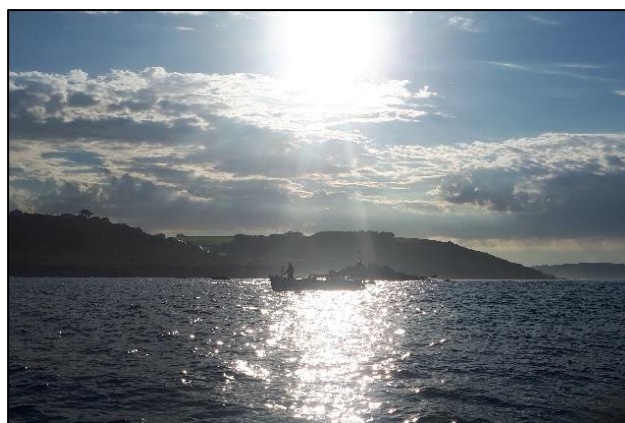


Devon and Severn IFCA News

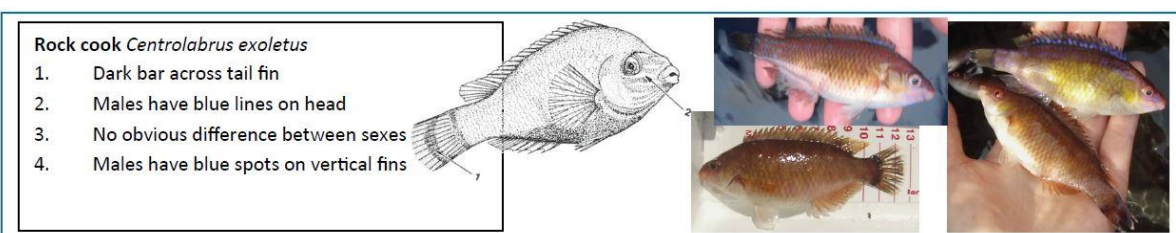
Update on the Live Wrasse Fishery

D&S IFCA's Environment Officers are now undertaking observer surveys as part of the fully documented Live Wrasse Fishery in the Plymouth Sound. Using D&S IFCA's RIB, officers are working with fishers to implement a new COVID-safe observer survey protocol that minimises health risks while allowing continued monitoring of fishing activity. The data collection programme provides an opportunity for D&S IFCA to closely monitor the fishery, including any changes over time that may relate to sustainability, and to implement adaptive management.



The Live Wrasse Fishery targets wrasse for use in Scottish salmon aquaculture, where they clean parasites (lice) from the salmon. The salmon farming industry regards this as a more environmentally-friendly method of parasite control than using chemicals.

The fishery in D&S IFCA's District re-opened for commercial fishers on 16th July 2020, following a closed fishing period from 1st May to 15th July that D&S IFCA implemented in order to allow wrasse to be protected during their spawning season. Four wrasse species have historically been targeted in this fishery: goldsinny, ballan, corkwing and rock cook. However, following a [public consultation](#), a recent update to the [Potting Permit Conditions](#) has prohibited the removal of rock cook from the fishery.



This change has been made in light of evidence presented to the Byelaw and Permitting Sub-Committee in D&S IFCA's Three Year Comprehensive Review of the Live Wrasse Fishery. This Comprehensive Review suggested that, although the fishery is sustainable for most species, catches and landings per unit effort (fish per pot) have recently declined for rock cook, and that this species may benefit from additional protection.

A final report documenting the evidence base and the complete decision-making process to amend the Potting Permit Conditions has been produced and can be read [here](#).

Managing Impacts of Commercial Fisheries on European Marine Sites

The Three-Year Comprehensive Review was recently used, alongside other evidence, to inform an assessment of the likely impacts of the Live Wrasse Fishery on the environment of Plymouth Sound and Estuaries SAC and Tamar Estuaries Complex SPA (Plymouth Sound and Estuaries EMS). This assessment was in line with Defra's 'Revised Approach' to the management of commercial fisheries in European Marine Sites (including Plymouth Sound and Estuaries EMS). This approach aims to ensure that all existing and potential fishing activities are managed so that they either (a) have no likely significant effect on a site in view of its conservation objectives or (b) following assessment, can be concluded to have no adverse effect on the integrity of the site.

D&S IFCA's officers prepared five Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) that assessed the effects of fish traps (wrasse pots) on the following features of Plymouth Sound and Estuaries: rock (including the fish communities of rocky reef ecosystems), intertidal sediments, subtidal sediments, seagrass and shad. Previous versions of these HRAs had been completed in January 2018 and sent to Natural England for its formal advice. As this was over two years ago and a Comprehensive Review of the Live Wrasse Fishery (a key pressure considered within the original HRAs) has taken place, with changes in management of the fishery implemented over time, this is an appropriate opportunity to review these HRAs.

Natural England has now provided its formal advice on the revised HRAs. Natural England has advised that they are content that D&S IFCA has used the best available evidence to carry out these assessments and to determine whether management is required to ensure the protection of site features from direct and indirect impacts of fishing with wrasse pots. It is Natural England's view that D&S IFCA's officers have appropriately identified: (1) activities likely to have a significant effect on site conservation objectives; and (2) any management measures required in order to ensure there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the European Marine Site(s). Natural England has confirmed that it believes that any foreseeable risk or harm to designated sites has been appropriately assessed and agrees with D&S IFCA's conclusion of no adverse effect to site integrity.

Natural England has also highlighted that D&S IFCA's ongoing commitment to monitoring this fishery, together with the application of the current thinking on adaptive risk management, provides an appropriate mechanism for re-assessing this risk. The Comprehensive Review, and the adaptive management measures implemented for the Live Wrasse Fishery by D&S IFCA, are underpinned by the evidence collected via observer surveys. These surveys will therefore continue throughout the 2020 – 2021 fishing season and will inform a further review of the fishery early in 2021. This review will also account for evidence highlighted by ongoing PhD research at the University of Exeter, which focuses on the ecology of wrasse and the impacts of the fishery along the south coast. D&S IFCA is mindful of Natural England's recommendations for further study, and are also exploring Natural England's advice to (a) address some compliance issues (highlighted in the HRAs and the Comprehensive Review) that will help to ensure a fully documented fishery, and (b) consider further reviews of the HRAs following any potential changes to management of the Live Wrasse Fishery in Cornwall IFCA's District, which includes part of Plymouth Sound.

The HRAs and Natural England's formal advice are available to view in D&S IFCA's Website Resource Library and on the Environment & Research/[Wrasse Display Page](#).

D&S IFCA's officers look forward to working with the fishers over the coming weeks and months to ensure that fishing is carried out sustainably and in line with the Potting Permit Conditions, and that an appropriate balance is struck between the social and economic benefits of fishing, and the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, fishery effects.