

Management of Pot Fisheries in D&S IFCA's District

Officers' Recommendation

To go out to informal consultation with all potting permit holders to gauge wider opinion on the concerns and suggestions for management measures recorded to date.

1. Background

D&S IFCA Members have raised concerns regarding the pot fisheries in D&S IFCA's District. A paper was presented to the B&PSC on 20th October 2022 relating to the pressures and risks to the static gear fisheries in the D&S IFCA's District which were raised by the South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen (SDCS). A summary paper was taken to the Full Authority on 15th December 2022 and noted by Members. A Crab Management Update was noted at the B&PSC meeting on 23rd February 2023.

D&S IFCA Members agreed that workstreams relating to crustacea fisheries were included in the 2023/2024 and the 2024/2025 Annual Plans. This workstream involves engagement with commercial fishers operating in the D&S IFCA's District and discussions on their concerns relating to crustacea stocks and what potential management would be appropriate to manage the crab and lobster stocks in the District.

This officers' paper highlights the concerns and management measures suggested at the engagement meetings, together with outputs from other engagement in the South West. D&S IFCA will use this information to provide topics to go out to informal consultation (a Call for Information) with all D&S IFCA potting permit holders, the results of which will be considered by the B&PSC potentially leading to formal consultation on management measures.

2. Engagement at Port Meetings

Between January and June 2024, D&S IFCA Environment officers held port meetings with commercial potting permit holders across the D&S IFCA's District. In total 12 meetings were organised with three on the North Coast of Devon and nine along the coast in South and East Devon. All commercial potting permit holders were contacted directly by e-mail, and news items were produced and published on D&S IFCA's website. For North Devon netting permit holders were also contacted to help inform fishing activity within the Bristol Channel and Approaches SAC.

The rationale behind these meetings was to discuss three topics to help D&S IFCA better understand the activities and the concerns of Permit Holders:

- **Importance of fishing grounds to local fishermen.**

D&S IFCA regularly responds to consultations on the impacts of marine developments, aiming to highlight impacts of these development on fishing activities and fish. Officers wanted to talk to the permit holders and ask them to provide information on their activity and indicate areas worked on charts. This information will help to ensure that the existing

fishing uses of the sea are properly accounted for, and that the possible impacts of co-location and displacement of fishing activities by marine developments are properly considered/mitigated/avoided.

- **Concerns about management of crab and lobster.**

Officers wanted to hear about permit holders' concerns about crustacean fisheries in the District and suggestions on potential management measures.

- **Fishing in the Bristol Channel (North Devon only)**

D&S IFCA is required to assess interactions between fishing activities and harbour porpoise in the Bristol Channel Approaches Marine Protected Area, and officers aim to ensure that any management measures (if required) are proportionate. Officers wanted to talk to North Devon fishers to give the opportunity for local fishermen to provide sound, accurate data to best inform the assessments..

3.Evidence Gathered at Port Meetings

Attendance by permit holders at the meetings was relatively low, in particular in South Devon. Of a total of 177 Commercial Potting Permit Holders, 41 fishers attended the meetings. Felicity Syvester (D&S IFCA General member) attended the Appledore and Ilfracombe meetings. Some fishers at the meetings said they would support on-line surveys to gather information.

Table 1: Dates of meetings and number of attendees.

Port	Date of Meeting	Number of Permit Holders/fishers attending
Clovelly	31/01/2024	5
Ilfracombe	19/02/2024	4 (+ 1 crew)
Appledore	20/02/2024	3 (+ 1 crew)
Plymouth	02/05/2024	6
Salcombe	16/05/2024	2
Dartmouth	14/05/2024	2
Brixham	20/05/2024	3
Torquay	22/05/2024	1
Teignmouth	28/05/2024	6
Exmouth	23/05/2024	2
Seaton	10/06/2024	5
Lyme Regis	11/06/2024	0

Alongside the discussions and notes taken at the port meetings, 30 fishers (mostly those attending the meetings) completed survey forms, annotated charts providing details of their activities, and also detailed concerns relating to their fisheries and suggested potential management measures. The concerns, raised by all fishers who engaged, are summarised in Table 2 and the management measures in Table 3. Full details of the suggestions are tabulated in Annex 1 and 2.

