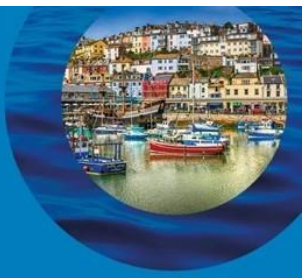
Marine Management Organisation



Decision Document on the ICES division 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e King scallop dredge fishery closure 2025

March 2025

...ambitious for our seas and coasts

Contents

1. Summary

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) sought views on proposals to close UK waters in ICES division 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e to the king scallop (*Pectens maximus*) dredge fishery. **A closure period of 1 July to 30 September 2025 is the chosen option.**

MMO is 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.

In exercise of its obligations under the Joint Fisheries Statement, MMO have determined the most appropriate closure decision to balance the environmental needs of the spawning stocks, with the socio-economic impacts expressed by stakeholders, is to apply a 3-month closure period applicable in both 7d and a parallel closure in Lyme Bay area of 7e from 1 July to 30 September 2025.

The closure in ICES division 7d will apply to all vessels over 10 metres and the Lyme Bay area of 7e closure will apply to all vessels over 12 metres in length. The closures will apply to both EU and UK scallop dredge vessels.

The 2023 stock assessment for area 7d suggests current fishing may be occurring at a sustainable level. Harvest rate estimates in 7d show exploitation has been occurring below the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxy since 2019 to 2022, and 2024 draft stock survey data indicates 7d has continued to see a positive trend in stock biomass since 2022.

In the area of Lyme Bay 7e there continues to be high levels of exploitation above the MSY proxy. Despite this, Lyme Bay 7e has shown trends in harvestable biomass similar to the trends seen in neighbouring areas particularly 7d, suggesting the area might be supported by recruitment outside of Lyme Bay 7e. The 2024 draft stock survey data suggests improvements to the harvestable biomass - the biomass of individuals above the minimum landing size (MLS).

Impacts of the 15 May to 30 September closure option for area 7d and Lyme Bay were raised by stakeholders as a significant concern, with both environmental and socio-economic concerns stated.

A 15 May to 30 September closure would alter fishing behaviours resulting in large quantities of UK landings following the opening of the area after the closure period. For example, in area 7d an abundance of scallops on the ground led to reported landings of 1992 tonnes in October 2024 compared to 597 tonnes of landings in October 2023. This significant increase in landings compared to previous years resulted in an over saturation of scallops landed leading to a price decrease from £15 to £11 a kilogram.

This impact has been reported across all fishing sectors and has been reported by industry members that the extended closure period introduces risk to the continued viability of UK businesses. This has been highlighted particularly by sectors such as the under 15 m scalloping fleet, and there are concerns about the impacts displaced fishing activity has had on the stock and the wider marine environment.

The increase in landings in October and November 2024 saw overall landings for the year for both areas increase beyond levels seen in 2022 and 2023. If overall effort patterns across the year are higher, it can negate any positive impact of a closure.

Significant amounts of displacement of effort which would otherwise have been concentrated on 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e has also been observed occurring in alternative fishing areas with poorer quality meat yields being landed in return. This displacement of effort introduced the environmental impacts of dredging onto alternative areas potentially leading to damage to sensitive species and habitats that may otherwise have been avoided.

Paragraph 2.1.4 of the JFS states that “The fisheries policy authorities will place emphasis on rebuilding stocks and protecting the environment. This will need to be delivered in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of fishing interests” A closure period of 1 July – 30 September 2025 has been chosen as it will protect the environment from displaced fishing effort and be sensitive to fishing interests while also providing protection during the peak spawning period for the stocks, which are either being fished below MSY (7d) or continues to sustain high levels of exploitation (7e).

2. Proposed Options

Two closure lengths were considered for ICES division 7d (see Figure 3 in Annex for further information):

- 15 May – 30 September 2025, the same period as the EU closure of 7d to the king scallop dredge fishery and the same closure as 2024, or
- 1 July – 30 September 2025, the same UK closure period as 2023.
- A no-closure option was also presented in the consultation.

Furthermore, a closure to the Lyme Bay area of 7e (see Figure 3 in Annex for further information) aligning with the chosen closure period for 7d was also presented, alongside an option to keep Lyme Bay open regardless of the option chosen for 7d.

3. Stock assessment

ICES division 7d

The most recent Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) stock assessment published in 2024 suggests that the stock units assessed in the Eastern Channel (7d) re estimated to have generally been exploited at, or below, the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) proxy target of 23.4% (see Table 1), except for in 2018.

Table 1: Harvest rate estimates for division 7d, with an MSY proxy harvest rate of 23.4% which were calculated for the 2023 stock assessment (published in 2024).

	Landings (tonnes)	Harvestable Biomass in Dredged Area (tonnes)	Harvest Rate on Dredged Portion of Stock (%)
2017	11260	52580	21.0
2018	14041	26455	53.1
2019	8429	38797	21.7
2020	11797	58378	20.2
2021	8584*	48908	17.6
2022	6021*	37025	16.3

2017 – 2020 landings presented for EU & UK vessels *2021-2022 estimated from UK landings alone

In 2018, the harvest rate was more than double the MSY proxy reference value of 23.4%, this was due to lower estimates of harvestable biomass combined with increased landings in 2018 of 2191(tonnes) (see Table 1). The large variation in reported annual landings and estimated biomass suggests that the population assessed is not at equilibrium. However, the stock continues to look relatively healthy, with fishing below MSY proxy since 2019 to 2022.

Further, Cefas has estimated an increase in harvestable biomass in 2023 following declines in stock abundance estimations from 2020 to 2022. Cefas survey data collected in 2023/2024 is currently being processed and will be available in April 2025, therefore evidence provided relates to the most recent stock assessment published in 2024 using data up to 2022. Draft stock survey data for 2024 which is yet to be published indicates 7d has continued to see a positive trend in stock biomass since 2022.

ICES division 7e

The 2023 stock assessment indicates that the Lyme Bay area of 7e continues to experience levels of exploitation above MSY proxy. Cefas estimate a harvest rate MSY proxy reference point of 24.4% for the Lyme Bay 7e stock unit. Analysis of the landings data in Lyme Bay 7e between 2017-2022 have indicated that the stock has been estimated to be continually exploited above the 24.4% MSY proxy harvest rate, with exceptionally high levels of exploitation observed in years 2018, 2020, 2021 and 2022 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Harvest rate estimates for area Lyme Bay 7e, with an MSY proxy harvest rate of 24.4% which were calculated for the 2023 stock assessment (published in 2024).

	International Landings (tonnes)	**Harvestable Biomass in Dredged Area (tonnes)**	**Harvest Rate on Dredged Portion of Stock (%)**
2017	1450	4888	29.7
2018	2191	2381	92.1
2019	1284	3252	39.5
2020	2004	3632	55.2
2021	1761*	2500	70.4
2022	2020*	2808	71.9

*Estimated from UK landings

Despite these high levels of exploitation above MSY proxy the estimated harvestable biomass in Lyme Bay area of 7e has shown trends in harvestable biomass similar to the trends seen in neighbouring areas particularly 7d (and including 2018), following a decline in harvestable biomass of 51% from 2017 to 2018 (see Table 2).

