

Ministerial Foreword to Joint Consultation on the Isle of Man King Scallop Fishery

Effective fisheries management is complex under the best of circumstances; attempting to balance the challenges of stock assessment, harvest strategies, economic viability in a globally-competitive market, and ensuring long-term environmental sustainability. Recently, these challenges have been further complicated by Brexit and the global Coronavirus pandemic.

In recent years, most of the efforts in fisheries management under the EU's Common Fisheries Policy have been focussed on so-called quota species, typically finfish. However, the Isle of Man's fisheries are currently almost exclusively based on non-quota species, including king scallops; and the relative lack of regional attention has resulted in issues such as data-poor stocks, too many boats chasing too few 'fish', and poorly-developed management strategies for such fisheries.

By contrast, and due to their local importance, the Isle of Man Government has worked closely with fisheries scientists from Bangor University and the scallop fishing industry to address and overcome these issues, and in recent years has established what is generally considered to be one of the best-managed scallop fisheries in Europe. It is notable that more recently, scallop fisheries around the UK have also been the subject of increased management discussion, which is heartening because Manx and UK stocks and fishing industries are linked, and the successful, sustainable management of the Island's fisheries should also be considered as part of a wider approach.

As such, from a Manx perspective, the twin objectives of long-term economic and environmental sustainability require further work, and this consultation represents the next steps on that journey, one that fundamentally includes consideration of our partners and neighbours in the UK in what the Isle of Man Scallop Management Board has called a 'bioeconomic' approach to scallop fishing regulation.

As a Government, we must be responsive to the needs of our economic industries, and the Isle of Man Scallop Management Board has strongly indicated their view that, at current combinations of available stock and market prices, a large number of vessels and businesses are not economically viable. There are simply too many vessels chasing too few scallops that are sold at relatively depressed prices, and the resulting increased fishing effort leads to deterioration of the supporting marine environment.

Mechanisms to resolve this circular dilemma are undoubtedly challenging, but we must either address these, and make hard choices for long-term benefit, or allow market forces to make those choices for us.

As such, this consultation, developed and prepared by the Isle of Man Scallop Management Board, in collaboration with DEFA officers, and Bangor University scientists, presents the challenges of local scallop fisheries, and a considered range of potential solutions. Public consultations are not Government policy, they gauge opinions and views about the most likely solutions, and seek to find a balanced, collaborative way forward for all stakeholders.

In this endeavour I commend the Isle of Man Scallop Management Board for its vision and work to date, and encourage those with an interest in the future of Manx scallop fishing, and the marine environment, to contribute their knowledge and express their views.

In this way, the island's economically-valuable seafood and ecologically-valuable seabed will also continue to interact sustainably for many years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister for the Environment, Food and Agriculture.