



## **Devon and Severn IFCA**

# **Response to MMO Consultation on a Seasonal Closure of the Crawfish Fishery in ICES Area 7**

**4<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

The role of Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) is to lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries within its District, which covers the area from baselines out to six nautical miles in English waters as shown in Figure 1. D&S IFCA is responding to the MMO's Formal Consultation on the seasonal closure of the Crawfish Fishery in ICES Area 7, as a small crawfish fishery exists within D&S IFCA's District.

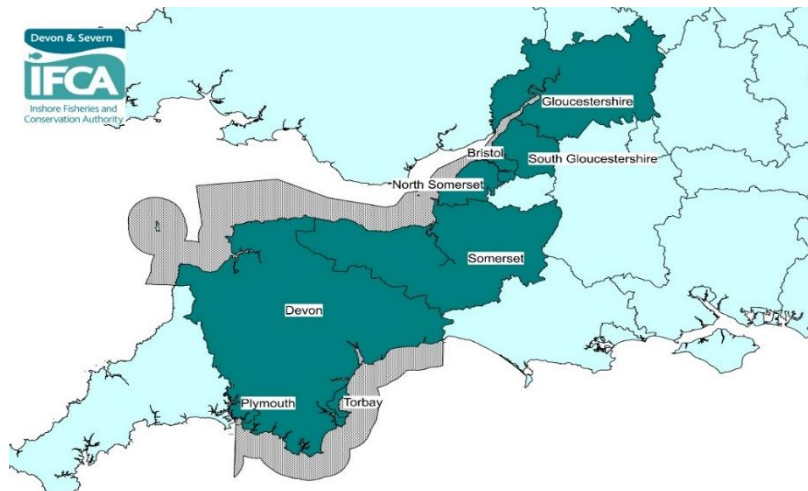


Figure 1. Map of Devon and Severn IFCA's District, showing in grey the sea area from baselines to 6nm (or the median line with Wales).

The ten regional IFCAs have a shared vision to: *“lead, champion and manage a sustainable marine environment and inshore fisheries, by successfully securing the right balance between social, environmental and economic benefits to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry.”*

The powers and duties of all IFCAs are provided by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (MaCAA, 2009), in which the main legal duties are described in sections 153 and 154. D&S IFCA statutory duties are to :

- (a) seek to ensure that the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way,
- (b) seek to balance the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources of the district with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of such exploitation,
- (c) take any other steps which in the authority's opinion are necessary or expedient for the purpose of making a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development, and
- (d) seek to balance the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the district.

### **D&S IFCA's Response to a Seasonal Closure of the Crawfish Fishery**

D&S IFCA is supportive of a seasonal closure of the crawfish fishery in ICES Area 7. D&S IFCA supports and agrees with the purpose of the seasonal closure as set out in the consultation documents, which are:

- provide further protection and spawning potential by decreasing the number of removals and interactions with fishing activities.
- improve spawning potential by increasing the likelihood that crawfish can spawn and moult before interacting with fishing activity.

- improve the subsequent recruitment of juveniles into the fishery by protecting berried females for a specified period and allowing for settlement of juvenile stock.
- decrease the fishing activity and removals when fish are in a poor condition and more likely to suffer from high rates of mortality.
- reduce the risk of nets being left for long soak times or lost during the unpredictable winter weather.

D&S IFCA has analysed the MMO landings data for crawfish landed into Devon ports. Figure 2 shows the annual landings of crawfish and Figure 3 shows the monthly landings into Devon ports. As can be seen, the landings into Devon ports are fairly low, compared to the total taken from ICES Area 7 as outlined in the MMO Consultation Document.

