

# Fisheries

**Fishing has always been an important activity within Dorset's coastal zone. To date (2010), activity focuses on a fleet of approximately 230 vessels based in Dorset's ports and harbours, and a larger number of vessels fishing beyond the 6 nautical mile limit, some of which land their catch in Dorset. There is an active recreational angling sector from boat and shore (this includes commercial charter angling and diving).**

**The fleet targets a mixed fishery offshore, with crabs and lobsters being the primary catch for many boats. Shellfisheries are also important both socio-economically and environmentally in sheltered harbours. There is real scope to enhance local management of Dorset's fisheries, and their value to the local economy - but there could be possible threats from future decisions on the EU Common Fisheries Policy and the introduction of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).**

## Dorset's Fishing Industry

Over 430 vessels currently hold permits to fish commercially within the Southern Sea Fisheries District, which includes the waters off Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight out to the 6 nautical mile limit of exclusive UK fishing rights. Approximately half of these boats are based within Dorset's ports. Within the District's boundaries, byelaws limit the maximum size of any vessel that fishes to 12 metres, so the fleet is largely made up of 'day-boats'.

Some of the fleet have the capability to fish beyond the boundaries of the District, either further west in Devon, or further offshore. Between 6-12 nautical miles they share rights to fish with other UK fishermen and those with traditional access: in this area just the French. Beyond 12 nautical miles the waters are available to all EU countries with access rights.

Recent years have seen a slow decrease in the numbers of fishing vessels in Dorset, however there has also been a shift from part-time to full-

time work, and the overall assessment is that fishing effort has probably increased.

Onshore industry employment includes management of landing facilities, fish merchants and fish processors. None of Dorset's harbours are classified as 'major', but Poole and Weymouth are very active, and Mudeford, Swanage, Portland, West Bay and Lyme Regis all support local boats. In fact, Poole Port has one of the biggest transshipping trades in the whole of the UK for shipping shellfish to Europe. Shellfish lorries come from all over England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales to ship their loads. Some of the larger boats may also land in the Channel Islands or France. Since the closure of some of the quota species in the North Sea, "nomadic" fishing vessels have targetted non quota fish such as scallops and bass off the coast of Dorset. This has been problematic and forced the introduction of a closed area in Lyme Bay which was introduced through a Ministerial Stop Order to reduce the impact on the sea bed from heavy mobile fishing gear.

Fishing also supports a range of service industries, maintaining vessels and equipment. Total employment dependent on fishing in Dorset is difficult to estimate, as most fishermen are self-employed, however there are estimated to be between 500-800 full-time and part-time jobs.



**Fishing boats in Weymouth Harbour. Copyright: Dorset Coast Forum**

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## The Regulators & Regulations

Regulatory arrangements for fisheries are complex.

### European - 1st level of regulation

- **Common Fisheries Policy**  
<http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/reform/>  
The main corner stone of fisheries regulation is the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) of the European Union. The policy is set in Brussels and applies Europe-wide, with a range of regional variations. The drive within the policy has been to try to prevent widely perceived overfishing of many stocks by reducing fishing effort through reduction in fleet sizes, days at sea and the continued operation of national quotas on catch. Imposing minimum landing sizes and restrictions on fishing gear.

Often the decisions taken are very remote from the local level at which they have their effect. CFP decisions are perceived to be influenced by political bargaining between member states. The result is a policy that has little or no respect within the fishing industry. The EU, have consulted with stakeholders regarding the reform of the CFP.

- **Shellfish Waters Directive and Shellfish Hygiene Directive** set standards for water

quality in shellfisheries, and the flesh quality of shellfish :

- <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:376:0014:0020:EN:PDF>

### National - 2nd level of regulation

- **Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA):**  
has powers to impose its own fisheries regulations within 200 nautical miles. As a result of this some of Dorset's significant fisheries are not regulated by the CFP. Examples include: minimum landing sizes for crabs and lobster are set by national legislation. Defra:
  - Has powers to declare statutory nursery areas for Bass which have a statutory closed season. The Fleet and Poole Harbour are protected in this way.
  - Provides the national policy lead on fisheries,
  - Leads UK negotiation on CFP
  - Has the powers to enforce all main EU and UK legislation regarding the landing of catch
  - Has the responsibility for gathering fishery statistics and catch returns, notifying and enforcing Bass nurseries, classifying shellfish harvesting areas

- Appoints 50% of Sea Fisheries Committee members and approve their byelaws

- **Marine Management Organisation (MMO)**  
-all fishing vessels require license from the MMO  
<http://marinemanagement.org.uk/fisheries/management/documents/licences/apply.pdf>
- **Marine and Coastguard Agency (MCA, an agency of the Department of Transport)** - Fishing vessels must be registered with the Registrar of Shipping and Seamen which is under the MCA  
<http://www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/mcga07-home/workingatsea/mcga-rss.htm>
- **Centre of Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS),** a government agency – are responsible for the national research programmes for fisheries:  
<http://www.cefas.co.uk/home.aspx>
- **The Environment Agency** - regulates fishing of migratory species: salmon, trout and freshwater eels. EA lead on ensuring implementation of Shellfish Waters Directive.

