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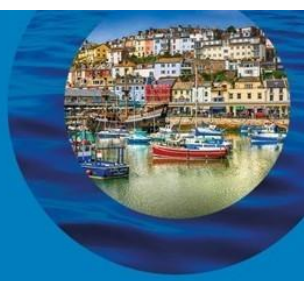


Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Updated decision on the king
scallop (*Pectens maximus*)
dredge fishery closure in ICES
division 7d and the Lyme Bay
area of 7e closure 2024

May 2024

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



Introduction

On 2 April 2024 the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) acting on behalf of all four UK Fisheries Administrations (UKFAs), following a consultation (7 December 2023 – 14 January 2024), **announced a closure to the king scallop (*Pectens maximus*) dredge fishery from 15 May – 30 September 2024 in ICES division 7d to UK and EU vessels over 10 metres in length and in the Lyme Bay area of 7e to UK and EU vessels over 12 metres in length.**

This decision (to be viewed [here](#)) represented an extension on the 2023 closure, which ran from 1 July – 30 September 2023. This decision was made using the best available evidence at the time and the rationale was to:

- Provide increased protection to the stock during its primary spawning season (May – October). This is particularly important in ICES area 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e. The 2022 Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Agriculture Science (CEFAS) [stock assessment](#) suggested that the king scallop stock in the Lyme Bay area of 7e has been highly exploited between 2017 – 2021, exceeding maximum sustainable yield (MSY) each year. The stock assessment also suggested that the king scallop stock in 7d was being exploited close to MSY in 2017, 2019, and 2020, and above MSY in 2018 and 2021 (see Table 1).
- Fully avoid spatial displacement of effort from the king scallop dredge fishery closure in EU waters of 7d (15 May – 30 September 2023).
- Reduce displacement which caused a 39% increase in king scallop landings by 15 metre and over vessels in 7d from 2022 – 2023 for the month of May.

New evidence

Area 7d

The MMO acts on the best available evidence to ensure sustainable and economically viable fisheries. On 16 April 2024 a new 2023 CEFAS king scallop stock assessment was published (to be viewed [here](#)) stating that in the Eastern Channel (27.7.d.N) the exploitation rate of king scallops has generally been at or below the MSY target.

The 2023 stock assessment revised harvest rate estimates for 2021 and provided a new estimate for 2022. The new assessment suggested that there was a decrease in the estimated harvest rate compared to the 2022 stock assessment, with the rate now below MSY (see Table 1). The latest assessment revised the harvest rate estimate from 24.1% (above MSY at 23.4%) in 2021 to 17.6%, and suggested a continued trend below MSY in 2022 with a harvest rate of 16.3%.

Table 1: Harvest rate estimates for area 7d North, with an MSY harvest rate of 23.4% which were calculated for the 2022 and 2023 stock assessment (published in 2023 and 2024). Figures for 2020 and previous years have not changed between stock assessments.

Year	2022 stock assessment harvest rate	2023 stock assessment harvest rate
2020	20.2	20.2
2021	24.1	17.6
2022	NA	16.3

This suggests that as the harvest rate is below MSY, current fishing may be occurring at a sustainable rate. However, it is important to note that the 2021 and 2022 harvest rates are still provisional, due to international landings being unavailable at the time of publication. Further information on data limitations and methodologies are available [here](#).

Area 7e (Lyme Bay)

The Lyme Bay area (27.7.e.L) continues to experience the highest exploitation levels, consistently above the MSY target since 2017, and increasing since 2019.

The 2023 stock assessment also had some revised harvest rate estimates which are slightly lower than the previous estimated rate (Table 2). However, the estimates in the latest assessment still suggest the harvest rate is well above an MSY estimate of 24.4% at 70.4% in 2021 and 71.9% in 2022.

Table 2: Harvest rate estimates for area 7e (Lyme Bay), with an MSY harvest rate of 24.4% which were calculated for the 2022 and 2023 stock assessment (published in 2023 and 2024). Figures for 2020 and previous years have not changed between stock assessments.

Year	2022 stock assessment harvest rate	2023 stock assessment harvest rate
2020	55.2	55.2
2021	80.2	70.4
2022	NA	71.9

Analysis and considerations

Following the publication of the 2023 stock assessment, MMO undertook engagement with all stakeholders who responded to the consultation, as well as Cefas, Defra, IFCA and the UKFAs to gather information and views on the impact of the change in the stock assessment on the MMO's decision. These views centred around the various lengths of closure in each geographic area and the impact, both positive and negative, that it would have on businesses and the reputation of the UK fishing industry.