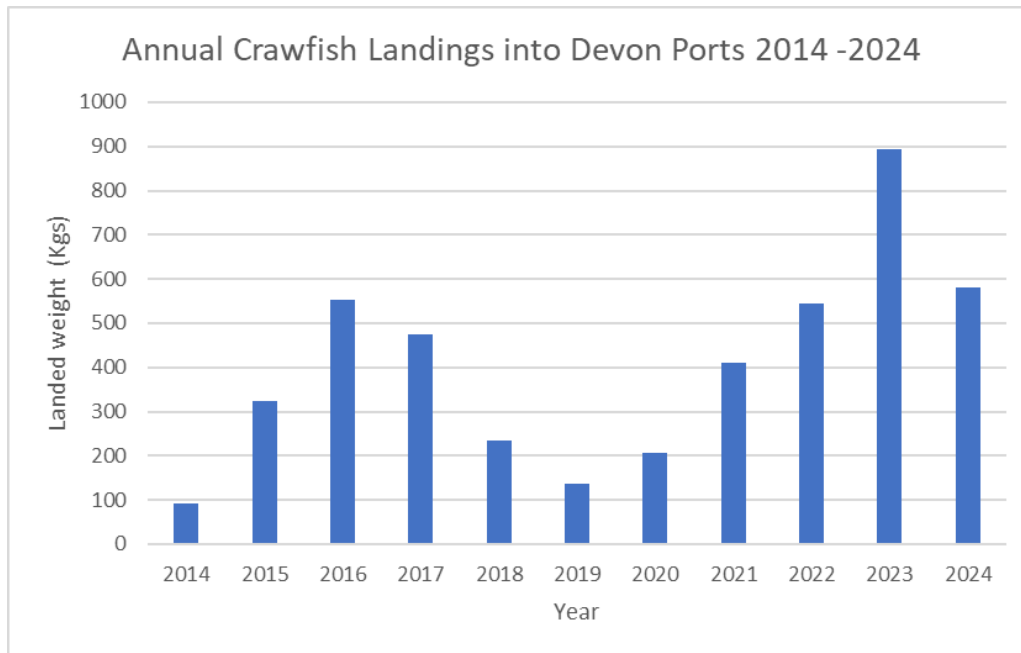
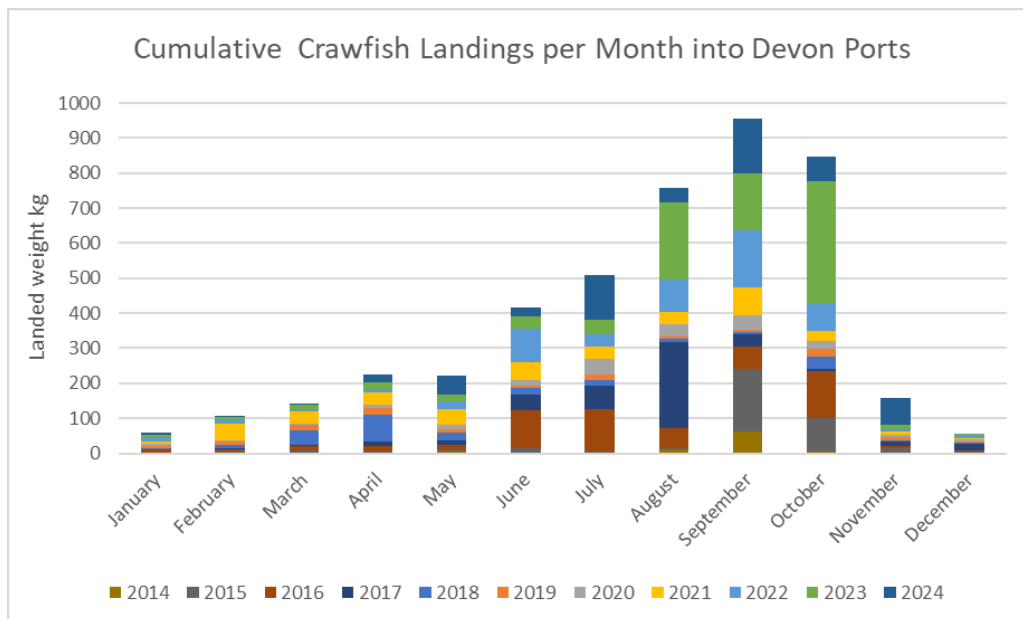


Figure 2 Annual landings into Devon Ports between 2014 and 2024. MMO data sourced.



D&S IFCA is responding to questions 1-4 of the MMO Consultation Document. Questions 5-8 are not applicable as D&S IFCA is a statutory authority and not an active member of the fishing industry.

#### **Consultation Questions:**

**1. A potential seasonal closure for retaining and landing crawfish (*Palinurus spp*) in English waters of ICES area 7 for all UK and EU vessels using all gear types during the following:**

- **option 1: no closure**
- **option 2: closure from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026 (inclusive)**

#### **D&S IFCA's Response to Q1):**

D&S IFCA has in the past few years attended workshops and fishing industry groups and sits on the Crab and Lobster FMP Working Group, Science Group, Implementation Group and SW Crab Fishery Trial Group. D&S IFCA has listened the views of the fishing industry and taken into account the evidence provided in the MMO Consultation Documents 2025. Figures 2 and 3 show standings of crawfish into ports in D&S IFCA's District to the end of 2024. The highest landings into Devon ports were in 2023 peaking at 893.30 kgs and in 2024 the second highest landings since 2014 of 580.90kgs. These figures are a very small proportion of the landings overall into ICES Area 7. From the Consultation Document the landings into 7e and 7f are approximately 36 and 56 tonnes respectively (as estimated from Annex 2 Figure 2 in the MMO Consultation Documents). Whilst the figures landing into Devon ports in the D&S IFCA's District are much lower than these figures, D&S IFCA supports the seasonal closure for 2025/2026 and outlined in Option 2 – from 19<sup>th</sup> December 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026 (inclusive). Crawfish are not regularly targeted by D&S IFCA Potting or Netting Permit holders – mostly they are a bycatch species caught in pots with some caught in nets where other species are being targeted. This is very different to the fishery further west, where crawfish are targeted largely in nets.

D&S IFCA appreciates that further west in Cornwall, and around the Isles of Scilly in particular, there is an elevated Christmas market for crawfish, and D&S IFCA supports the fact that the fishers in these areas have limited income over the winter months. Aligning the closure with the last neap tide as described in the consultation documents to allow landings for the Christmas market is supported by D&S IFCA.