### Sub national - 3rd level of regulation

- **IFCAs**  
10 Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs) are being established around the coast of England to promote healthy seas, champion sustainable fisheries and boost

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viable industry. In Dorset the Authority is known as the Southern IFCA. These Authorities will give everyone who uses or impacts on the marine ecosystem a say in how it's being managed. The Members on the IFCA will work to ensure that:

- the exploitation of sea fisheries resources is carried out in a sustainable way;
- the social and economic benefits of exploiting the sea fisheries resources is balanced with the need to protect the marine environment from, or promote its recovery from, the effects of exploitation;
- other steps are taken which, in the IFCA's opinion, are necessary to achieve sustainable development;
- the different needs of those engaged in the exploitation of sea fisheries and marine resources are balanced;
- the conservation objectives of Marine Conservation Zones are achieved.

More info: [http://www5.igrasp.com/fe/tpl\\_capita01.asp?newms=info1](http://www5.igrasp.com/fe/tpl_capita01.asp?newms=info1)

- **County and Unitary (Upper Tier) Councils:**

- Fund Sea Fisheries Committee through a levy system and will represent about one third of IFCA Members

- Are responsible for fishing facilities ashore and for economic development and tourism roles relevant to fisheries
- Port Health Authorities (District Council Environmental Health) have duty to enforce shellfish hygiene regulations

- **Harbour Authorities:** Have powers to regulate mooring and landing facilities within harbour limits. Southern Sea Fisheries hold lease and shellfishing rights, through the Poole Harbour under Poole Fishery Order (1985).
- **The Environment Agency :** Salmon, sea trout and eels (which all migrate between the sea and freshwater) are dealt with separately from other species and are the responsibility of the Environment Agency, who has powers to the 6 nautical mile limit. Licences are required to take salmon and sea-trout from the sea within this limit, or to take eels (except by rod and line). Aside from licensed fishing for salmon and trout by rod and line, there are only 7 salmon and trout fishing operations licensed in Dorset: one in Poole Harbour and six in Christchurch Harbour. The stocks of salmon in the Region's rivers are seriously threatened, and the levels of both current exploitation and of illegal fishing are a conservation concern.

## Policing the Regulations

In general the lead on managing fisheries activity within the six-mile limit lies with SSFC until April 2011 and with IFCAs after this date. They can enforce most EU and national fisheries legislation, together with their own byelaws. The SSFC employs seven full-time Fishery Officers and operates four small patrol craft.

Beyond 6 miles the regulatory responsibilities lie with MMO, and are implemented by the Fishery Protection Squadron of the Royal Navy (FPS) and Direct Flight (DF). The FPS and DF carry out patrols throughout UK waters and their activities are directed by MMO.

SSFC and the MMO enforce regulations on shellfish landings, with MMO having sole responsibility for quotas and licences, and there are good informal working arrangements. The Environment Agency have their own arrangements for enforcing salmon and sea trout regulations. However, SSFC carry out a community policing approach within Dorset which includes partner agencies such as the MMO, Environment Agency, Poole Consumer Protection (EHOs) and the Marine Police.

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## The Fisheries

Fishing off Dorset targets a variety of species, and many of the boats are adapted to carry a range of different types of fishing gear. The main catches are:

- Crabs & Lobster - caught in pots, these are the primary catch for many of the boats in

the District. Spider Crab and Brown (Edible) Crab represent the bulk of the catch, most of which is exported to France and Spain. Lobsters are higher value but caught in smaller numbers, with more of the catch sold within the UK.

- Fin-fish - the most important species include Bass, Cod, Pollack and flat fish such as Plaice and Sole. The main catch methods used are trawls, gill nets and lines, with trawls, which run over the seabed targeting bottom dwelling (demersal) fish. A wide range of other fin-fish (pelagic) are caught within the District in smaller quantities.
- Offshore shellfisheries include scallops which are dredged by a small number of local boats, 'nomadic' fishers or hand-picked by commercial divers. Fisheries also exist for whelks and cuttlefish which are caught in purpose-built pots. Shellfish are particularly important within Poole Harbour, where a Hybrid Fishery Order exists. This combined Regulated Several Fishery is administered by Southern Sea Fisheries Committee (SSFC). There are other private shellfish beds which are cultivated commercially within Dorset and are found in the Fleet and Portland Harbour.

