

DEVON SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE

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Devon Sea Fisheries Committee – Lobster Tagging Programme 2008 -2009

In 2008 a lobster tagging programme commenced. The programme was initiated to look at the movement and growth of lobsters along the coast of North Devon and around Lundy Island. Natural England providing funding for the purchase of tags and for the prize draw to encourage fishermen to return information on recaptured tagged lobsters. Fishermen involved in the lobster fishery in North Devon were contacted and information was sent to them regarding the programme. A majority of the fishermen were very supportive and willing to have Devon Sea fisheries Officers on board to undertake the tagging and survey work.

1000 yellow streamer tags were purchased each with a unique 4 digit number. 11 days at sea tagging lobsters was achieved in 2008. 910 lobsters were tagged, 275 in the No Take Zone at Lundy Island. Those tagged in the NTZ and Marine Nature Reserve around Lundy were juveniles, adults and berried females whilst in all other areas along the North Devon coast only those lobsters below 90mm carapace length (DSFC minimum landing size - Byelaw 27) and berried lobsters were tagged. For each lobster tagged carapace length was recorded together with the sex of the lobsters and position it was returned to sea. Other information was recorded, for example, whether the lobster was crippled, soft and colour of eggs if berried. Fishermen were given callipers to aid in measuring recaptured lobsters and they reported the location of recapture together with size, sex and reproductive status of females. If the lobster was once again returned to sea its position was recorded.

Up to the end of 2008, fishermen reported 80 tagged lobsters having been recaptured. By August 2009 a further 83 yellow tagged lobsters were recaptured and reported by fishermen. Out of the 910 lobsters tagged in 2008 this gives an approximate percentage recapture report rate of 18%. Information gathered from these recaptures was used to calculate number of days the lobsters were at liberty between recaptures; growth from tagging to recapture and the distances and direction moved was calculated by mapping the data on GIS.

IN 2009 two further tagging programmes were completed, in June/July and September. Natural England funded these programmes. A fishing boat was chartered and six strings of 35 pots were placed locations around Lundy Island in the NTZ and MNR to replicate the location of survey strings from the previous year. Orange streamers tags were used each with a unique 4 digit number (consecutive to those used in 2008). In total 744 lobsters were tagged in the MNR in 2009 with 421 lobsters tagged from out of the NTZ. The later survey recaptured 53 lobster s tagged from the June survey. Some lobsters caught in the NTZ in the June survey showed signs of shell disease and a few were limp and moribund. After discussions with Cefas it was decided that one of their officers would accompany DSFC on the September tagging programme and haemolymph samples were taken from all tagged lobsters and a few whole lobsters were taken for assessing the health of lobsters around Lundy Island.

The lobster tagging project is ongoing and data are being collated from fishermen's recapture reports on a regular basis. Analysis of data is therefore ongoing and a report of the findings will be produced in 2010.