Some industry members suggested a shorter closure period from 1 July to 30 September may be more appropriate, to offer some protection for the spawning stock while minimising economic impacts. They also highlighted a shorter closure may lead to a reduction in displaced effort into nearby sensitive areas. Other industry members remained in favour of the extended closure period on the basis of the increased environmental protection it provides the stock and the uncertainties of the evidence base.

Decision following review of Cefas stock assessment 2023 is to continue with the closure length from 15 May – 30 September 2024 in 7d and Lyme Bay of area 7e

MMO has determined that a longer closure period is still the most appropriate length of closure for 2024 in both areas. This measure will provide increased protection for spawning stock that will support juvenile recruitment to the stock, supporting future viability and sustainability of the fishery. A closure period that includes the early summer months from mid-May will also be beneficial for the reduction of environmental impacts from dredging; in particular, the removal of benthic organisms (hydrozoans and bryozoans) that scallop larvae use to settle on during metamorphosis.

As the updated stock assessment for Lyme bay area of 7e still indicated that exploitation was occurring above MSY, MMO did not determine it to be appropriate to reconsider its decision for this area. Although the stock assessment suggests the harvest rate is below MSY, with current fishing potentially occurring at a sustainable rate, MMO has some concerns regarding data limitations and uncertainties as well as the increased fishing effort in May and June 2023.

The 2021 and 2022 harvest rates are still provisional, due to international landings being unavailable at the time of publication. Also, the estimated harvest rates for 2023 are not yet

known and as such, the impact of the increase in effort during May and June 2023 remains unknown.

Due to differing closure periods across UK and EU waters in 2023 there was displacement of effort from EU 7d waters into UK 7d waters, resulting in a 39% increase in king scallop landings by 15 metre and over vessels in 7d from 2022 – 2023 for the month of May. A 15 May to 30 September closure in UK 7d waters mirroring the EU closure will help to prevent similar displacement from EU waters. There is also a risk that if there are divergent closure lengths in area 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e there is the potential to result in spatial displacement from Lyme Bay into 7d.

The stock assessment for area 7d covers both UK and EU waters and there is uncertainty in understanding the health of the UK stock specifically and the impact differing management has on the stock. Due to this, there is less certainty that the increase in harvestable biomass observed is representative of state of the UK fishery, and as such the information in isolation has not provided enough evidence to alter the preferred management decision.

Decision

MMO is encouraged by the 2023 Cefas stock assessment which suggests the exploitation rate of king scallops in ICES area 7d has generally been at or below the MSY target.

However, due to uncertainties in the data, alongside concerns with an increase in effort prior to the 2023 closure, MMO has concluded that there is insufficient evidence to determine that a change in decision would not introduce additional risk to the stock for future years. Therefore, MMO have determined that the extended closure is required to protect the stocks.

Having considered this new evidence, MMO has decided to continue with the original decision: **the king scallop dredge fishery in ICES division 7d will be closed from 15 May – 30 September 2024 to UK and EU vessels over 10 meters in length and Lyme Bay area of 7e will be closed to UK and EU vessels over 12 meters in length.**

In light of the limitations in the data, MMO has considered the precautionary, sustainability and ecosystem objectives to its decision in line with the King Scallop FMP and setting initial management measures. By implementing the extended closure period for both 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e it will strengthen existing measures to increase stock protection, ensuring sustainability of exploitation, whilst aligning management across relevant areas.

UKFAs 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.

Next steps

Government recognises this decision will disappoint some industry members, and will learn the lessons from this year and commit to greater collaboration with stakeholders earlier in the decision-making process when implementing future fisheries management measures.

MMO will continue monitoring of evidence and fishing patterns, with a close focus on activity of exempted vessel categories and displacement of fishing effort into sensitive areas.

Whilst the closure in Lyme Bay will help to protect stocks from potential displacement caused by the closure in area 7D, it is recognised that there may be more suitable, alternative approaches that can be taken to manage fishing activity in Lyme Bay and wider areas, such as technical measures. MMO will work with Defra, other UKFAs and industry to explore possible

alternative or additional approaches that could be applied in future years, including for the 2025 closure.

This will contribute to improving the wider management of our king scallop fisheries which is a priority for UKFAs and the MMO as we work towards developing and implementing longer term approaches. This will be supported through the recently published king scallop fisheries management plan (FMP) and continued engagement with industry and scientists, to help inform these longer-term management approaches and improve the evidence on which decisions around future management will be based.

Any queries should be directed to: SustainableFisheries@marinemanagement.org.uk