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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Response to the call for evidence on ICES area VIId king scallop closure from mid- August to mid - October 2021



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Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO), acting on behalf of all four UK Fisheries Administrations (UKFAs), sought views on a proposal to close UK waters in ICES area VIId (see annex 1) to king scallop (*Pectens maximus*) fishing between mid-August and mid-October 2021 to all vessels regardless of length, aligning with similar scallop fishing regulations in EU waters.

UK Fisheries Administrations are committed to ensuring fisheries are managed to a level where stocks are healthy and fished sustainably, environmental damage is minimised, and economic return is maximised whilst ensuring sustainable exploitation.

Stock assessments for 2017-2019 indicate harvest rates above the level associated with Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), suggesting stocks have a pattern of overexploitation. The assessments for 2020 have a provisional harvest rate estimate just below the MSY rate (21.4 vs 21.5). However, this may be subject to change once full international landings data become available; the rate is therefore currently uncertain. This supports the need for appropriate management to be strengthened to ensure scallop stocks are protected and the fisheries managed sustainably.

In light of this advice, UKFAs wished to explore the option of a closure to all vessels regardless of length. A similar proposal was received from the Scallop Industry Consultation Group (SICG).

In previous years UKFAs have closed area VIId to scallop dredging for periods of several weeks to vessels of 15 metres and over in overall length.

Having considered the call for evidence responses, and taking in to account further scientific advice on the stock biomass, UKFAs have agreed to introduce a closure of the area VIId, in UK waters, scallop fishery from 15 August to 18 October, with a two-tiered approach to opening times complementing existing measures in EU waters. The closure will apply to UK and EU vessels over 10m in length in UK waters, and to UK vessels of all lengths in EU waters. The arrangements are outlined below:

- 15 August - 4 October for the whole of the area VIId scallop fishery in UK waters for all vessels over 10m.
- The same closure will apply for all UK vessels, irrespective of size, in the whole area VIId scallop fishery in EU waters with the exception of the area south of parallel 49°42' N (the Bay of Seine area), which will remain closed for all UK vessels between 15 August – 18 October.

This consultation ran from 26 July 2021 to 8 August 2021.

Response of the UK Fisheries Administrations

14 representations to the call for evidence were received including from industry groups, fisheries managers and individuals. In summary, of the seven responses received from those representing the over 10 metre (m) scalloping sector (including 15m and above) six were in favour of the proposal, with all four responses from the under 10m scalloping sector against it. Responses from fishery managers, including some Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities and Crown Dependencies, highlighted concerns around potential displacement of scallop fishing activity into area VIIe, as a result of the VIId closure.

The proposal to protect the spawning scallop stock by closing the UK waters in area VIId to scalloping, builds on similar closures in the area over recent years, leading the way to achieving long term stock sustainability.

Improving how non-quota species, including shellfish stocks, are managed is a priority for UKFAs and the Government as we work towards developing and implementing longer term approaches. This will be supported through, for example, the domestic introduction of Fisheries Management Plans, as set out in the Fisheries Act 2020, and discussions with the EU on long term management plans for shared non-quota stocks.

Exercises such as this call for evidence and the introduction of improved measures, alongside continued engagement with industry and scientists, will help inform these longer-term management approaches and improve the evidence on which decisions around future management will be based. This approach will also help to ensure the impacts of any future management measures are fully understood, both in terms of the likely socio-economic impacts and the level of protection they provide to the stocks. The introduction of seasonal closures, such as the VIId scallop fishery closure, is one management measure that could be applied and developed alongside others such as technical measures and fishing activity limits. The aims and scope of any potential future seasonal closure, including in area VIId, will continue to be informed by the best available scientific evidence on the status of stocks.

Having considered the call for evidence responses (as summarised in the next section), whilst most were in favour of the proposed closure those from the under 10m sector were not. UKFAs agreed that the impact on those vessels under 10m needed further consideration to understand the business impact, how this sector could adapt their fishing practices, and the potential impact of displacement should a similar closure be implemented in future years. UKFAs sought further scientific advice to understand the potential impact on stock sustainability should all vessels lengths not be included in a closure of ICES area VIId (i.e. those vessels under 10m in length fishing in UK waters). This advice concluded that at this time, the impact of this sector on the stock biomass would not be significant.

Summary of Responses to the Consultation Questions

Fourteen responses were received to the call for evidence which sought views on five questions.

Summaries of the views received are set out below:

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

Of the 14 responses:

- Six are in favour of the proposal.
- One is in favour of the proposal for over 15m vessels only.
- Four are against the proposal.

The question was not applicable to three of the respondents.