With the exception of the few cultivated shellfisheries, the future of the industry relies on continued sustainable populations of fish i.e. that

fishing activity must be at levels, which the fish populations can support. Fish are generally very mobile, and many have annual migrations. Crabs also move considerable distances on and offshore as the seasons change. Dorset's coastal waters provide important spawning and nursery areas for a range of different marine species. Fish larvae produced here supports the future of the fisheries in Dorset and beyond.

## Securing the 6 & 12 Mile Limits

The status of the 6 and 12 mile fishery limits is that they are derogations from the CFP's principle of open access to fishing waters for all member states. The prospect of the limits being lost has been viewed with great alarm both within and beyond Dorset's fisheries interests. The limits are essential to maintaining local management of Dorset's coastal fisheries. One of the aims in the reform of the CFP will be to look at the renewal of the 6 and 12 mile derogations and make them permanent.

## Organisation of the Industry

It is clear that coastal fishing covers a wide range of activity, from highly professional full-time boats to low key part-time work. 90% of boats are skipper-owned, resulting in an industry of small businesses in competition with each other. However there are many common interests where the industry lacks an effective voice. There are a number of small local associations, but their effectiveness is limited by the unwillingness of some fishermen to join, and

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lack of full time staff. A fishermen's council has been established within the Southern IFCA District.

There is undoubtedly scope for the Industry to organise itself more effectively, to its own benefit and to the benefit of improved fisheries management.

## Fishing and Conservation

Recent years have seen a widespread public focus on the environmental impacts of fishing, with reports of crises in fish stocks, etc. Lack of data makes objective assessment of the health of inshore stocks unreliable. There is no evidence of serious declines, but the safest working assumption is that exploitation levels are close to the sustainable limit. Substantial increase in effort is therefore a cause for concern.

There are some concerns about seabed damage due to heavy trawling gear and scallop dredges. The limit on vessel size provides some control on this, as 12 metre boats can only operate gear of limited size and weight. Past attempts by the SSFC to limit the size of heavy gear through byelaws have been rejected by DEFRA.

There were four areas in Lyme Bay which had been closed to sensitive bottom towed gear through a voluntary agreement with local fishermen. However, with closures on quota

species, nomadic vessels have displaced their effort into non quota fish such as scallops, which are found in Lyme Bay. Due to the increased effort and the collapse of the voluntary agreement in Lyme Bay, a Ministerial Order was introduced to protect 60 square nautical miles of sea bed from bottom-towed gear.

Dorset also has a voluntary marine reserve at Kimmeridge.

There are proposals to establish a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within the UK's marine area. Conservation agencies estimated that only 2.2% of the UK Waters are protected at present. Under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, DEFRA has an obligation to introduce a network of Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) to protect vulnerable seascape, habitats and threatened species. It is understood that these could provide a reservoir of species that will colonise undisturbed areas, and control areas for scientific monitoring. A further concept is temporary closure of areas during spawning. A lot of work is needed to evaluate the benefits of these sorts of measures, decide whether they can be implemented, and consider how big they should be, and their location. Finding Sanctuary is leading this work for the South West <http://www.finding-sanctuary.org/> and a local MCZ Group is facilitated by the DCF <http://www.dorsetforyou.com/394476>

## Recreational Angling

Recreational angling is an important part of fishing in Dorset. It is a very popular activity, supporting a large number of recreational and commercial charter boats and angling suppliers. Shore angling is also very significant, and Chesil Beach has been voted the UK top angling site for 2008 & 2009. Some sports divers also take fish and shellfish.

Whilst the volume of fish taken by recreational activity is much smaller than commercial catches, it is still seen as significant (3 tonnes of fish is quoted as the total catch for some of the larger shore angling competitions). Both commercial and recreational fishing use a single fisheries resource, and as a result minor conflicts do occur over inshore species such as Bass, Wrasse and Mullet. Statistics from competitions provide an accurately recorded source of fisheries information.

Selling of catch by some recreational fishermen and divers is illegal.

## Shore-Based Facilities

Fishing requires provision of:

- Quays for landing fish
- Shore-based facilities for storage and maintenance.

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Landing facilities require EU approval for hygiene purposes. The facilities in Dorset are generally adequate, although some sites require maintenance and are gradually being improved with support for investment from the MMO and the EU.

## Marketing the Catch

The main markets for much of Dorset's fishing catch are abroad. There are a number of successful local outlets, but the overall profile of locally produced fish within the County is low. It is felt that locally based fishing fleets provide a significant part of the appeal to the seaside ports, and there should be an opportunity to improve investment in local marketing and local use of fish, both in the service industries and in the home.

## The Axis 4 European Fisheries Fund project

This Fund is managed by the MMO in England to promote the sustainable development of fisheries in smaller communities dependent on fishing for employment. Each group must demonstrate, via a detailed business plan, a clear understanding of the issues and opportunities facing their industry and how they will promote sustainable fishing in their area.



Boats at Kimmeridge. Copyright: Mark Simons

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