impacts from the 'nomadic' vessels. Restrictions on the 'larger' more efficient vessels was raised as a management option at all the workshops.

Concerns raised by SD&CS.

To date discussions on possible management measures through the Crab and Lobster FMP have yet to take place although issues relating to the potential displacement of these vessels into UK and inshore waters have been raised both by the businesses that own the offshore vessels but also by those members of the fishing industry that work inshore (SD&CS) and North Devon Fishermen's Association.

SD&CS have informed D&S IFCA that these concerns have been repeatedly raised with Defra over a number of years, information on how the impacts of displacement will be generally countered is scant. There are concerns regarding the capacity of these vessels, stock sustainability and the impact on the inshore fishery .

SD&CS report that they have been in communication with their inshore colleagues in Cornwall, who are struggling to remain viable as a result of competition in the inshore area from increased effort by these vessels that were designed to be more efficient and fish further offshore than 'traditional' inshore fishing vessels, and changes in their fishing patterns (albeit that some of these vessels are choosing to fish inshore for reasons other than the TCA such as moving away from crab to inshore lobster grounds). SD&CS have requested that D&S IFCA try to find a way to stop this situation being replicated in Devon's inshore waters. These concerns reflect the current situation in Cornwall and the ever-present risk that these efficient 'offshore' vessels may decide to move part or all of their operations inshore, as many of these vessels are 14.99m in overall length.

Potential risks from these more efficient 'offshore' vessels include gear conflict with the inshore fleet (longer strings of pots shot over those used by day vessels) displacement of existing vessels; positioning by the offshore vessels on inshore grounds; increased effort on the inshore crab stocks; potential for working days/weeks through all weather and tidal conditions without a break; targeting effort on inshore lobster stocks; and undermining Gentlemen's Agreements between fishers that exist in potting areas such as the Inshore Potting Agreement Area.

Consideration by B&PSC

As mentioned, D&S IFCA sits on national Crab and Lobster FMP groups and the Project UK Southwest Crab and Lobster FIP. During the FMP meetings, these concerns and other issues have been raised and are listed to be considered under the plan's future objectives. However, management measures have not yet been discussed nor any timings for the implementation of any proposals.

D&S IFCA has current commitments under its Annual Plan, and these may need to be reviewed as a result of the risks to the static gear (potting) fisheries from changes in fishing pressure in the D&S IFCA's District, highlighted by SD&CS. If the B&PSC recognises that D&S IFCA Officers should focus attention on these risks raised to crab fisheries, then this would require changes to the current timetable in particular to delay the workstream (KT106) to carry out consultation with the interested sectors in the Skerries Angling Zone, and potentially a delay to the start of the review of the existing Netting Permit Conditions.

Members will recognise under their role to consider the D&S IFCA's shared vision that D&S IFCA looks to deliver low impact inshore fisheries and support sustainable fishing practices, and, where applicable, consider the precautionary approach to its management.

Background Papers

Members Handbook V1.0 – May 2022.