One respondent suggested aligning the closure with the full French scallop fishery closure (1 May to 1 November), with four respondents suggesting the reopening should coincide with the reopening of French waters south of the median line. A further respondent made the point that a two tiered approach to the opening of VIId needs to be implemented, as the opening south of 49 42' area (known as the Bay of Seine fishery) remains closed to the French under national legislation until 18 October.

Question 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?

One respondent felt there was the potential for displacement not only offshore but also inshore, inside of the 0-6nm zone specifically into area 27.7.e (VIIe).

Displacement of the u10m fleet into area IVc, was raised as a likely risk which could cause increased exploitation on stocks and issues with other gears such as pots. Two respondents expressed potential displacement into area VIIe.

Whilst a number of respondents thought some displacement would be inevitable it was not seen as an issue as the seasonal closure of VIId, that had applied to 15m and over vessels in recent years, meant it was already reflected in fishing plans.

One respondent stated that areas have different breeding times, so the stock being targeted due to displacement would not necessarily be in its breeding season. Another felt the Scottish migratory over 15m fleet might be displaced.

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

Information received indicated that such a closure would benefit scallop stocks in the Channel, as larger UK scallop vessels would be less likely to target the area, giving the scallop beds time to recover.

One respondent confirmed that they would change their method of fishing if the closure was implemented, with a respondent representing the over 15m sector suggesting that vessels may switch to beam trawls if they have that capability. Other respondents confirmed that local vessels would not be negatively impacted by the proposed closure, as historically they only fish for scallops during winter months, pursuing other fisheries in the spring and summer.

As a seasonal closure of VIId to scallop vessels over 15m has been in place for a number of years, respondents representing over 15m vessels do not expect to see a change in impact on their businesses. However, the point was made by one respondent that moving to other grounds does have an economic impact through increased steaming time and reduced catch rates – others could experience the same.

One respondent commented that any increase in fishing effort on inshore grounds, because of displacement, is likely to have an impact on landings per unit effort. This may in turn require changes to local management regimes, which could primarily impact on locally based vessels first.

One respondent stated it may put them out of business, with others expressing how much they have invested stating that smaller vessels have limited alternative grounds to move to, whilst another expressed the view that more notice should be given to proposed closures.

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

Out of the 14 responses:

From operators

- One represents over 15m vessels
- Two represent both over and under 15m vessels
- One represents an over 15m and an under 15m (but over 10m) vessel
- One represents under 15m (but over 10m) vessels

Individual responses:

- Four have vessels under 10 metre
- Two have vessels between 10 and 15 metre

Question 5: Do you have any other comments?

A number of additional comments and views were provided around wider scallop fishery management and the need for improvements, highlighting issues and areas for consideration during the development of future measures. These are summarised below:

Managing the area VIId scallop fishery

- No further regulation is required.
- Proposed technical measures such as maximising dredge numbers to 10 a side would help shellfish prices and stop overfishing.
- The main ring size should be 85mm and 75mm on the back, which would let smaller scallops out.
- Concerns that the benefits of the area VIId fishery closure will be compromised by current effort regimes, suggesting that it could be improved by a catch control management system.
- The proposed closure should go further and close from May to October in line with the French closure, to give the ground a complete rest from fishing.
- A 60 day per quarter regime for all vessels should be introduced, suggesting this would ease displacement and overall pressure on all stocks.
- The inclusion of all vessel sizes in the closure is seen as a sensible first step in the regulation of the under 15m scallop fleet.
- Consideration around the different spawning times of stock areas e.g. the Solent, within area VIId should be given.
- Future measures e.g. seasonal closures, for future years and potential joint management with the EU, must be scientifically justified in terms of spawning stock protection.
- Particular consideration should be given to the impact of proposed new measures on the smallest vessels/businesses within the scalloping fleet (many of which are below 10 metres). These vessels are already restricted where they can operate either by IFCA Byelaws, day boat range from port and/or the competition from the larger and higher impact vessels.
- Further solutions that should be considered for offshore management, including closed areas (perhaps on a rotational basis) to support a better stock of more mature larger and fecund scallops, so enhancing spatfall and recruitment into the fishery.

Joint management of shared scallop fisheries with the EU

- The continuation of the historic closure of VIId will aid joined-up management with the EU and will facilitate the regulation of the u15m fleet, driving forward sustainable management.
- Supportive of exploring joint management of the valuable Channel King scallop fisheries with the EU, including the UK's proposal to extend the closure to the under 15m fleet.