Concerns raised and Suggestions of Potential Management Measures

North Devon (Clovelly, Appledore, Ilfracombe)

- **Concerns:**

North Devon Fishers' concerns were largely related to overfishing and the level of effort, in particular, pot numbers and the larger vessels operating in this part of the District. Many of those points that related to larger vessels, who have large numbers

of pots, also related to viviers vessels operating there. Fishers were also concerned about soft, small and poor-quality crab being used as bait. North Devon fishers were worried about more regulations being introduced inshore and REM on vessels. Fishers also pointed out the season for crab and lobster is getting shorter and catches were declining. The removal of too many male lobsters was also raised as a concern.

Fishers in North Devon saw that their fishing is in conflict with marine developments such as seaweed farms and windfarms. They also pointed out that the economics of fishing was in decline with poor prices and limited ability to diversify.

- **Management Measures:**

North Devon fishers suggested potential management measures that could be applied to the North of the D&S IFCA's District as they considered that the North and the South coast could be managed differently. Restricting the size of vessel together with pot limitations in the North Devon part of the District were favoured as well as the potential for seasonal closures in the different pot fisheries. However, some fishers also felt they were too many restrictions already in place in the inshore area.

Other measures that could be applied more widely related to days at sea limits for larger vessels. Minimum conservation reference size (CRS) changes were raised with the suggestion of a maximum size for lobsters and an increase in the minimum CRS above 90mm.

No management measures were suggested regarding recreational potting apart from the concern that recreational potters are not abiding by D&S IFCA regulations.

South Devon (Plymouth, Salcombe, Dartmouth, Brixham, Torquay)

- **Concerns:**

The greatest concerns from South Devon fishers attending the meetings, in particular those operating out of Plymouth, Dartmouth and Salcombe, related to vivier vessels and the impact they believe are having on stocks outside the 6nm due to their level of effort, ability to work 24/7 and weeks at a time and the potential for them to move inshore and continue with that level of effort on the inshore grounds. Concerns that these vessels are landing poor quality, diseased and soft crab,.

South Devon fishers were concerned about recreational potting, in particular the amount of recreational pots on the ground and some concern were raised about the landing of undersize and berried crustacea by recreational potters. Fishers in South Devon were also concern about changes in the crustacea socks – with shifts in seasonality of the different species pushing the start of the crabbing season later in the year and raised environmental changes as a cause for the stock changes. Some fishers raised the impact of escape gaps on lobsters with claws getting caught in the gaps and damaged when pots are hauled aboard, and the restriction on the velvet crab fishery.

- **Management Measures:**

The fishers in South Devon are generally confined to MPAs and the Inshore Potting Agreement (IPA) due to the level of demersal gear in this part of the District and therefore had different views of potential management measures compared to the North Coast fishers. Many felt that the inshore fleet is overregulated compared to the offshore fleet and wanted to have restrictions applied across the board.

South Devon fishers were against pot limitations due to the restricted areas they work and that the number of pots is already restricted by space. Pot limitations would only be supported if applied nationally and not just in the inshore area. South Devon fishers were keen on restrictions being applied to vivier vessels and showed support for days at sea as a management measure to restrict the potential for vivier vessels to work 24/7 in the inshore area. Through discussion with the South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen (SDCS) they felt that national measures introduced through the Crab and Lobster FMP in terms of effort limitation as part of the SW Crab Pilot study was the most appropriate way forward. This also applied to the use of REM.

East Devon (Teignmouth, Exmouth, Seaton)

- **Concerns:**

The greatest concern raised by fishers operating out of these ports was recreational potting. These concerns included too much recreational gear impacting the small inshore commercial vessels ability to fish, too many recreational fishers on one vessel hauling many pots, recreational potters not abiding by the permit conditions and landing undersized and berried crab and lobster. The fishers operating out of these ports, also raised concerns about the increase in scallopers in the area, the impacts of demersal fishing gear on habitats and crustacea stocks.

The impact of increased netting due to changes in management of finfish stock and that levels of netting were increasing in these areas. They also raised the concern about stone crushers on nets destroying crab caught in the nets. Fishers from the East Devon ports pointed out the difference in MCRS across the boundary with Southern IFCA which affects their landings compared to fishers working across the line and that some fishers were taking whelks of less than 65mm from Devon and landing them into Lyme Regis (Dorset) due to the different size limits.

Fishers in this part of the District supported the concerns raised across the District on the changes in environmental conditions, as well as capital dredging further East in the channel, and the increase in other species affecting crab and lobster stocks. They also remarked that scrubbing of lobsters and declawing crabs is taking place particularly in the Budleigh area. Several fishers also raised their concerns on scallop divers not adhering to catch limits.