Draft 2024 stock survey data of Lyme Bay indicated significant increases in stock biomass present since 2018, with a spike observed in the number of individuals slightly below minimum landing size (MLS), indicating smaller and younger scallops and a stronger recruitment year compared to previous years. An increase of the total number of individuals at MLS has also been observed in comparison to previous years since 2018, indicating positive signs for the stock despite exploitation continuing above MSY proxy in the years prior, as presented in Table 2.

Cefas larval transport simulations indicate management outside Lyme Bay may be as important as within Lyme Bay itself. However, as uncertainties exist about larval connectivity between the different assessment areas, local management measures in Lyme Bay remain important as it is unknown to what extent the stock is self-sustained.

4. Landings data

In 2024 the 12 m and under UK fleet landed a total of 881 tonnes in 7d, with 7,345 tonnes landed by the over 12 m UK fleet. Around 90% of scallops are landed by vessels 12 m and over from division 7d. Smaller vessels would not normally target scallops during the closure period as the lack of roe and generally low quality of the meat means it is usually advantageous for smaller vessels to switch to other fisheries during this period where possible. This was reflected in the 2024 landings which saw a reduction in landings when compared to other months by these vessel classes during the closure, despite being exempt (see Figures 1 & 2).

In 2024 there was a temporal shift in fishing activity with a three to four-fold increase in landings from 2023 to 2024 in October and November. Landings increased from 597

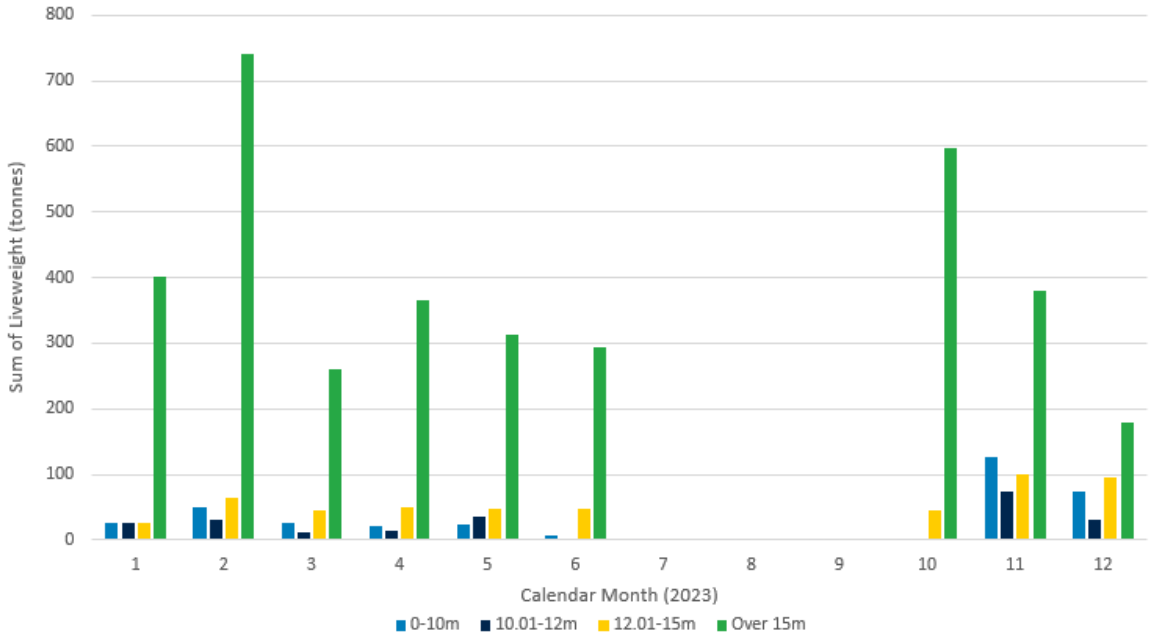
tonnes to 1992 tonnes (7d) and 105 tonnes to 591 tonnes (Lyme Bay area of 7e) in October 2024, and increased from 380 tonnes to 1279 tonnes (7d) and 95 to 408 tonnes in November when compared to 2023 (see Figures 1 and 2). This increase in landings saw overall landings for the year for both areas increase beyond levels seen in 2022 and 2023 (see Table 3). If overall effort patterns across the year are not reduced, it can negate any positive impact of a closure.

During the 2024 closure period MMO observed significant displaced effort across UK waters. Figure 4 (see annex) highlights significant effort was displaced into alternative waters as vessels were unable to access 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e during May – July 2024, compared to the same period in 2023, showing that fishing behaviours were altered. Impacts can be identified in the English Channel, North Sea as well as Scottish waters during the May to July period, all of which are still areas with increased landings for 2024 when compared to 2023.

Figure 5 (see annex) shows landings across the UK for 2023 and 2024. From this we can see an overall increase in yearly landings from offshore areas especially offshore ICES division 7e (western channel) when compared to 2024. Responses to the consultation suggested that offshore 7e had lower densities of scallops, causing dredgers to increase effort to remain profitable resulting in increased seabed contact potentially leading to increased environmental impacts.

This displaced effort introduced pressure on alternative scallop stocks and potentially also on other species of concern identified by stakeholders such as crab. Displacement into offshore 7e was of particular concern for stakeholders as this was identified as an important area for other shellfish stocks. Although the visualisations in Figures 4 and 5 (see annex) should not be taken as a clear representation of effort, they do provide useful context to support concerns provided during the consultation of the potential impact the displacement of fishing activity has presented to a number of areas.

