



Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority

**D&S IFCA's Response to
MMO's Consultation on Proposals for King
Scallop Fishery Closures
in ICES Area 7d and Area 7e
in 2026 and 2027**

28th November 2025

Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

The Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), including Devon and Severn IFCA (D&S IFCA), are statutory regulators. The ten regional IFCAs have a shared vision: “Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities will 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 IFCAs are responsible for the sustainable management of sea fisheries resources in English waters from baselines out to six nautical miles. D&S IFCA's District includes waters from baselines to six nautical miles on the south and north coasts of Devon and north Somerset, and the waters of the Severn Estuary out to the median line with Wales. D&S IFCA's District includes areas of ICES rectangle 7e

The powers and duties of the IFCAs are provided by the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009; the Act). D&S IFCA statutory duties include:

- (a) to seek to ensure that the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way,
- (b) to 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) to 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) to seek to balance the different needs of persons engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries resources in the district.

Proposal to close Area 7d and Area 7e king scallop dredge fishery:

- From 1 July to 30 September 2026 and;
- From 1 July to 30 September 2027

D&S IFCA Response:

In its response to the 2025 scallop dredge proposals for the Channel, D&S IFCA set out that if the basis of the closure was to protect spawning stocks, then it should be applied to all areas within 7d and 7e. The 2025 closure in Area 7e only applied to 7eL (Lyme Bay). If the intention is spawning period protection, then it should apply through all the ICES areas 7d and 7e.

D&S IFCA's maximum length of vessel is 14.99m. D&S IFCA has a closed season for scallop dredging vessels from 1st July to 30th September. The proposed restrictions are therefore in line with this long-standing inshore management measure.

When the scallop dredge fishery is open in D&S IFCA's District, including parts of 7e, the fishing effort is controlled by other management measures including restricting all vessels, up to 14.99m in length to using no more than six dredges aside.

D&S IFCA has spoken to some of the masters and owners of the 12-15m scallop dredge vessels, and they have all commented that it was particularly challenging to compete with the much larger offshore vessels during the closed period during 2025. If the proposal to close all 7d and 7e was to apply to all vessels over 12m, then it is likely that the effect will be that many of the fleet of approximately 26, 12-15m, scallop dredge vessels, that operate under D&S IFCA permits during the rest of the year, would be forced to tie up during the closed period as they

are not set up to be nomadic vessels and move to other areas such as the Celtic Sea or North Sea.

Once poor weather is taken into account, the proposed three months closure represents a much larger proportion of the fishing year for these 12-15m vessels, and it is likely that such a shock to the businesses will be too severe. The proposal to close for two years provides some certainty for the larger, offshore nomadic fleet as they can plan ahead. For the owners, and crew of the 12-15m vessels, the closure creates greater uncertainty for their fishing futures.

D&S IFCA therefore supports the entire closure of 7d and 7e but that the closure should apply to vessel over 15m in length. **Vessels below 15m in length should be allowed to continue to fish outside of D&S IFCA's District from 1st July to 30th September.**

To ensure that effort is further restricted and supports the purpose of protecting spawning stock, **D&S IFCA proposes that a limit of six dredges aside should also apply.**

D&S IFCA has applied the vessel size restriction and limited the number of dredges that any vessel can use for many years and shown that for all vessels including the larger 12-15m vessels in the fleet, the fishery remains viable.

D&S IFCA has also been trialling REM on two local scallop dredging vessels between 12-15m in length. The use of REM has meant that that vessels have been able to fish six dredges aside whilst fishing in the D&S IFCA District and then fish additional dredges when outside the District. The REM system allows for the number of dredges to be counted when deploying and hauling the gear.

If REM is not installed on the vessels, then **the bar length should also be restricted to 5.18m** so that it restricts the number of dredges that can be attached to a maximum of six.

D&S IFCA believes that if the above management approach was applied it reflects its duties to balance the protection of the scallop stock and the marine environment whilst supporting a viable inshore fleet.

Would you consider any alternative areas to be at risk to displaced effort because of any proposed closure? Including ICES rectangles other than those covered in the closure, or other areas such as the mid-channel potting blocks.

As mentioned in previous responses to king scallop closures, D&S IFCA is concerned that closing 7d and 7e in UK waters is causing displacement of the larger scallop vessels into 7eO and crab fishers have highlighted that those over 15m scallop vessels that have large number of dredges aside e.g. 18 to 22 dredges, are causing a significant impact on crab stocks in the Channel and particular around the Mid-Channel Blocks that lie within 7eO. The effort of these vessels has impacted the crab stocks, through damage to the crabs, through bycatch in the dredges, damage to the habitats and a decline in crab catches in the pot fisheries so impacting the crab fishermen who operate in the crab blocks when they are open. The closure of 7e together with 7d would ease the concerns in 28E6 but likely cause greater displacement into the north east corner of ICES rectangle 28E7 and southeast portion of 29E7. The Mid-Channel blocks take up much of ICES rectangle 28E7 and the southeast portion of 29E7.

Displacement of many large scallopers from 7d into 7e was reported by South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen in 2022 and 2023 and led to gear conflict and loss and damage to crab catches/stocks in the vicinity of the mid channel blocks. Some of D&S IFCA's Potting Permit holders fish in the mid-channel blocks and therefore damage to their fishing opportunities in the blocks will likely cause increased displacement of potting effort into D&S

IFCA waters to remain viable for the rest of their fishing season. There is real concern regarding the damage that scallop dredgers can do to crabs and crab stocks on the ground. Crab catches have been in decline over recent years in the South West and pressure has increased significantly because of the large amounts of octopus on the ground during. Any increase pressure of the stock due to displacement of large scallopers may lead to further declines.

Any other comments

If possible, Defra should work with the EU to agree to prohibit UK and EU scallop dredging vessels over 15 metres in length in all of Area 7d and 7e from 1st July to 30th September.