- **Management Measures:**

Fishers from these ports focussed their management suggestions on limiting the level of recreational fishing and further restrictions on demersal mobile gear vessel through spatial restrictions out to one mile and reducing the number of scallop dredges aside. Some fishers were supportive of localised management of the amount of potting gear in particular around Budleigh Salterton.

Table 2: Summarising the Potting Concerns raised by Fishers attending D&S IFCA’s District-wide Meetings

Category of Concern	North Devon			Total No. of concerns raised	South Devon					Total No. of concerns raised	East Devon			Total No. of concerns raised	Totals District Wide
	Clovelly	Ifracombe	Appledore		Plymouth	Dartmouth	Salcombe	Brixham	Torquay		Teignmouth	Exmouth	Seaton		
Vivier vessels impact		1	1	2	2	6	2			10				0	12
Large vessels impact	3	3		6	1					1				0	7
Efficiency of boats impacts on stocks		1	1	2						0	1	1		2	4
Engine Power				0						0		1	1	2	2
Escape gaps impacts				0	2		1			3	2			2	5
Bait/ crab quality issues	2	3	1	6		1	1			2		1		1	9
Recreational potting concerns		1		1	1	1		3	1	6	6	2		8	15
Overfishing/ pot numbers	2	3	2	7	1					1		1		1	9
Demersal gear impacts				0		2				2		3		3	5
Netting Impacts			1	1	1	1				2		1	3	4	7
Too many regulations / no more restrictions	1	1	1	3		1	2			3				0	6
MCRS concerns				0	1	1				2		1	2	3	5
Changes in environment / Populations of other species	1			1		3				3	1		3	4	8

Category of Concern	North Devon			Total No. of concerns raised	South Devon					Total No. of concerns raised	East Devon			Total No. of concerns raised	Totals District Wide
	Clovelly	Ilfracombe	Appledore		Plymouth	Dartmouth	Salcombe	Brixham	Torquay		Teignmouth	Exmouth	Seaton		
Impact of crab fisheries outside 6nm on migration	1	1		2		1				1				0	3
Changes in crustacea stocks	1	4		5	1	2		1		4			3	3	12
Infringements crab claws, scrubbing, catch limit, mutilated tail		1	1	2						0	1	1	1	3	5
Fishery Concerns e.g. prices, moving gear, diversification, removal of male lobsters		3	1	4		1				1				0	5
Conflict with developments	2	2	2	6						0			1	1	7

Table 3: Summarising the Potting Management Measures suggested by Fishers attending D&S IFCA’s District-wide Meetings

Category of Management	North Devon			Total No. of measures suggested	South Devon					Total No. of measures suggested	East Devon			Total No. of measures suggested	Total District Wide
	Clovelly	Ilfracombe	Appledore		Plymouth	Dartmouth	Salcombe	Brixham	Torquay		Teignmouth	Exmouth	Seaton		
For pot limits	5	3	1	9						0		2		2	11
Changes in MCRS	2	1		3		2	2		1	5			1	1	9
Other suggestions e.g. different management on each coast	2	1	2	5						0	1		2	3	8
Against pot limits				0		3	3		1	7				0	7
Restrict Vivier vessels		1		1	2		3			5	1			1	7
Soft shelled crab as bait	1	1		2		1	2			3			1	1	6
Limit Recreational potting				0					1	1	3	2		5	6
No more inshore management			1	1		2	3			5				0	6
Restrict Demersal gear	1			1						0	1	3		4	5

Category of Management	North Devon			Total No. of measures suggested	South Devon					Total No. of measures suggested	East Devon			Total No. of measures suggested	Total District Wide
	Clovelly	Ilfracombe	Appledore		Plymouth	Dartmouth	Salcombe	Brixham	Torquay		Teignmouth	Exmouth	Seaton		
Restrict Large vessels	3			3						0				0	3
Pot limits if applied nationally			1	1	1	1				2				0	3
Support Days at sea	1			1		1	1			2				0	3
Seasonal closures	2	1		3						0				0	3
Escape gaps /panels	1			1						0	1			1	2
Netting			1	1						0			1	1	2
cuttle pots				0				2		2				0	2

4. Additional Information Gathered

In order to help further inform topics for informal consultation by D&S IFCA, information has been gathered from other sources relating to potting management in the South West of England. These include a report on the Project UK South West crab management workshops, information provided by SDCS and their responses to the Crab and Lobster FMP, and Cornwall IFCA's Call for Information on the crustacea pot fisheries in their District. The following points provide a summary of information gathered.