Graph A - 7d - 2023



Graph B - 7d27.7.d - 2024

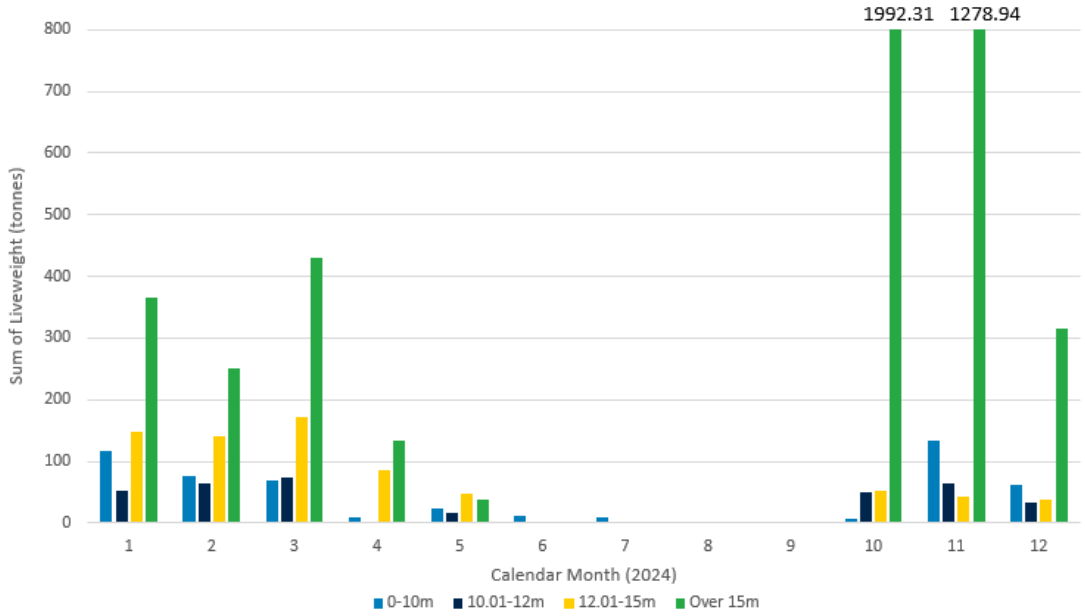
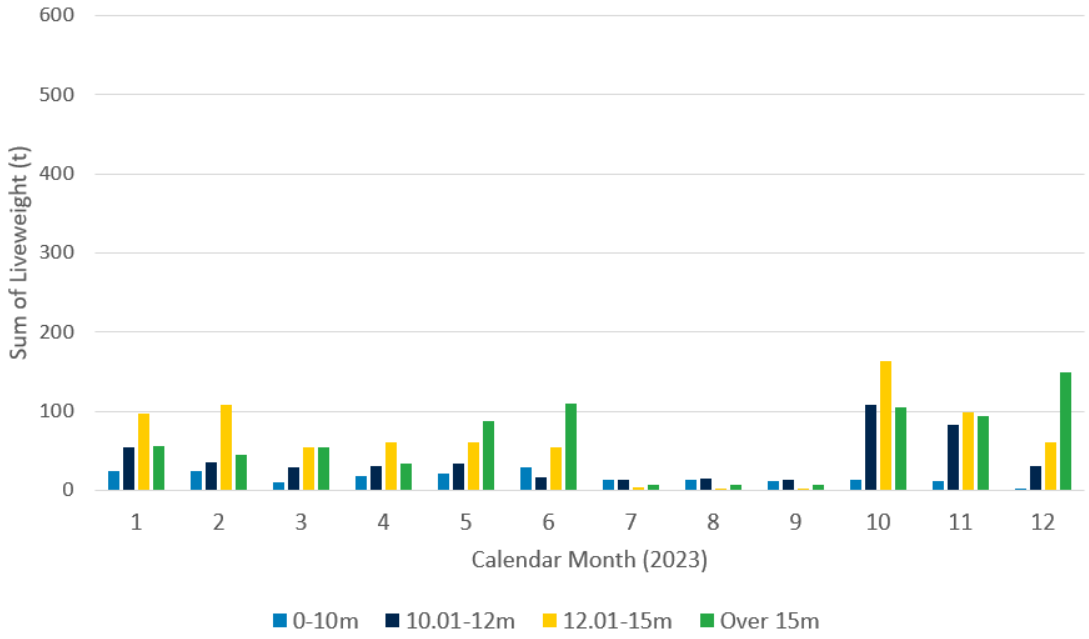


Figure 1: Total weight tonnes (t) of landings of king scallops by UK vessels in ICES division 7d (UK waters only) during 2023 (Graph A) and 2024 (Graph B) by month. The different colours display UK vessel length fleet sectors.

Graph C - Lyme Bay area of 7e 2023



Graph D - Lyme Bay area of 7e- 2024

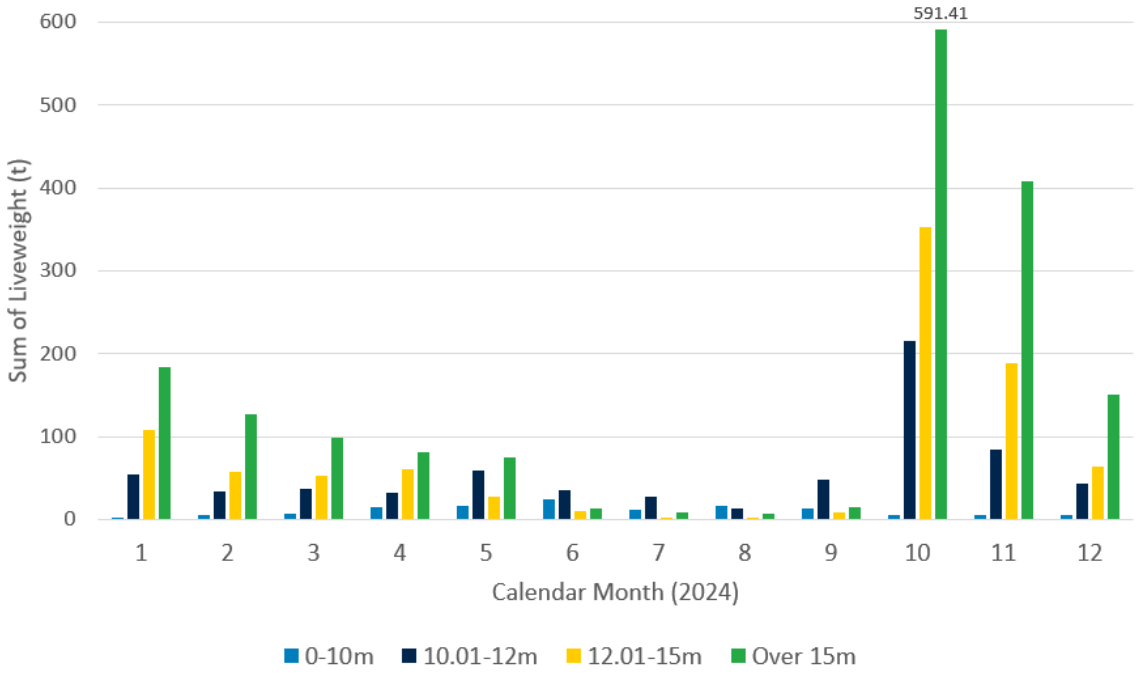


Figure 2: Total weight tonnes (t) of landings of king scallops by UK vessels in the Lyme Bay area of 7e (ICES rectangles 29E6, 29E7, 30E6 and 30E7) during 2023 (Graph C) and 2024 (Graph D) by month. The different colours display UK vessel length fleet sectors.

Table 3: Total yearly UK landings (tonnes) by UK vessels (above) and total yearly UK vessel count of UK vessels (below) in UK waters of 7d and 7e (Lyme Bay) from 2022 – 2024.

