

Foreword to Joint Consultation on the Isle of Man King Scallop Fishery by the Scallop Management Board

Following concerns over the King scallop stocks within the Isle of Man territorial Sea, a consultation was held in July 2016. Prior to this, there had been a trend towards additional vessels prosecuting the fishery with increased fishing effort, increased landings but declining Landings per Unit Effort (LPUE). This was despite a previous consultation around similar concerns in 2010.

The 2016 consultation aimed to:-

- Reduce the latent capacity of the fleet
- Reduce current effort levels
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of the stock.
- Form a Scallop Management Board (SMB) to develop a co-management approach between industry and government.

It is now five years since the 2016 King scallop consultation, and the subsequent fleet reduction that followed. The SMB felt that now would be an appropriate time to examine whether the actions taken has resulted in the main aims and objectives being met. The latent capacity of the fleet was, indeed, reduced; however in order to control effort levels, additional fishery restrictions, including a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and Daily Catch Limit (DCL), were recommended by the SMB.

Ensuring recovery towards long-term sustainability of the stock has proven to be far more challenging, and despite annual reductions in the TAC and DCL the Isle of Man king scallop fishery remains a recruitment-based fishery. This has been confirmed through the high-intensity stock surveys developed by industry.

The DCL has now reached a point, accentuated by the Covid effect on the market price, whereby it is no longer economically viable for much of the licensed fleet to fish in the Territorial Sea. The effectiveness of this management measure is therefore at its limit. The TAC, which ultimately helps to set the DCL, is also at too low a level to allow a substantial rise in DCL, which would improve the economic outlook for the catching sector.

From the annual stock surveys, there are signs that the stock may be stabilising but this is at a far lower biomass than when the fleet was first reduced following the 2016 consultation. There are no definitive signs that the stock recovery is able to persist, despite novel approaches such as closed areas to protect juvenile populations and Restricted Access areas to control effort. These approaches have, however, proved to be successful on a localised and short-term scale, but the level of potential latent and underutilised effort remains a barrier to any substantial increase in biomass, increase in stock abundance and population structure, and long-term economic security for the fleet.

A Discussion Document put forward by the SMB in December 2020 highlighted these issues. Through the use of a bio-economic model, the socio-economic outlook of the fleet and the sustainability of the stock were considered together and this highlighted the need for a Long-Term Management Plan (LTMP). A list of High-Level Objectives (HLO) was endorsed by the SMB in February 2021. It was agreed that there is a need for effective and strategic fleet capacity management (effort) framework going forward.

Since that industry-led initiative in late-2020, the SMB has worked closely with DEFA and Bangor University to develop this consultation, which is seeking stakeholder views on the principles, objectives and development of a LTMP and, importantly, considers immediate management solutions to the barriers and challenges in moving towards the industry's HLO's. The consultation also considers technical management options for the fishery and opportunities to facilitate the continued delivery of industry-led science and surveys, which are seen by the SMB, DEFA and Bangor University as vital for providing the scientific evidence required to measure the effectiveness of stock and effort management.

The initiative for this consultation came from industry, and is grounded in the aim for long-term bioeconomic security for both the stock and those dependent upon it. It is now jointly delivered by the SMB and DEFA after a significant collaborative effort. The consultation was endorsed by SMB members following a series of workshops before being submitted to the DEFA Minister for his approval and launch.

Members of the Scallop Management Board