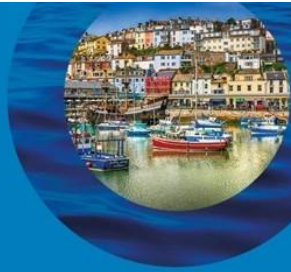




Marine
Management
Organisation

Lyme Bay gear separation meeting: 31 January 2024

Meeting notes and outcomes



...ambitious for our seas and coasts

Gear Separation in Lyme Bay Meeting

Wednesday 31 January 2024 5-7pm, Fishing College, Lyme Regis

Rationale and purpose of the meeting

Following the outcomes of the Lyme Bay sole fishery consultation and the June 2024 steering group meeting, the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) committed to facilitating a meeting in early 2024 to discuss the topic of gear separation as a potential management measure in Lyme Bay.

Between 2015 and 2022 available quota for Dover sole (*Solea solea*) in the ICES Area 7.e increased by 122%, contributing to increased fishing effort, including in Lyme Bay. Concerns were raised by stakeholders about the effects of this increased effort on the sole population, the wider marine environment, and local communities. As a result, MMO ran a consultation from 29 March to 28 May 2023 and a workshop on 19 June 2023 to explore potential management measures.

Responses received on the 2023 Lyme Bay sole fisheries consultation had conflicting opinions on which gear types should be restricted, based on how they impact the individual responding. There was significant support for separating gear types, but it was not clear in the answers as to whether they should operate at different times or in different areas and apply to which gears. Similarly, the idea of gear separation was not explored in detail at the workshop held with key members of industry in June 2023 to discuss management options for Lyme Bay and the consultation outcomes, and it was agreed to be discussed in January 2024.

A meeting was arranged for 31 January 2024 with fishers of Lyme Bay and government, to discuss the current issues with the Lyme Bay sole fishery, and proposed options for management. This meeting was held face-to-face, in the Lyme Regis Fishing College. An agenda was provided to attendees prior to the meeting. The meeting was facilitated by Wilson Sheriff.

The aims of the workshop were as follows:

1. Develop a mutual understanding of the current issues with gear conflict and spatial challenges in Lyme Bay.
2. Understand if the introduced measures, post consultation, have improved or changed the problems experienced by fishers.
3. Explore the possibility of introducing either spatial and/or temporal gear separation measures and what this could look like.
4. Explore if there are amendments needed to the current introduced measures and what solutions those present suggest.
5. Maximise consensus on whether more management measures are needed and what those should be.

Attendees

32 Industry members attended in person with representatives from all gear types that fish within Lyme Bay.

Fisheries representatives attended from Lyme Bay CIC, South-Western Fish Producers Organisation and Western Fish Producer Organisation.

Representatives from the wider fisheries sector include The Angling Trust and Blue Marine. Government representatives attended from MMO.

Output of the discussion sessions

Prior to specific management measure discussions, attendees were asked whether the issue of gear conflict had been addressed by measures already introduced.

Comments included:

- There had been no change in conflict experienced since the measurements have been introduced and that gear conflict experienced in the bay was between the static gear types. It was also suggested that there was little space for trawlers to operate which also increased instances of gear conflict.
- The designated Lyme Bay closed area does not allow for trawling and has become heavily used by static gears.
- There were mixed opinions as to the sources of the main conflict. Specific comments included: static gears have an advantage in the designated area and should keep their gear within that area; trawlers visiting from outside the immediate Lyme Bay ports; some static gears “reserving” areas by leaving gear while not actively fishing; too many static gears across the entire bay; trawlers were fishing through angling lines.
- The WhatsApp group is the most effective solution they currently have. Not everyone uses this due to several reasons such as not having smart phones and it is time consuming to have to plot all the locations before going fishing.
- Some using the WhatsApp group to notify of their gear location are still having gear damaged. It was also noted that some fishers were not marking their gear clearly because they were using the WhatsApp group.
- It was accepted that some accidental gear conflict will inevitably happen.
- The MMO form for recording gear conflict is not being used, and there have been instances of gear conflict since the consultation was run. Lack of use was attributed to the form being hard to locate.
- As all the fishers in the room moved where they fished throughout the year, it was felt that any spatial or temporal separation would limit fair access to the fishery and was therefore not wanted.

In summary of the discussion:

- There had been no change (either positive or negative) to gear conflict since the introduction of the new management measures.

- No strong consensus on whether gear conflict was occurring with some attendees suggesting the issue was too much gear on the ground and others suggesting there was no issue.
- The voluntary WhatsApp group is currently the most effective solution to easing and avoiding gear conflict.
- Gear separation, either temporal or spatial, was not wanted by those fishers at the workshop.