Vessel Length	7e (Lyme Bay)			7d		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
0-10 m	212	210	154	443	351	526
10.01-12 m	515	463	687	292	224	356
12.01-15 m	601	818	986	618	522	729
15 m+	538	760	1761	3415	3529	4804
Total	1866	2251	3588	4768	4626	6415

Vessel Count	7e (Lyme Bay)			7d		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
0-10 m	48	57	40	61	56	43
10.01-12 m	21	15	15	9	5	7
12.01-15 m	26	25	22	10	11	10
15 m+	47	39	40	31	31	29
Total	142	136	117	111	103	89

5. Summary of Consultation Responses

33 representations to the consultation were received including responses from industry groups, fisheries managers, NGOs and individuals (see annex for full summary of consultation responses). Responses were received from UK and EU organisations. In summary, most respondents agreed to a scallop closure in ICES division 7d, however there were differing opinions on the temporal extent of the closure. Overall, while there was a mixed response with regards to which closure should be chosen, points were raised in favour of and against both options.

A closure to the Lyme Bay area of 7e for the same period as that selected for 7d was deemed to be the preferable by many of the respondents in order to avoid displacement into an area where Cefas estimates suggest that the stock is being fished above MSY proxy and to avoid bycatch of other species in Lyme Bay.

The points below were received in response to the consultation:

Concerns raised by industry in relation to the 15 May to 30 September closure largely focused on the economic impacts of the closure and displacement of vessels into other areas. Displacement to the 7e offshore area and subsequent gear conflict as a result of the longer closure was highlighted in responses to the consultation.

Economic concerns included a distorted market for king scallops, problems fulfilling orders from customers, the disproportionate impacts of a closure on certain sections of the fleet, loss of valuable roe-on scallops for export, limited time to adequately prepare for the closure and the loss of valuable time fishing for scallops which are in good condition

Responses in favour of a closure from 15 May to 30 September focused on avoiding displacement from EU waters, aligning with the EU and the increasing stock biomass in EU waters, increased environmental and stock protections, alignment with Devon and Severn[1], Southern[2] and Sussex[3] IFCA closures, limiting gear conflict, and preventing scallops being fished before they were most valuable.

Although some responses countered opposing views that the 2024 closure period had a significant socio-economic impact on businesses, the overwhelming majority of responses acknowledged that despite the potentially short-term benefits to the stock observed, socio-economic impacts were significant and likely to last into future years.

There were divergent opinions regarding whether under 10 m length vessels should be exempt from the 7d closure and whether under 12 m vessels should be exempt from the 7e closure. Some respondents were against the proposal providing comments such as the closure should apply to all vessel lengths as smaller vessels tend to have mixed fishing activity and can better adapt to the closure; some smaller vessels are still able to operate a large number of dredges; exempting certain vessel classes could encourage people to invest in more vessels of this size; including all vessels would provide maximum stock protection; and smaller vessels are already under IFC District closures in some areas.

Other respondents commented the 10 m and under fleet should be exempt from the 7d closure and that the 12 m and under fleet should be exempt from the 7e because smaller vessels have limited capacity to move fishing activity along the coast; economic small port activity in ICES division 7d and the Lyme Bay area of 7e is reliant on inshore fishing activity continuing uninterrupted; these vessels are already limited by weather conditions; smaller vessels have reduced impacts on scallops; smaller vessels could be displaced in the Cornish IFC District (which does not impose a seasonal closure); and that smaller vessels need the option for diversification.

6. Consultation outcome

Having considered the consultation responses, socio-economic information provided by

[1] Devon and Severn IFCA scallop management please see here,

[2] Southern IFCA Solent dredge byelaw and conditions please see here.

[3] Sussex IFCA scallop closure byelaw please see here.

stakeholders, and considered all available scientific advice on the stock biomass and environmental health, MMO have agreed to introduce a closure in 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e (ICES rectangles 29E6, 29E7, 30E6 and 30E7, Figure 3, annex for reference) for the king scallop dredge fishery from 1 July to 30 September 2025.

In 2025 the 7d closure will apply to all UK and EU vessels over 10 metres in length and the Lyme Bay area of 7e closure will apply to all UK and EU vessels over 12 metres in length.

When considering this decision UKFAs must be mindful of the principles of public law which includes requiring measures to be necessary and expedient for the regulation of sea fishing, as well as being proportionate and enforceable. UKFAs also considered the Fisheries Act 2020 in their decision making including the sustainability objective and environmental, social and economic considerations.

MMO will continue to monitor data, scientific advice and feedback from industry to ensure that the closure achieves its objectives.

A summary of the reasoning for this decision is outlined below:

A closure length from 1 July to 30 September for 7d and Lyme Bay are of 7e would allow a balanced approach to protect stock during spawning, whilst aiming to allow for sustainable exploitation to occur and aligning with JFS paragraph 2.1.4.

Harvest rate estimates in 7d suggest that exploitation is occurring below MSY proxy, and although including the caveats in how MSY proxy and the harvest rates are calculated would suggest that current fishing is at a sustainable level (Table 1). However, large variations in the estimated harvestable biomass within 7d remain and require monitoring. In the area of Lyme Bay 7e, harvestable biomass remains below 2017 estimates and high levels of exploitation continue to be sustained above MSY proxy (Table 2). However, questions remain regarding how self-sufficient the area is or to what extent the area is supported by recruitment from other areas, with 2024 draft stock survey indicating improvements to the total stock biomass and number of individuals at MLS present.

Some industry members described the significant financial impact that a 15 May – 30 September closure period would have on the scallop sector. Effort would be displaced to many other areas resulting in poorer yields and potential damage to stocks outside the closure area, and introduced potential for increased environmental impacts as displaced vessels introduced effort in alternative areas (see Figures 4 and 5 Annex).

Furthermore, UK vessels would lose access to appropriately sized roe-on scallops, which was identified by stakeholders as a key market for UK industry. It was also shared by stakeholders in the consultation that the 15 May – 30 September closure would have a detrimental impact on the catching and processing sectors, bringing into question the economic viability of the sector, whilst introducing significant risk to jobs both at sea and in the supporting land-based infrastructure.

These socio-economic impacts did not occur in isolation, with negative environmental impacts such as displacement occurring alongside these. With reference to paragraph 2.1.4 of the JFS MMO must balance fishing interests against stock and environmental benefits. Evidence suggests that a longer closure period would again result in displaced effort and stakeholder responses suggest that it would result in socio-economic issues, with no overall decrease in total landings. As the 7d stock is being fished below MSY and the 7e stock appears able to sustain high levels of exploitation the need for a longer

closure may not be needed.

A concurrent closure in the Lyme Bay area of 7e was chosen as this would limit depletion of the stock due to displacement of fishing effort from 7d. This is particularly important due to the overexploitation of the stock in Lyme Bay which has been exploited above MSY proxy since 2017.

MMO elected to exempt vessels 10 m in length and under from the 7d closure and vessels 12 m in length and under from the Lyme Bay area of 7e closure for the following reasons. These size classes are heavily dependent on weather which imposes a natural limit on the number of days they can spend at sea. Smaller vessels often have finer profit margins and a lack of options for diversification can increase this vulnerability. Exempting smaller vessels from the closure gives them the ability to switch to scallop fishing should they need, providing alternative income opportunities. In 2024 landings by these exempted vessel classes were low during the closure period suggesting limited impact on the stock.