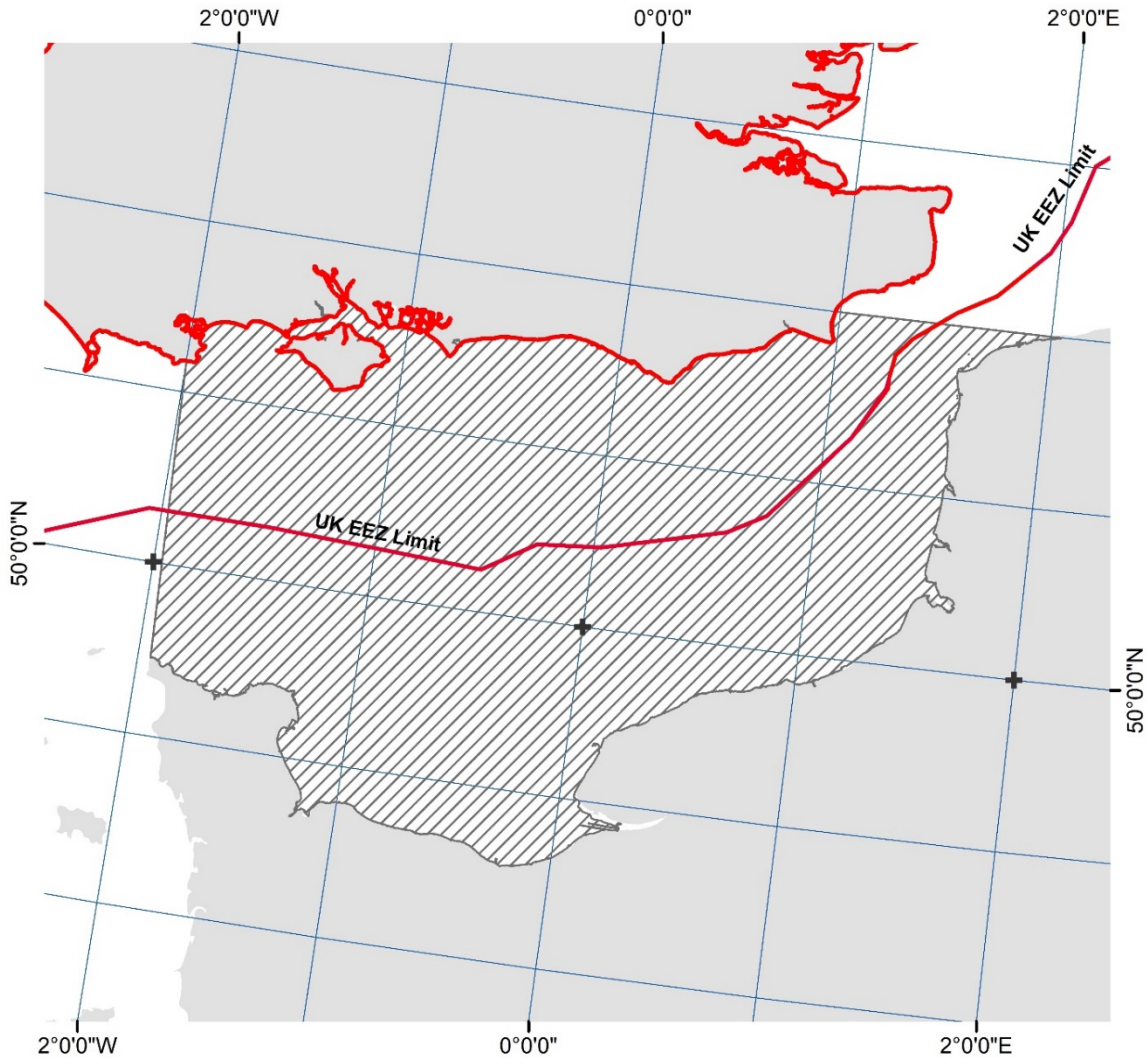
Useful Information

Topic of the consultation:	To ask for views on a closure of ICES area VIId king scallop fishery between mid-August and mid-October 2021 to all vessels regardless of length.
Scope of this call for evidence:	To seek views, evidence and impact information on a closure of ICES area VIId king scallop fishery to all vessels regardless of length.
Geographical scope:	ICES area VIId.
Those consulted:	Scallop fishing and processing industry, IFCA's, crown dependencies, academics and members of the public.
Body/bodies responsible for the call for evidence:	MMO: Fisheries Management Team, Defra and UKFAs.
Duration:	The consultation ran from 26 July 2021 to 8 August 2021.
Enquiries:	For any enquiries about the call for evidence please contact effort@marinemangement.org.uk

Annex 1: Chart of ICES area VIId



ICES Area VIId



- UK Exclusive Economic Zone
- ICES Area VIId
- ICES Statistical Rectangles



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