Many inshore fishers in the South West have a reduced income during the winter months, mostly due to adverse weather conditions, and have to consider this throughout the year to make up for the shortfall. In D&S IFCA's District landings start to increase in April/May, and this too provides fishing opportunities in these early spring months before fishers target other species such as crab and lobster. Therefore, a closure extending to the end of May would reduce these fishers fishing opportunities. However, with the concerns raised by fishers, in particular in regard to the larger offshore vessels that could continue to fish during the winter as these are not restricted by adverse weather conditions, and the need to introduce

management measures that help protect the stock, a longer closure across ICES Area 7 to all crawfish removal would help to address the concerns.

D&S IFCA is aware of the influx of octopus into the South West and this, whilst providing some fishers with earning potential, has had an impact on crab and lobster stocks and therefore landings. The predation of crustacea and scallops and whelks by octopus is a real concern to the industry and may mean that if these stocks have been decimated by octopus predation fishers may look to target other species. This could result in an increase in netting for crawfish and therefore a protection of the stock to allow spawning and juvenile recruitment into the fishery is important.

Therefore, in summary, D&S IFCA supports a seasonal closure for the crawfish fishery from 19<sup>th</sup> December 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026 that applies to English waters ICES Area 7 for all UK and Foreign vessels.

**D&S IFCA's Response to Q2):**

- 2. Do you consider there should be a different closure period which has not been included as an option? If so, please tell us what your proposed closure period is and provide or direct us to where supporting evidence is available.***

No. D&S IFCA supports option 2: closure from 19 December 2025 to 31 May 2026 (inclusive).

**D&S IFCA's Response to Q3):**

- 3. Would you support a seasonal closure following the last neap tide before Christmas, remain in place for the future?***

D&S IFCA believes that the seasonal closure should be reviewed on an annual basis considering any changes in the fishery and therefore would not support the seasonal closure following the last neap tide before Christmas remain in place for the future. It will be important to assess the fishery annually, looking at landings, changes in the number of vessels coming into the fishery and targeting crawfish. Monitoring of the landings and changes in the number of vessels targeting crawfish, in particular in light of the zero TAC on pollack and any impacts of the influx of octopus into the South West, is recommended. It is important to consider the concerns of the fishing industry that there may be a transition from those previously targeting pollack and those who traditionally targeted crab, lobster and whelk stocks switching to netting to target crawfish.

**D&S IFCA's Response to Q4):**

- 4. Other than specific effort management are there any other technical measures that you would like to see introduced to the fishery?***

In order to consider further management measures, it would be useful to identify any changes in the number of vessels fishing for crawfish and to monitor their crawfish landings in particular those of the larger vivier netters, as the inshore fleet has raised concerns about the level of effort of these vessels. However, from the landings data it would appear that the greatest effort has come from the under 10m vessel which may be as a result of the pollack restrictions.

Understanding the number and length of nets deployed and days at sea targeting crawfish will give a better understanding of the effort and may help determine whether effort controls are required on the fishery. Within the workshop held in February 2024, many fishers suggested

potential management measures relating to the mesh size and thickness of twine used in the fishery, which would reduce the number of juveniles caught and potential damage to those returned to the sea, and these may be worthy of further consideration.

D&S IFCA has been in contact with Cornwall IFCA, who have raised concerns about the level of effort on the crawfish fishery, and, from pers. comms, Cornwall IFCA would like to see effort management in the fishery. From the landings data for 2023 and 2024 as shown in Annex 2, Figures 1 and 2 in the MMO Consultation documents, there has been a large increase in the landings above previous years. It has been reported that the landings have increased from 22.8t in 2020 to 117.1 tonnes in 2024. This is an increase of 94.3 tonnes, an increase of over five times the landings in 2020. Figure 1 in the Annex1 of the Consultation Document shows the dramatic increase in 2023 and 2024 particularly in July, August September and October. Figure 2 shows the increase in landings in 2023 in ICES Areas 7e and 7f. In Area 7f the increase is almost double the landings compared to 2022. This is a real concern to the sustainability of the fishery. The MMO might consider further management measures for the fishery to reduce the effort.

Further management measures could include an increase in mesh size to further protect the juvenile who are susceptible to damage in the nets and during the sorting of the catch in the nets. Potential further management measure could include limiting the tier length of nets or the number of tiers deployed by individual vessels in the fishery. D&S IFCA believes it would be good to have observers on board to look at the level of discards and damage of adults and juveniles from netting. If netters have switched from targeting finfish, such as pollack, to netting for crawfish they may not have the same level of expertise in how the nets are hauled and cleared to prevent damage to juveniles and those to be returned, such as berried female crawfish. Having a trial with REM, such a cameras on board some vessels, may provide more evidence to help support future management measures. It might be useful for the MMO to develop an impact assessment to look at how the restrictions of pollack have impacted the fishing industry and the impact on other fisheries, such as crawfish, where fishers have switched to target other species to make a living. This may involve detail analysis of sales and landings data of individual UK fishing vessels operating in ICES Area 7 to identify changes in fishing behaviour.

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