Concerns were raised over the potential exemption of under 10 m vessels from the 7d closure and under 12 m vessels from the Lyme Bay area of 7e closure. MMO will monitor and analyse landings data from these vessel lengths throughout 2025 to ensure fishing activity of these permitted vessels does not overly risk the objectives of the closure. Should this indicate that the stock sustainability objective of the closure isn't being met the MMO will react accordingly to undertake the most appropriate action.

Other considerations

When making the decision, MMO has also taken into account other considerations such as the impact of a closure on other stocks, and policy and legislative considerations.

Within the consultation responses that were received, concern over the wider environmental impacts have been received, such as the impact of dredging on crab stocks.

Concerns were raised that vessels displaced from 7d and the Lyme Bay area of 7e will encroach on mid-channel potting boxes, resulting in gear conflict and bycatch of other important species. MMO will monitor VMS and landings data to consider whether the chosen management option is having an impact to nearby stocks of other species. As part of the MMO's communications regarding the closure, these mid-channel potting box arrangements will be highlighted to increase awareness and aim to prevent displacement into these areas.

This decision has considered national policy such as the relevant marine plans and the Joint Fisheries Statement, to ensure the short term social and economic risks have been balanced with long term health of the marine environment that provide resilience to coastal communities whilst protecting the stock for future fisheries. Further consideration of environmental, social and economic themes and alternative scenarios is available in the annex.

This decision does not set a precedent for any potential future closures, and future decisions on fishing effort and gear restrictions will be made through the king scallop fisheries management plan (FMP) using best available scientific evidence and with input from a cross section of the scallop industry. The FMP sets out a holistic approach to king scallop management where seasonal closures (if deemed appropriate) will be implemented alongside other management to ensure sustainable fishing of the stock.

Alternative management measures were suggested in response to the question of

temporary measure suggestions, such as having permanent dredge areas, making scallop into a quota species, horsepower restrictions, fishing licence restrictions and days at sea. All of these management measures could be considered once the appropriate evidence has been collected and assessed through the king scallop FMP.

Improving non-quota species management, including shellfish stocks, is a priority for Government as we work towards developing and implementing longer term approaches. This will be supported through the Fisheries Management Plans and international agreements on non-quota species such as the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, as set out in the Joint Fisheries Statement.

Exercises such as this consultation 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 decision has been assessed against the South[1] and the Southwest [2] Marine plans:

This activity is compliant with the following marine plan policies in the South Marine Plan[4:] S- FISH-1, S-EMP-2, S-SOC-1, S-BIO-2, S-FISH-4. The remaining policies in the South Marine Plan are not applicable to this decision.

This activity is compliant with the following marine plan policies in the Southwest Marine Plan[5]: S- FISH-1, S- FISH-2, S- FISH-3, S-EMP-1, S-SOC-1, S-BIO-2. The remaining policies in the Southwest Marine Plan are not applicable to this decision.

7. Next steps

The following closure in UK waters for the king scallop dredge fishery will be enacted via a fishing vessel licence variation:

- ICES division 7d for all UK and EU vessels over 10m in length from 1 July to 30 September 2025

- Lyme Bay area of 7e (ICES rectangles 29E5, 29E7, 30E6 and 30E7) for all UK and EU vessels over 12m in length from 1 July to 30 September 2025

UK fishing vessel licence holders (or their nominees) who hold a scallop entitlement or have recorded dredges as a gear in their fishing logbook will be notified of the variation by email.
All UK vessel licence variations can be found here.

All EU vessels with a UK foreign vessel licence for UK waters will be notified of the variation by email by the UK Single Issuing Authority (UKSIA).

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[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-south-marine-plans-documents

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-south-west-marine-plans-documents

All foreign vessel licence variations can be found

All respondents to the consultation will be informed of the decision by email.

Useful Information

Topic of the consultation:	To ask for views on a closure of ICES division 7d and 7e (Lyme Bay area) king scallop (*Pectens maximus)* dredge fishery between: 15 May - 30 September, 1 July – 30 September or No closure With consideration given to exempt the 12 metre and under fleet.
Scope of this call for evidence:	To seek views, evidence, and impact information on a closure of ICES division 7d and the Lyme Bay area of 7e for the king scallop dredge fishery.
Geographical scope:	ICES division 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e (ICES areas, 29E6, 29E7. 30E6, 30E7)
Those consulted:	Scallop fishing and processing industry, IFCAs, Crown Dependencies, NGOs academics and members of the
Body/bodies responsible for the Consultation:	MMO: Fisheries Management Team
Duration:	The consultation ran from 18 November 2024 – 12 January 2025.
Enquiries:	For any enquiries about the consultation please contact sustainablefisheries@marinemanagement.org.uk.

