

Devon and Severn IFCA News

Devon and Severn IFCA involved in MMO project assessing non-lethal seal deterrent options.

D&S IFCA officers are working with marine consultants ABPmer in conducting non-lethal seal deterrent field trials using acoustic deterrent devices (ADD) for the MMO funded through EMFF.



Seal interactions with fishing gear such as depredation (taking catch) of fish has seen an increase in South West England over the last year. Depredation is a particular issue for static net fisheries that leads to notable economic costs from loss of catch, increased gear handling and gear damage. These interactions can lead to seal mortality, potentially as a result of accidental bycatch whilst the seals remove or eat fish from the nets. Fishers have a legal right to shoot seals if they interfere with their nets or catch, known as the 'netsmen's defence' but this practice is rarely carried out.

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) Marine Conservation Team has a duty to provide advice on interactions between seals and fishing gears. DEFRA policy is that non-lethal methods should be tried and shown to be ineffective, prior to resorting to shooting. However, effective non-lethal seal deterrents are difficult to implement from fishing vessels in open water.



In order for the MMO to improve the specificity of advice, ABPmer and NFFO are running a project looking at the interactions between seals, fishing gear and the effectiveness of non-lethal ADDs. Two gillnet fishers within the D&S IFCA's District are currently carrying out field trials with the ADDs. D&S IFCA is assisting in the project by providing logistical support and attending the fish market in Brixham and providing ABPmer with the grade,

weight, size and counts of mackerel landed. Once the field trials have been completed, the data will be analysed by ABPmer to compare the difference in catch between the test (with the ADD) and control nets (without ADD).

Need more Information?

You can read more about the different work being undertaken by D&S IFCA by examining the [D&S IFCA Annual Plan \(2019-20\)](#).