A. Summary of the UK Project South West Crab Management Workshops

A report¹ was produced by Project UK on a series of workshops undertaken in the South West with fishers to discuss crab management options. After consulting with the national Crab Management Group, set up as part of the Crab and Lobster Management Plan development, the group were keen to hear the industry's management suggestions that could be used as a pilot for the south west and then potentially scaled up to the rest of the UK through the Fishery Management Plan.

Input was gathered through an online survey and five in person workshops, as well as additional written and online input from industry members unable to attend in person. All local crab fishers were encouraged to participate, and details were shared through direct emails, social media (Twitter), word of mouth and harbourside posters. Three workshops were held in Devon in Ilfracombe, Stokenham (near Kingsbridge) and Brixham. The groups discussed a range of technical measures, input controls and output controls. There was clear consensus across the workshops for increased enforcement, and improved regulations for the quality of crab landed. There was general agreement that the current fishing pressure is too high, and that a mixture of licence caps and effort controls could be used to ensure management is fair and equal across the fishery. Table 4 summarises the management options discussed and the level of support for these measures.

The key discussions highlighted the following:

- Prevent the landing of poor-quality crab
- Ban on the landing of berried lobsters
- Ban on the landing off soft shelled crab
- Alignment of the minimum landing sizes across the inshore and offshore areas
- Increased enforcement
- Pressure on the stock is too high
- Latent capacity needs addressing
- Increased management is needed for larger vessels
- Days at Sea would be appropriate for larger vessels and needs applying offshore
- Smaller vessels are limited by weather
- Concerned that pot limits are not enforceable, and effort could be manipulated by using different/modified pots
- Seasonal closures were suggested but different times for inshore and offshore fleets
- Spatial closure limiting size of vessel could help inshore
- IPA was praised as a good example of best practice.

¹ [Project UK South West Crab Management Workshop: Final Report June 2022](#)

Table 4: Table of comparison – Summary of the Results from the Project UK’s South West Crab Management Workshops

Management option	Workshop						Other written input
	Ilfracombe	Stokenham	Brixham	Newquay	Newlyn	Online	
Seasonal closure	Agreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Agreement	
Alignment of Minimum Landing Size (MLS)	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
Restrictions for larger vessels	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
Gear modification e.g. escape gaps	Agreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement
Ban on berried females	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
Managing fishery by licence	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
Capping all unused shellfish permits and entitlements/latent capacity	Disagreement	Agreement	Agreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	
Days at Sea	Disagreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	
Pot limit	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement
Managing fishery by TAC	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	Disagreement	
Zonal management	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement
Prohibition of crab as whelk bait	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
SSS - size, sex, season	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Disagreement	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Disagreement	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	
Recreational limits*	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	Not discussed or not considered an issue	
Management of quality	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	
Increased enforcement of regulations from IFCA/MMO	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement	Agreement

	Agreement
	Unsure or only with other caveats
	Disagreement
	Not discussed or not considered an issue

*Despite survey results, this was not considered an issue by workshop participants

B. South Devon and Channel Shellfishermen Ltd (SDCS) Information

Points raised at SDCS meeting on 7th August 2024 and summary provided by SDCS Executive Officer

- Overall, SDCS are generally very against any additional management inshore until such time as the activity outside 6nm is brought up to standards.
- SDCS are not into the idea of pot limits at all, because they feel they are already prevented from expansion by the available space - there may be room for a discussion over 'capping at current levels' - more likely within the fishery, not on an individual basis.
- MMO are moving on crawfish regulations outside of the FMP process which has caused a lot of ire - and SDCS Executive Officer suggests that to maintain trust and co-working, DSIFCA should not repeat that.
- Outside 6nm and in Cornwall, there are more voices who *may* support the capping of effort by pots - but call it pot limits and they get defensive. Will a parlour and an inkwell be considered the same? Will we need to prevent the innovation of even bigger multi parlour pots (SDCS Executive Officer has seen some as tall as herself in use in other areas, with multiple parlours). A pot is not just a pot, and so any discussion over 'limits' will need to take gear type and innovation into account too.
- Even SDCS members who fish outside 6nm want to see effort curtailed in some way, but they currently are preferring a menu of measures that could be applied in their 'micro regions'
- Because of the above point, if the REM project can be trialled into the 'SW Pilot' and test the [REM] kit on different scales of vessel and in different parts of the SW fishery, it might come in handy - but not at this stage just in the inshore region.