Annex

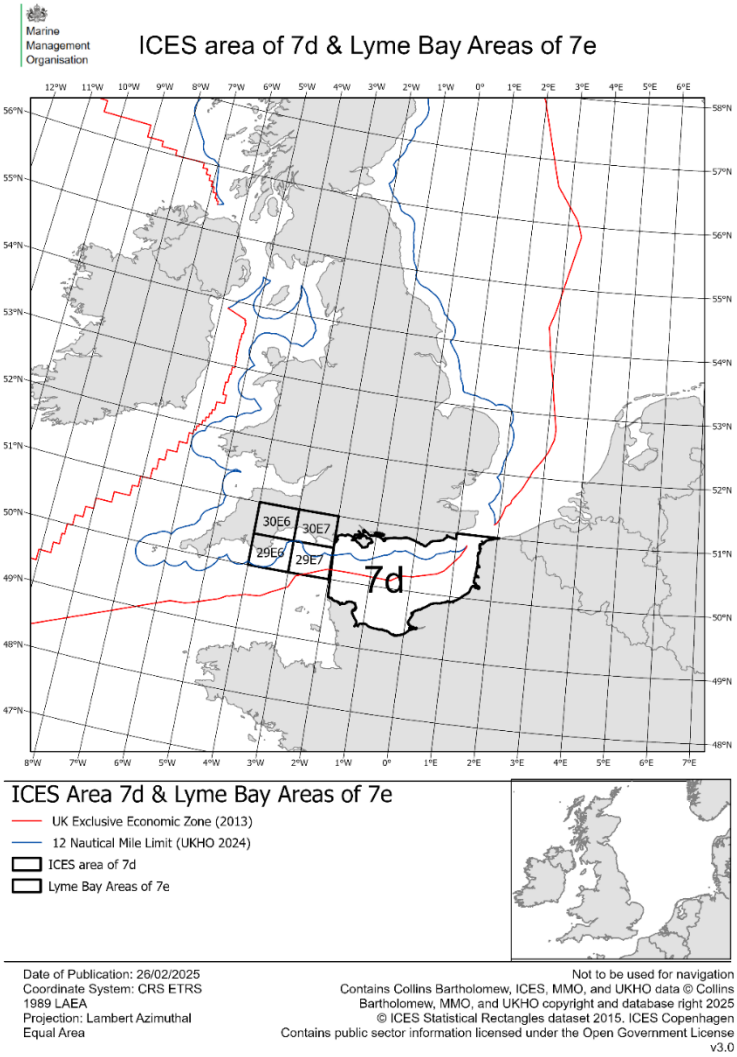
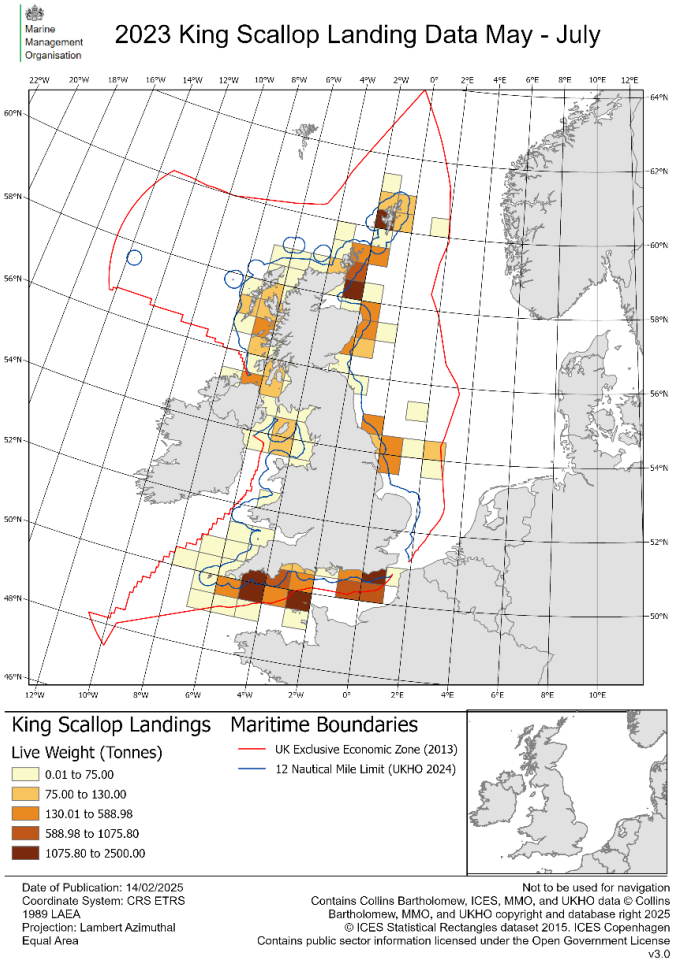


Figure 3: Map of ICES area 7d and Lyme Bay areas of 7e (defined in this context as sub-rectangles 30E6, 30E7, 29E6 and 29E7).



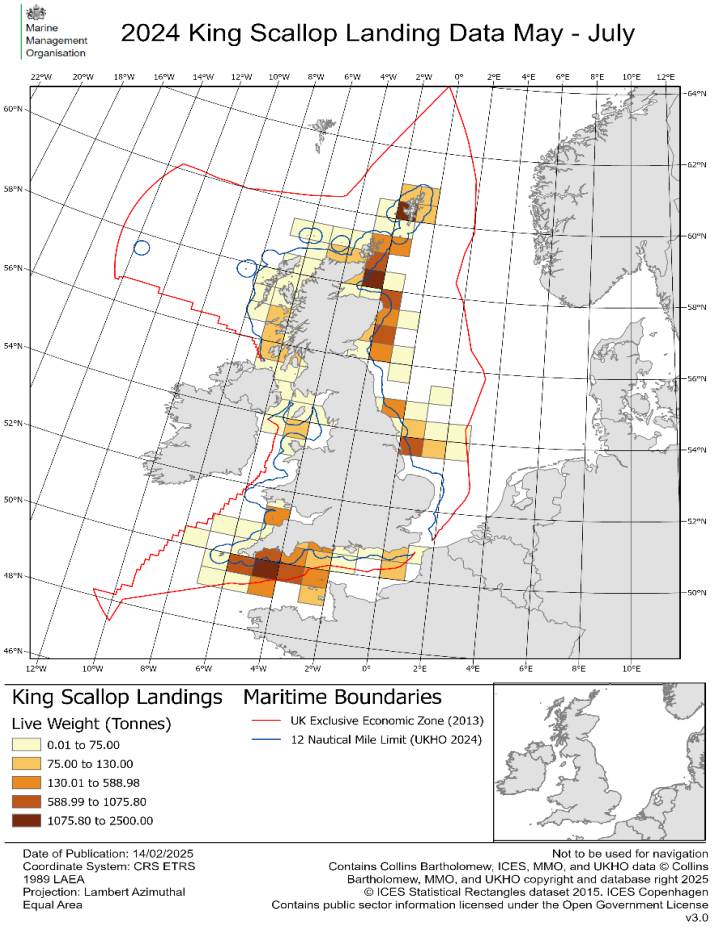
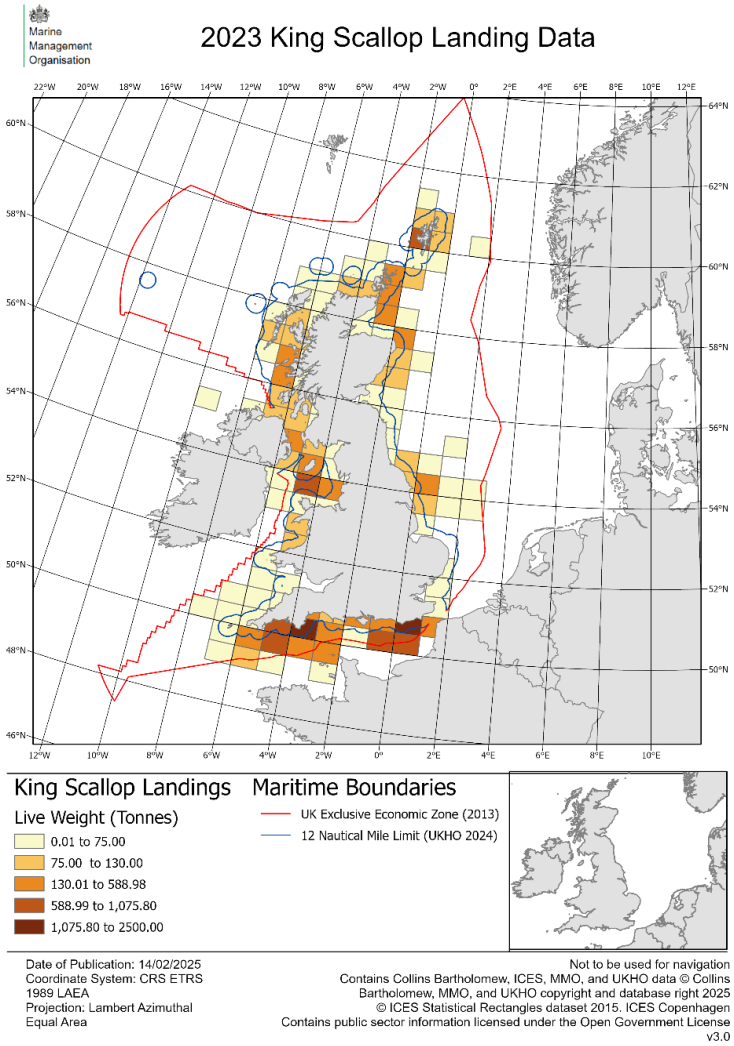


Figure 4: Scallop Dredge fishing across the UK from May to July in 2023 (left) and 2024 (right) by UK vessels.



