

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority's Response to the Call for evidence on a proposal for a King Scallop Fishery Closure in ICES area VIId from mid-August to mid- October 2021

The MMO acting on behalf of all four Fisheries Administrations (UKFAs) is seeking views on a proposal to close the ICES area VIId King Scallop fishery between mid-August and mid-October to vessels of all lengths. Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) has provided the following information to answer the questions put forward:

1) A closure to scallop dredging in ICES area VIId from mid-August to mid-October 2021 to all vessels.

The assessment of King Scallop stock status for selected waters around the English Coast 2019/2020 (Lawler et al, 2021) provides detailed information on the scallop stock status. It is noted from this report that there is a voluntary closure for part of UK scallop fleet in quarters 2 and 3, which is confirmed by the lower landings during this time. D&S IFCA would suggest that bringing in a closure to scallop dredging in the ICES area VIId would reinforce these voluntary measures. As the information on spawning indicates that this takes place between May and October with peak spawning in the summer months and trickle spawning through the period, a period of closure to scallop dredging will protect the spawning stock allowing the scallop to spawn before capture. D&S IFCA has a closed season for the removal of scallops during the months of July, August and September each year within its District. (which lies in ICES area VIIe- Division 27.7.e.L).

The stock assessments for Area 27.7.d.N within ICES rectangle Area VIId have shown that the harvest rates have been much higher than the MSY candidate harvest rate between 2017 and 2019 indicating a pattern of overexploitation of scallop stocks. The report suggests that for 2020 the harvest rate is just below MSY candidate harvest rate but is based on scallop removal estimates. Whilst this uncertainty exists and measures to protect the spawning stock are valid, it may be more appropriate to await the updated figures for 2019 and 2020 to ensure that the most accurate data on scallop removals are used rather than estimates for both these years. This would confirm whether the closure of ICES Area VIId to scallop dredging is the right course of action to avoid further overexploitation.

The stock assessment for Area 27.7.e. show a marked difference between the harvest rate on the dredge portion of the stock (from the dredge survey only) and the harvest rate on the wider stock (incl. UWTV survey in unexploited areas). For 27.7.e.L the harvest rates (2017- 54.7%, 2018 -77%, 2019 -40.4% and 2020- 30.6%) on the dredged portion of the stock far exceed the MSY candidate harvest rate of 21%. If the wider stock is considered including UWTV survey data, the harvest rates still exceed the MSY candidate harvest rate for all years apart from 2020 which uses estimated removal values. Will there be consideration of a closure in this part of VIIe to protect the spawning stock as this appears to indicate over exploitation in this area? For 27.7.e.I. the harvest rate for the dredged portion of the stock is higher than the MSY candidate harvest rate for 2018 and 2020 although for 2020 the harvest rate on the wider stock is lower than the MSY candidate harvest rate of 19.5%. Again is there a similar consideration to introduce a closer for scallop removal from mid-August to mid-October in this area?

2) Do you think a closure in ICES area VIId would lead to displacement of fishing for scallops into other areas? If so, which areas?

Whilst D&S IFCA can provide information in relation to its District and to some extent neighbouring IFCA Districts it would be useful if information had been provided to indicate how much displacement of effort is envisaged by UKFAs due to the closure. As the closure would be in the UK part of VIId is envisaged there will be displacement into the French part of VIId or further west into VIIe.

D&S IFCA has an annual closed season for the removal of king scallop in July, August and September. The fleet displaced from VIId are likely to move to the open areas in VIIe (outside of D&S IFCA's District) including the western part of VIIe and Cornish waters. Cornwall IFCA does not have a closed season and vessels of up to 16.46m overall length can fish for shellfish in its District. There will cause increased pressure on scallop stocks in VIIe and may lead to overexploitation. As detailed in the Report (Lawler et al, 2021) and summarised above some areas of VIIe are currently close to overexploitation and this further pressure is likely to cause the harvest rate to exceed the MSY candidate harvest rate. ICES Division 27.7.e.L (Lyme Bay) harvest rates on the dredged portion of the stock have shown that they have been higher than the MSY candidate harvest rate. With D&S IFCA permitted scallop vessels seasonally displaced into waters outside D&S IFCA's District and the displacement of vessels from VIId this may lead to increased competition for scallop fishing opportunities and could cause some local vessels to try and avoid this increased competition by fishing inside D&S IFCA's District within the D&S IFCA's closed season.

Scallop vessels up to 15.24m may fish in D&S IFCA's District in October once the local closed season is over. Annually there is a rush for vessels to enter D&S IFCA's District to resume fishing for scallops. As the proposed closed season in VIId extends mid-October it can be predicted that there will be an additional increase in pressure inside D&S IFCA's District from those vessels that meet the criteria to fish in there (15.24m and under in overall length, and have a D&S IFCA Mobile Fishing Permit).

3) How a closure of ICES area VIId to scallop dredging would impact you and your business, and other fisheries?

There will be a need for D&S IFCA to increase monitoring of scallop vessels to ensure compliance with its Mobile Fishing Byelaw and Permit Conditions during its closed season and within prohibited areas due to the increased displacement, pressure on stocks and competition for areas to fish in VIIe outside of the District.

4) If you are a vessel owner/vessel agent or skipper: is your vessel over or under 15 metre in overall length?

N/A

5) Do you have any other comments?

No.

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Sarah Clark
Deputy Chief Officer
Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Contact details:

I am happy to be contacted via e-mail: s.clark@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk
or Mobile: 07515 050887