SDCS FMP Response:

- Overall, SDCS membership is extremely supportive of the proposed prohibition of landing of soft-shelled crab to be used as bait and have been asking for this for a number of years. At this stage, our membership is showing preference for a prohibition of both retention and landing of crab that has recently cast its shell, to further decrease the likelihood of crab that has recently cast its shell being landed, or otherwise used within fishing vessel operations. For some, but not all, this support also extends to spider crab
- SDCS have previously requested that DEFRA address latent capacity within the >10m fleets and repeats that call here. Latent capacity should be prevented from rejoining the fishery - at least for the short term – whilst sustainable management is being designed and implemented.
- Members agree with the increase in MLS for crawfish and for lobster to 90mm across the board.
- The majority of SDCS membership cite the inshore Devon region as having some of the most comprehensive management for crab, lobster and crawfish in the UK and suggest that the region is used as a baseline model for other areas, including the South West outside 6nm. Measures in place include a higher MCRS than many other areas, for crab, lobster and crawfish, prohibitions on the landing of soft brown crab, lobster and crawfish, parts of crab, lobster and crawfish that are detached from the shell, v-notched and otherwise mutilated lobsters

Additional Anonymised SDCS Members' Responses to FMP:

1. There are in excess of 40 steel super crabbers [viviers] fishing 3000 pots+ and predominantly creels leading to too much effort for the stocks to have a chance.

Local day boats are restricted by weather/tide. Super crabbers are not and the fact most use trapped pots is in effect reducing stocks.

2. Decommissioning of larger vessels.
3. Regulators should consider a maximum size for lobsters.
4. Ban on berried lobster should apply to all including Channel Islands.
5. Agreement of the ban on soft shelled crab.
6. Possible increase in lobster size to 92mm or 95mm.
7. Ban on the landing of cripples and diseased crab and not to go as bait.
8. Some agreed with the ban of soft-shelled crab to be extend to spider crab and lobster – a ban on retention so need to be returned to sea.
9. Dead crab market should be maintained as not fit for consumption and can be used as bait.
10. MCRS (Devon sizes) should extend across the 6-mile limit.
11. Vivier vessels are using more efficient pots impacting stock, have no controls and need to be managed to reduce pressure on stocks.
12. Inside the 6nm there has not been a great increase in number of pots – there has been a decrease in number of vessels, but pots number remains the same or even reduced.
13. Concern regarding predation by octopus.
14. Seasonal management of the inshore fleet is already in place due to weather, tides.
15. Ban on vessels over 10m one mile from shore.
16. Increased enforcement at merchants and export businesses especially on soft shelled crab.
17. Inshore fleet is subject to a great deal of regulation already/ no more regulations inshore.
18. Water temperatures are high and impacting crab stocks.
19. One size does not fit all.
20. Impacts of scallop vessels on crab stocks.

C. Cornwall IFCA's Call for Evidence

Cornwall IFCA (CIFCA) undertook a Crustacea Call for Evidence in 2021 to gather evidence on effort management in the Crustacea Pot Fishery in its District.. A report² was published on its website in 2023. Table 5 summarises the responses to seven effort management options consulted on. Whilst D&S IFCA District and its fisheries are different from those in CIFCA's District, they are common themes to the responses from the fishers in both District. Concern was raised in the CIFCA's District on the size of vessel which also included the larger vivier vessels and managing the maximum size had the most positive responses. Pot limits were also raised as a potential effort management measure as where closed periods and the needs to increase management of recreational fishing.

² [Effort management in the CIFCA Crustacea Pot Fishery – Stakeholder Call for Evidence](#)

Table 5: Summary of the responses for the seven effort management measures considered in the CIFCA 2021 Call for Evidence

Table 17. Summary of responses for the seven effort management measures considered in the Cornwall IFCA 2023 Call for Evidence.

Effort management measures	Percent of responses (%)							
	For	Already doing	Uncertain	Against	Management not relevant	No comment/ related but unclear/ compliance issues	Not understood question	Blank - No response
Pot Limits	69	0	5	5	0	13	0	8
Gear Marking	34	23	3	5	11	3	1	19
Limiting Types of Pots	16	2	9	22	8	11	2	31
Changing the Maximum Vessel Size	74	0	3	8	0	3	0	11
Closed Periods	49	15	9	10	0	4	0	13
Days at Sea Limits	20	25	4	22	0	8	0	22
Increased Management of Recreational Fishing	35	10	0	4	17	1	0	32

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers

Full Authority and B&PSC - Officers' papers and minutes of meetings – [Section B of D&S IFCA website Resource Library](#).

End