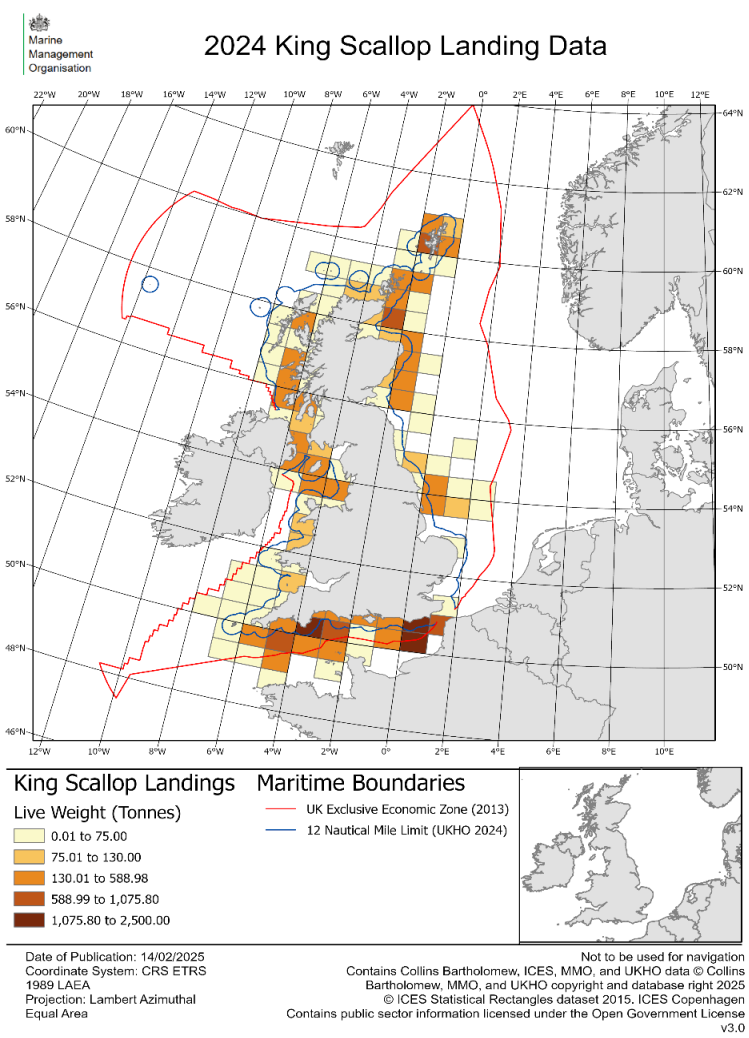


Figure 5: King Scallop Dredge fishing across the UK during 2023 (left) and 2024 (right)

Further information on the considerations of the consultation

Environmental theme

- Scientific evidence suggests a closure can protect the stock during spawning as well as reducing the environmental impacts from dredging. Peak spawning is typically summer, although spawning events occur from spring through to October.
- The potential impacts of any closures are uncertain. A closure would be expected to materialise as an increase in the average level of future recruitments. However, it would be difficult to separate management benefits from natural variability for a single event. The additional benefits of a longer closure compared with a shorter closure is also unknown.
- If overall effort patterns across the year are not reduced, it can negate any positive impact of a closure.
- If any displaced effort from the 7d closure is redirected to Lyme Bay, there is a risk to the sustainability of the local scallop population.

Social and economic theme

- Environmental and stock benefits must be balanced against socio-economic needs, allowing for sustainable fishing to be achieved.
- Consultation responses and engagement with the SICG brought to our attention that the extended closure period implemented in 2024 had significant economic and social impacts on the UK scallop fleet.
- Displacement to the 7e offshore area and subsequent gear conflict as a result of the longer closure was highlighted in responses to the consultation.
- Economic impacts included distorted market for king scallops, problems fulfilling orders from customers, the disproportionate impacts of a closure on certain sections of the fleet, loss of valuable roe-on scallops for export, limited time to adequately prepare and the loss of valuable time fishing for scallops which are in good condition.

Lyme Bay closure scenarios

- Responses to the consultation highlighted displacement from 7d into 7e as a concern. A scenario where Lyme Bay remained open during the closure period could have resulted in over-exploitation of the stock and further impacts on other fisheries through increased bycatch and seabed damage.

Exclusion of the 10m and under fleet from the 7d closure and the 12m and under fleet from the Lyme Bay 7e closure

- Consultation responses suggest that the under 10m and under 12m fleet are suffering due to limited opportunities for diversification. Although landings data and consultation responses suggest that they do not predominantly target scallops during the closure period, including them would further limit their opportunities for diversification. Respondents suggested that smaller vessels often operate under smaller profit margins and further limiting their opportunities for diversification could disproportionately impact them economically.

- Many small coastal communities in 7d and 7e are reliant on the smaller vessels which often operate directly out of their ports – including them in the closure has the potential to impact these communities.
- Although many smaller vessels are still capable of operating large numbers of dredges, many of them fish within 0-12nm and are heavily dependent on weather. Both of these place an additional limitation on the effort exerted on the stock by these vessels.
- Numbers of under 10 m vessels fishing for scallops in Lyme Bay and 7d have been falling from 2022-2024 (see Table 3).

Summary of Responses to the Consultation Questions

This consultation ran from 18 November 2024 – 12 January 2025 with information on background of the fishery, reasoning for the proposed closure and consultation questions available for review here.

Those individuals who are the nominated contact on the domestic fishing vessel licence system, and other interested parties were directly emailed to notify them of the consultation. There were also communications regarding the consultation on social media. 33 representations to the consultation were received including responses from industry groups, fisheries managers, NGOs, individuals and a mixture of sectors from under 10 m vessels to over 15 m vessels. Further detail of responses can be found below, numbers presented below are to indicate general responses to the consultation and are **not** indicative of the number the people each respondent was representative of:

1) A proposed closure prohibiting UK and EU scallop dredge fishing for vessels in UK waters of ICES area 7d and the Lyme Bay area of 7e, for the following time periods:

A) From 15 May to 30 September 2025

B) From 1 July to 30 September 2025

C) Retain extended closure period for Lyme Bay area of 7e, roll back closure period in 7d to shorter closure period

D) No closure within any time period

Of the 33 respondents, 14 favoured the 1 July to 30 September closure option. Those who selected this option primarily cited economic reasons including the impacts of last years extended closure on their business. Some respondents also cited the 2024 Cefas stock assessment which suggested that the 7d king scallop stock was predominantly being fished below MSY proxy.