Potential solutions and proposals

MMO opened discussion for other suggested solutions in managing the sole fishery in Lyme Bay. Suggestions focused on similar themes from the consultation including statutory changes to gear and MCRS and improved communication.

- It was generally agreed that the newly introduced licence condition to mark fixed gear East to West was not good enough and needs improvement. The visibility of the E and W was the main area of concern regarding the marking. It was also noted that not everyone was complying with the condition.
- Discussion took place about different forms of gear marking including an AIS transponder fitted to Dhan buoys, additional flags, clearer and consistent ownership markings, and use of radar reflectors. It was noted throughout that radar reflectors can be dangerous if applied at both ends of the fixed gear and that AIS Dhans are expensive.
- Communication was emphasised by all people in the room, both using methods already established in the area (WhatsApp) and non-verbal (gear marking).
- There was strong agreement in the room that introducing a mesh size of 5" for nets would help address concerns of the sustainability of the sole fishery.
- Fishers expressed concern at the small size of the sole being caught with continued support from the fishers in the room to increase the MCRS. It was recognised that a change to the MCRS does need changes to gear type to be effective.
- Despite some wanting a maximum length of static net, there was no clear consensus on this, with concerns including larger vessels requiring more net than smaller vessels to cover their operating costs.
- Reducing the sole quota for the area was discussed but there was a general view that this would not solve the issue. It was also noted that this is done by ICES area and there are fishers in 7.e (outside of Lyme Bay) who rely on sole fishing who it would disadvantage.

What are the solutions?

MMO proposed several solutions as a result of the ongoing conversations:

- New method for anonymous reporting – texting Anna (South-West Regional Fisheries Group lead). The person reporting the conflict will be kept anonymous.
 - At the end of the meeting, fishers were given Anna Ni Donnchadha phone number: 07584 885 023. Fishers, both commercial and recreational, should text Anna with the following information:
 - What gear was damaged or lost (pots, nets, lines etc).
 - Coordinates of where the gear was damaged or lost.

- Any information that was spotted on the markings to identify the owner of the gear.
- The MMO will investigate the reporting system used by the East Coast Potters Association.
- The MMO will continue to investigate an increase to a 5" mesh size of fixed nets with Cefas alongside the existing consultation outcomes.
- The MMO will investigate any options for funding for those that would like to use AIS Dhans to voluntarily mark their gear.

It was agreed in the meeting that the MMO would no longer pursue in relation to this specific issue:

- Gear separation measures (both spatial and temporal separation).
- A maximum static net length.
- Reducing the sole TAC (Total Allowable Catch) to a level significantly lower than those set as a result of EU negotiations.
 - NB: Any requests prior to the meeting are still under consideration. Amendments to the catch limits can still be made in the usual method through contacting the inshorequotamanager@marinemanagement.org.uk.

It was noted by the MMO, that while these measures would not be implemented as a result of this meeting, there is the possibility one or more of these could be implemented in relation to other management in the future, such as an outcome from the Fisheries Management Plans or if discussions with this group evolve in the future.

Next Steps

The MMO explained that gathering the data needed may take time to acquire and that they need to follow a process before implementing any management changes.

The MMO have committed to communicate regularly with the attendees who have provided their details at the meeting or on the Regional Fisheries Group. Anyone else who wishes to be updated may contact the South-West Regional Fisheries Group lead, Anna Ni Donnchadha at anna.donnchadha@marinemanagement.org.uk.

Annex

Agenda

1. Welcome from MMO, recap measures introduced and set out the objectives of the workshop:
To discuss the potential for separating areas of Lyme Bay (ICES Rectangles 30E6 and 30E7) out to 12 nm, for use by different fishing methods at different times.
2. Welcomes, fishers introduce themselves and their interest, read agenda and housekeeping.
3. Discuss changes (or lack thereof) within Lyme Bay sole fishery.
Has there been a change to gear conflict since the introduction of the new management measures?

Are there any changes the MMO should be aware of when sole targeting in Lyme Bay?

Has there been any gear conflict since the new measures have been introduced?

Are the gear conflict issues experienced in the sole fishery still the same as identified in June 2023: is gear separation (spatially or temporally) still the best fit solution?

4. Open to industry for initial thoughts on possible solutions for conflict.
Does the fishing sector want spatial gear spatial separation and/or time-sharing measures?

10-minute break for facilitator and MMO to gather all options.

4. Discuss options raised and finalise best fit option/s.
Come to a group consensus on way forward and agreeing actions.
5. AOB comments from fishing sector on measures introduced in Lyme Bay.
6. MMO's decision-making responsibilities, process, and next steps.
7. Thank you and closing remarks.