11 respondents favoured the 15 May to 30 September closure option, citing increased stock and environmental protection, reduced gear conflict in the closure areas, displacement (especially from EU waters), aligning with EU and the success of their closure in improving stock biomass in EU waters, alignment with IFCA closures, and limiting the numbers of scallops which were taken before the meat quality and roe quantity increases in winter.

There were two responses in favour of no closure in 7d with a retained closure in 7e, with suggestions that other forms of management would be better suited for 7d. Another response suggested a shorter closure both areas. One response was in favour

of keeping both areas closed to dredging, citing the impacts on the environment and other fisheries.

2) **If you consider a closure an appropriate option, which vessel size should be included in the closure? Also, within which ICES areas would be most appropriate?**

Of the 33 respondents, 15 favoured a closure which included all vessels regardless of length. Reasons stated included:

- Smaller vessels tend to have mixed fishing activity throughout the year and could switch fishing activity from scallops during the closure period. Larger vessels on the other hand are more likely to be specialist scallopers and would thus be disproportionately impacted by a closure to 7d and Lyme Bay. It was argued that it would be unfair to exclude under 10 m vessels from the closure based on any potential negative impacts while including larger vessels which were more likely to be specialised and thus suffer greater economic impacts as a result of any closure.
- Some under 10 m length vessels are still capable of operating large numbers of dredges and harvesting large quantities of scallops.
- Exempting some vessel classes could incentivise them to increase fishing effort during the closure period.
- Including all vessel sizes would provide maximum stock and environmental protection from fishing activity.
- Some under 10 m length vessels are already under restrictions within IFCA Districts to limit scallop fishing in the English Channel

6 respondents favored exempting smaller vessels from the closure. Reasons stated included:

- Smaller vessels have limited capacity to move their fishing activity along the coast and into new fishing areas, and so the closure of 7d and Lyme Bay 7e would limit their ability to fish.
- Economic small port activity in ICES division 7d and the Lyme Bay area of 7e is reliant on inshore fishing activity continuing uninterrupted.
- Smaller vessels are already limited by the number of days they can spend at sea and weather conditions.
- Smaller vessels usually would not target scallops during the closure period as the quality of meat and quantity of roe is low, however because profit margins can be smaller for the 10-12m and under fleet sometimes they need to have the option to switch to scallops – reducing this ability could cause economic impacts.
- Smaller vessels have reduced impacts on scallop stocks.
- Smaller vessels could be displaced into the Cornwall IFC District which does not impose a seasonal scallop closure.

4 respondents favoured exempting vessels under 15 m in length from the closure, especially from the Lyme Bay closure, stating that there are many vessels local to this region who are within this size category and that these vessels have a positive impact

on the local economy in this region and are struggling financially.

3) **How would these proposed closures of ICES area 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e to scallop dredging impact you and your business?**

Respondents who favoured the longer closure highlighted the benefits to their business by conserving scallops' stocks, preventing displacement from the EU waters, preventing scallops being taken when their quality was low and damage to the environment and other fisheries caused by dredging.

Respondents who favoured the shorter closure highlighted the negative impacts last year's closure had had on their business; including oversupply, price decreases, loss of fishing time, and inability to fulfil orders and pointed to the Cefas assessment which suggested that the stock was being fished below MSY proxy under previous closures which lasted from 1 July – 30 September.

4) **Do you consider your business to rely on scallop fishing all year round? If not, do you swap into another fishery for part of the year? If this is the case, which other fisheries, do you fish? and for what proportion of your fishing activity?**

Of the 33 respondents 10 relied on scallops for their business all year round.

17 respondents relied on scallops part of the year. For some under 10 m vessels scallops represented between 25-50% of their business. These vessels switched into other fisheries such as cuttlefish and bass when the quality of scallops was lower.

The consultation received responses from fishers who do not dredge for scallops, however fish for species which they stated are impacted by dredging (e.g. crab potters).

The consultation also received responses from stakeholders who do not represent businesses such as NGOs and IFCAs.

5) **If you are a vessel owner/vessel agent or skipper: in which length group is your vessel; 10 m and under, 10.01 m – 12 m, 12.01 m – 15 m and the over 15 m fleet?**

- 10 respondents represented 10m and under vessels
- 9 respondents represented 10.01m-12m vessels
- 12 respondents represented 12.01m-15m vessels
- 15 respondents represented over 15m vessels.

Please note that many of the responses were submitted by representatives who represent vessels of differing size classes.

6) **Would you consider any alternative areas to be of concern to displaced effort as a result of any proposed closure? i.e. ICES rectangles other than those covered in the closure, or other areas such as the mid-channel potting boxes.**

Respondents highlighted a number of areas at risk of displaced effort and issues

relating to this. Four warned that a shorter closure which did not mirror that seen in EU waters would cause displacement into UK waters resulting in an overfish, especially with the potential for new dredge limits in EU waters. Three respondents warned of displaced effort into IFCA districts: Cornwall IFCA where there is no dredge closure and an increase in potting effort inside Devon and Severn IFCA resulting from potters being displaced by dredgers outside the District. One response warned of displacement into Welsh waters. Concerns were raised regarding impacts on other stock such as migrating crab stocks as a result of scallop dredge activity.

A common theme in the respondents who submitted information regarding displacement discussed displacement into other areas of 7e, especially the offshore. In total 10 warned of displacement into other areas of 7e outside the closure. Impacts of this included gear conflict, potential infringements on the mid-channel potting boxes (stated by 2 respondents), and increased fishing effort as these areas had lower densities of scallops.

7) Are there any temporary measures that should be considered whilst longer term management is implemented through the king scallop Fisheries Management Plan?

Other measures included dredge limits, co-management with the EU, permanent no-dredge zones, 110mm dredge rings, engine power restrictions, sole recovery days for dredgers in Lyme Bay, fallowing, quota, and a licence/permit to fish scallops.

8) Do you have any other comments?

Several respondents stated that in order to prevent scallops being fished until they were in the best condition the closure should be extended until 31 October. This they argued would provide economic and stock benefits.

Several respondents stated that the Scottish fleet were having a disproportionately large impact on the 7d and Lyme Bay area of 7e stocks.

Responses suggested the closure should consider the external factors that the fishing fleet are currently having to endure such as rising fuel, maintenance and processing costs that were eroding profit margins.

Some respondents suggested that dredging should be completely phased out of the fishing industry altogether.

Some respondents questioned the scientific rationale of last year's closure and pointed to the lack of a stock assessment for UK waters only. Some responses criticised the lack of economic and social considerations in the 2025 consultation document.